

DIGITAL INNOVATION, CONSUMER PERCEPTION, AND BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY AMONG ENTREPRENEURS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDONESIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) owned by entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs) by examining innovation strategies, business survival mechanisms, social support systems, consumer perceptions, challenges, and future expectations within the context of digital transformation and inclusive entrepreneurship. A qualitative approach was employed through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving EWDs from diverse business sectors across several cities in Indonesia. The data were analyzed using NVivo 14 through thematic coding. The findings reveal that innovation among EWDs is primarily driven by digital platforms. In particular, participants acknowledged that conducting live streaming activities provides opportunities to expand market reach while enhancing business transparency, interaction, and customer engagement. Both digital strategies and relational factors contribute significantly to business sustainability, especially in strengthening customer loyalty and emotional connections. In addition, family and environmental support play a crucial role in sustaining EWD-owned businesses. However, several participants reported experiencing inequality and discrimination during interactions with others while operating their businesses, including within digital platforms. Consumer acceptance was found to be dynamic, characterized by both empathy and skepticism, although increased digital exposure tends to strengthen consumer trust and product credibility. Despite these opportunities, EWDs continue to face multidimensional challenges, including physical, technical, and market-related constraints. This study highlights the importance of digital transformation and social support in fostering inclusive entrepreneurship and sustainable business development in Indonesia as a representative emerging market. The study contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting inclusive entrepreneurship among entrepreneurs with disabilities. It also advances SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through collaborative research between Indonesian and Saudi Arabian researchers, facilitating international cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs with Disabilities, Digital Entrepreneurship, Consumer Perception, Business Sustainability, Inclusive Entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Digital innovation has got special attention from business owners all over the world. It can offer opportunities and challenges to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in emerging market countries. MSMEs play a central role in economic development, particularly in emerging economies such as Indonesia, where they contribute significantly to employment creation, income distribution, and economic resilience. In addition to their economic role, MSMEs also serve as an

important instrument for promoting inclusive entrepreneurship, enabling marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, to participate in economic activities. Inclusive entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a mechanism to reduce inequality and enhance social participation among vulnerable populations (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2019; Stephan et al., 2020). However, despite these opportunities, entrepreneurs with disabilities often face challenges and structural barriers that limit their access to resources, mobility, and market participation (Darcy et al., 2020).

Within the Indonesian context, MSMEs are deeply embedded in socio-cultural systems, where trust, relationships, and community support significantly influence business practices. Previous studies have highlighted that social capital and community embeddedness play a crucial role in shaping business sustainability and innovation among MSMEs (Games & Sari, 2021; Sari et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that entrepreneurship is not solely an economic activity but also a socially constructed process that relies on networks and relational support. Nevertheless, while existing research has extensively explored MSMEs development and social capital, limited attention has been given to EWDs, particularly in understanding how they navigate structural constraints while leveraging available social and environmental resources (Darcy et al., 2020).

The rapid development of the digital economy has further transformed MSMEs' operational landscape, offering new opportunities for market expansion, branding, and customer engagement. Digital technologies, including social media and live-streaming platforms, enable businesses to overcome geographical and resource constraints, thereby enhancing competitiveness and innovation (Kraus et al., 2019; Nambisan et al., 2019). Moreover, digital transformation has been identified as a critical driver of value creation and business model innovation in modern enterprises (Verhoef et al., 2021). For entrepreneurs with disabilities, digital platforms offer the potential to reduce physical barriers and create new channels for consumer interaction. However, digital adoption also requires new capabilities, continuous engagement, and adaptability, which may pose additional challenges for marginalized entrepreneurs.

Another important dimension that remains underexplored is consumer perception toward entrepreneurs with disabilities. Market interactions are not purely rational but are shaped by social attitudes, emotional responses, and implicit biases. Research on disability and entrepreneurship suggests that stigma and discrimination continue to influence the experiences of disabled individuals in economic activities (Darcy et al., 2020). While some consumers may demonstrate empathy and provide support, others may exhibit skepticism regarding the competence and reliability of EWDs. This duality creates a complex environment in which entrepreneurs must simultaneously build trust and challenge existing stereotypes. In this context, understanding consumer perceptions is essential, as they directly influence market access, business sustainability, and long-term growth.

Despite the growing body of literature on MSMEs, digital entrepreneurship, and inclusive business practices, there remains a lack of integrative research examining the interconnections among innovation strategies, business survival, social support systems, consumer acceptance, challenges, and future expectations within the context of MSMEs owned by EWDs. Most prior studies tend to focus on specific aspects in isolation, such as digital adoption (Kraus et al., 2019; Nambisan et al., 2019) or business transformation (Verhoef et al., 2021), without providing a holistic understanding of how these dimensions interact in real-world entrepreneurial settings. Additionally, studies on inclusive entrepreneurship often emphasize social inclusion (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2019; Stephan et al., 2020) without sufficiently addressing the operational and experiential challenges faced by EWDs.

Addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of MSMEs owned by EWDs by examining six key dimensions: innovation strategies, business survival, the roles of family and environment, consumer acceptance, challenges, and future expectations. By integrating these aspects, this study contributes to the literature on inclusive and digital entrepreneurship, highlighting how EWDs navigate structural constraints while

leveraging digital opportunities and social capital (Games & Sari, 2021; Sari et al., 2022). The study supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by empowering entrepreneurs with disabilities through inclusive economic opportunities, enhancing their participation in economic activities and promoting equitable access to entrepreneurship. The study also contributes to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through research collaboration between researchers from Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, fostering international knowledge exchange and strengthening global partnerships for inclusive and sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of inclusive entrepreneurship has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly for its role in empowering marginalized groups and reducing socio-economic inequalities. Inclusive entrepreneurship emphasizes the participation of underrepresented individuals, including persons with disabilities, in economic activities as a pathway toward financial independence and social inclusion. Studies suggest that entrepreneurship can serve as a mechanism to improve well-being and create opportunities for disadvantaged populations (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2019; Stephan et al., 2020). However, these opportunities are often accompanied by structural constraints that limit access to resources, markets, and institutional support, particularly for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

In the context of inclusive entrepreneurship, existing literature highlights that individuals with disabilities face unique and multifaceted challenges that differentiate them from conventional entrepreneurs. These challenges include physical limitations, restricted mobility, limited access to capital, and social stigma, which collectively shape their entrepreneurial experiences (Darcy et al., 2020). Despite these constraints, EWDs often demonstrate strong resilience and adaptability, developing alternative strategies to sustain their businesses. This suggests that entrepreneurship among persons with disabilities is not solely an economic activity but also a process of navigating structural inequalities and social barriers.

The role of social capital is particularly significant in understanding the sustainability of MSMEs, especially within developing countries such as Indonesia. Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and trust that facilitate cooperation and resource exchange within a community. Research by Games and Sari (2021) and Sari et al. (2022) emphasizes that social capital plays a crucial role in supporting business continuity, innovation, and resilience among MSMEs. Family support, community relationships, and informal networks often compensate for limited access to formal resources, particularly for marginalized entrepreneurs. In this sense, entrepreneurship is deeply embedded within social structures, where relational dynamics significantly influence business outcomes.

At the same time, the emergence of digital entrepreneurship has transformed the traditional business landscape, offering new opportunities for MSMEs to expand their market reach and improve competitiveness. Digital technologies enable entrepreneurs to overcome geographical barriers, reduce operational costs, and engage directly with customers through online platforms. Studies by Kraus et al. (2019) and Nambisan et al. (2019) highlight that digital entrepreneurship is characterized by innovation, flexibility, and the ability to leverage digital tools to create value. For MSMEs, particularly those with limited physical resources, digital platforms serve as an important enabler of business development.

Furthermore, the concept of digital transformation extends beyond the adoption of technology, encompassing changes in business models, organizational processes, and customer engagement strategies. Verhoef et al. (2021) argue that digital transformation involves integrating digital technologies across all aspects of business operations, resulting in fundamental changes in how value is created and delivered. For EWDs, digital transformation offers the potential to reduce physical constraints and increase market accessibility. However, it also requires new competencies,

such as digital literacy, content creation, and platform management, which may present additional challenges.

Another important dimension in the literature is consumer perception and stigma, particularly in relation to marginalized entrepreneurs. Consumer behavior is influenced not only by product quality and price but also by social perceptions, attitudes, and emotional responses. Research indicates that stigma toward disability can affect trust, credibility, and purchasing decisions (Darcy et al., 2020). While some consumers may show empathy and support, others may doubt the capabilities of EWDs. This duality creates a complex interaction between social perception and market behavior, which can significantly impact business sustainability.

In addition to perception, the concept of business survival strategies is central to understanding MSME sustainability. Survival strategies are the ability of entrepreneurs to adapt to changing environments, manage constraints, and sustain business operations over time. Previous studies suggest that MSMEs rely on a combination of innovation, resource management, and relational strategies to sustain their businesses (Kraus et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021). For EWDs, survival strategies are often shaped by both internal capabilities and external support systems, including family and community networks.

Despite the growing body of literature on MSMEs, digital entrepreneurship, and inclusive business practices, there remains a lack of integrative research that examines the interconnections among multiple dimensions, including innovation, survival, social support, consumer perceptions, and challenges. Most studies tend to focus on individual aspects, such as digital adoption or social capital, without considering how these factors interact in real-world contexts. This limitation highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that captures the complexity of entrepreneurial experiences, particularly for marginalized groups.

Moreover, qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of EWDs remains relatively limited, particularly studies that use systematic analytical tools such as NVivo. Such approaches are essential for capturing nuanced insights into how entrepreneurs navigate constraints, leverage opportunities, and develop adaptive strategies. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study seeks to fill this gap and provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of MSMEs run by EWDs.

Overall, the literature suggests that a combination of structural constraints, social dynamics, and digital opportunities shapes EWDs. However, there is still a need for research that integrates these dimensions into a unified framework. This study contributes to the literature by providing a holistic analysis of MSMEs owned by EWDs, focusing on innovation, survival, support systems, consumer perception, challenges, and future expectations within the context of digital transformation and inclusive entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of EWDs. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this research because it enables the exploration of complex social phenomena, including innovation strategies, survival mechanisms, and consumer perceptions, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods. The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding social reality from participants' perspectives and emphasizes the role of context in shaping entrepreneurial experiences. Qualitative research is widely recognized as suitable for examining underexplored phenomena and capturing rich, contextual insights, particularly in studies involving marginalized groups such as entrepreneurs with disabilities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

Data were collected through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which allows for interactive dialogue and the exchange of experiences among participants. The participants were from some different cities in Indonesia. The use of FGD is particularly relevant in this study as it facilitates the exploration of shared challenges, adaptive strategies, and social dynamics within EWDs.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who actively engage in entrepreneurial activities across various sectors, including food businesses, handicrafts, transportation services, and digital-based activities. The discussions were conducted in a flexible and open format, enabling participants to express their perspectives freely. All sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and preserve participants' authenticity. Verbatim transcription is essential in qualitative research as it maintains the integrity of the data and supports deeper interpretation (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The collected data were analyzed using NVivo 14, which supports systematic coding and thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages, including data familiarization, initial coding, categorization, and theme development. Codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the research objectives, resulting in six main categories: innovation strategies, business survival, support systems, consumer acceptance, challenges, and future expectations. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, strategies such as data triangulation, systematic coding, and transparent documentation were applied. These approaches enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Ethical considerations were also addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and a respectful research environment, allowing participants to share their experiences openly and honestly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Innovation Strategies of EWDs (RQ1)

The findings reveal that innovation among EWDs extends beyond mere technological adoption, encompassing adaptive, experiential, and relational strategies shaped by both constraints and opportunities within the digital environment. Rather than relying solely on conventional innovation pathways, these entrepreneurs demonstrate contextual innovation, in which creativity responds to physical limitations, resource constraints, and evolving market dynamics.

A key innovation identified in this study is the utilization of live streaming as an interactive marketing tool, particularly through platforms such as TikTok Live. This approach transforms traditional transactional exchanges into real-time, participatory interactions, enabling consumers to engage directly with the seller during the purchasing process. More importantly, live streaming allows customers to observe not only the final product but also the production process, thereby enhancing transparency, authenticity, and perceived product value.

As expressed by one informant:

"Now I use live streaming... customers can directly see the product and purchase it during the live session."

This practice aligns with the concept of value co-creation, where consumers are not passive recipients but active participants in the consumption experience. The immediacy and interactivity of live streaming foster trust-building mechanisms that are particularly important for entrepreneurs with disabilities, who often face initial skepticism from consumers.

Furthermore, innovation manifests as hybrid strategies that integrate commercial and social values. For instance, some entrepreneurs creatively link economic transactions with acts of social contribution:

"When viewers give gifts, we share a bowl of meatballs with others... it creates attraction."

This strategy reflects a form of socially embedded entrepreneurship, where business activities are intertwined with moral and communal values. Such practices not only enhance

customer engagement but also strengthen emotional connections between sellers and audiences, ultimately contributing to brand differentiation.

Importantly, these findings suggest that innovation within EWDs is not primarily technology-driven, but rather experience-driven and relationship-oriented. Entrepreneurs leverage digital platforms not just as tools, but as spaces for storytelling, interaction, and identity negotiation. Through live streaming, they can reshape consumer perceptions, demonstrate their competencies, and construct a more inclusive entrepreneurial identity.



Figure 1. Word Cloud of Key Themes in EWDs Business Activities

The Word Cloud analysis further reinforces these findings by highlighting the prominence of terms such as live streaming, TikTok, customers, and business. The dominance of these keywords indicates that digital engagement has become the central axis of innovation among EWDs. In addition, the presence of words such as support, challenges, and interaction reflects the multidimensional nature of their innovation processes, which are shaped not only by technological adoption but also by social dynamics and structural constraints. Overall, this study demonstrates that innovation among EWDs is best understood as a holistic process that combines digital capability, emotional engagement, and social meaning, rather than as a purely technical advancement.

Business Survival Strategies of EWDs (RQ2)

The findings indicate that a dynamic interplay between digital adaptation and socio-emotional resilience shapes the survival strategies of EWDs. Rather than relying solely on technological tools, these entrepreneurs develop hybrid survival mechanisms that combine platform-based visibility strategies with relational and emotional engagement.

In the context of digital entrepreneurship, consistency is a critical determinant of survival, particularly on algorithm-driven platforms such as TikTok. Informants emphasized that sustained activity is necessary to maintain visibility and audience engagement:

“If we are not consistent, the viewers can disappear.”

This reflects the logic of the platform economy, where algorithmic systems prioritize continuous content production and active engagement. In this sense, consistency is not merely an operational choice but a strategic necessity for remaining visible in competitive digital ecosystems.

Moreover, digital survival is closely linked to the ability to create and maintain real-time interaction with audiences, transforming passive viewers into active participants. This aligns with

the concept of engagement-based survival, where business continuity depends on sustained attention and interaction rather than solely on product quality.

On the other hand, for offline-based businesses, survival strategies are predominantly rooted in relational capital and emotional attachment. Entrepreneurs rely heavily on repeat customers and long-term trust-building processes, as reflected in the following statement:

"I feel happy when customers come back again."

This highlights that emotional satisfaction and customer loyalty are not only outcomes but also strategic assets that sustain business continuity. The ability to build trust and maintain relationships becomes particularly crucial for EWDs, as it helps counteract initial consumer skepticism.

Based on these findings, survival strategies can be categorized into two primary dimensions:

- a. Digital Survival which driven by engagement, algorithmic visibility, and consistency
- b. Relational Survival which driven by customer loyalty, trust, and emotional satisfaction

Importantly, these two strategies are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary and interdependent. Entrepreneurs who successfully integrate digital engagement with relational trust-building tend to demonstrate stronger resilience and sustainability.

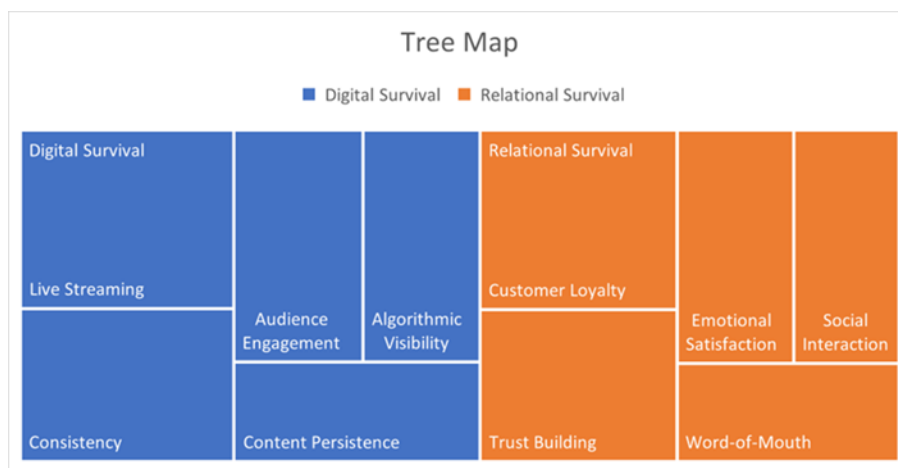


Figure 2. Thematic Hierarchy of Survival Strategies and Innovation

The Tree Map (Figure 2) visualization illustrates that survival strategies are closely intertwined with digital innovation and relational dynamics. The prominence of digital-related themes confirms that platform-based engagement has become a central mechanism for business continuity, while relational elements continue to serve as a foundational support system. Overall, this study reveals that survival among EWDs is not solely an economic process but a multidimensional strategy combining technological adaptation, emotional resilience, and relational embeddedness, enabling entrepreneurs to navigate both structural limitations and market uncertainties.

Role of Family and Environment (RQ3)

The findings demonstrate that family and environmental support play a critical and enabling role in sustaining EWDs, particularly in the context of physical limitations and operational constraints. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, where individual capability often dominates, EWDs rely significantly on social capital and support networks to maintain business continuity.

The study identifies several forms of support that contribute to business sustainability, including:

- a. Operational support, such as assistance in production, mobility, and daily business activities
- b. Emotional support, which strengthens motivation and resilience
- c. Informal collaboration, where family members or close networks contribute to business processes

These forms of support are reflected in the following statements:

“My husband helps me...”

“I help my parents...”

Such interactions indicate that business activities are often embedded within family structures, where economic and social roles overlap. This embeddedness allows EWDs to compensate for their limitations by leveraging collective resources within their immediate social environment.

However, the findings also reveal a significant disparity in access to support systems. Not all informants benefit from strong family or environmental backing:

“I still run the business alone; there is no one helping me.”

This highlights unequal access to social capital, which directly affects key business dimensions, including production capacity, operational efficiency, and scalability. Entrepreneurs without adequate support systems tend to experience greater constraints, particularly in labor-intensive or mobility-dependent activities.

From an analytical perspective, these findings suggest that the sustainability of MSMEs run by EWDs cannot be fully understood through an individualistic lens. Instead, it must be examined within a broader social ecosystem framework, where family, community, and informal networks act as critical enablers of entrepreneurial activity.

Furthermore, the role of the environment extends beyond direct assistance. A supportive social environment characterized by acceptance, encouragement, and inclusion fosters psychological resilience and confidence, which are essential for long-term business survival.

In contrast, the absence of such an environment may intensify vulnerability, limiting the entrepreneur's ability to expand or innovate. Therefore, social support should be viewed not merely as a complementary factor but as a foundational element in the sustainability of business for EWDs

Consumer Acceptance toward Entrepreneurs with Disabilities (RQ4)

The findings reveal that consumer acceptance toward EWDs is inherently dualistic, dynamic, and socially constructed, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between empathy, admiration, and latent stigma. This duality indicates that consumer perception is not fixed, but rather continuously shaped through interaction, exposure, and experiential validation within marketplace contexts.

From a positive perspective, consumers exhibit empathetic and supportive behavior, often expressing admiration for the resilience, effort, and determination demonstrated by EWDs. This form of response reflects what can be conceptualized as empathetic consumption behavior, in which purchasing decisions are influenced not solely by functional product attributes but also by emotional and moral considerations.

As expressed by one informant:

“Many people admire... some even want to learn.”

This statement illustrates that EWDs are not merely perceived as economic actors but also as symbolic figures of resilience and inspiration, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and

encouraging supportive purchasing behavior. In this sense, consumption becomes a value-laden act, integrating both economic and social meaning.

However, this positive acceptance coexists with persistent skepticism and implicit bias, indicating that stigma has not been eliminated. Negative perceptions are often expressed through subtle doubts regarding capability and concerns over service reliability:

“Can you pack it properly?”

“What if the hot soup spills on your hand?”

These responses reflect what can be defined as capability bias, where consumers unconsciously question the competence of individuals with disabilities. Although such concerns may appear protective or empathetic on the surface, they may simultaneously reinforce structural stigma and perceived professional inferiority.

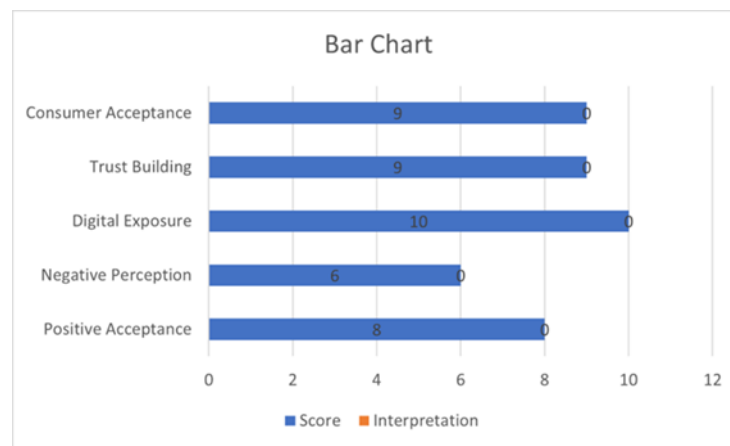


Figure 3. Consumer Acceptance Dimensions toward EWDs

The bar chart (Figure 3) reveals a hierarchical structure of influence among the dimensions of consumer acceptance. Notably, digital exposure emerges as the most dominant factor (score = 10), indicating that visibility through live streaming plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions.

This finding suggests that digital platforms serve as primary environments for shaping perceptions, where consumers can directly observe, evaluate, and validate the competencies of EWDs. In this context, visibility reduces uncertainty and challenges preconceived biases.

Furthermore, the high trust-building score (9) demonstrates that digital interaction facilitates the transition from skepticism to confidence. Trust is not granted immediately but is built progressively through repeated exposure, interaction, and experiential confirmation.

Meanwhile, positive acceptance (8) indicates strong emotional engagement, suggesting that consumers are receptive to narratives of resilience and effort. However, the relatively lower score for negative perception (6) indicates that stigma, although reduced, persists as a structural barrier.

Importantly, the high level of overall consumer acceptance (9) suggests that the transformation process is largely successful, but not absolute. Acceptance remains conditional and continuously negotiated, particularly in relation to ongoing interaction and performance visibility.

Future Expectations of MSMEs owned by EWDs (RQ6)

The findings indicate that EWD's future expectations are not merely aspirational but are deeply shaped by their lived experiences navigating opportunities and constraints within their business environments. These expectations reflect a forward-looking orientation that is simultaneously adaptive, realistic, and context-sensitive, rather than idealistic or detached from existing conditions.

A prominent expectation emerging from the data is the need for greater institutional and external support, particularly through training, mentoring, and structured assistance. Although many entrepreneurs have demonstrated strong initiative and self-reliance in developing their businesses, there is a clear recognition that individual effort alone is insufficient to sustain long-term growth. As expressed by one informant:

“There has been no training... it mostly depends on our own effort.”

This statement highlights a gap between entrepreneurial potential and institutional facilitation, suggesting that EWDs often operate their businesses within a limited support ecosystem. In this context, expectations for external support are not simply requests for assistance but rather reflect a broader need to enhance capabilities, in which entrepreneurs seek to expand their skills, knowledge, and access to resources to compete more effectively.

At the same time, informants expressed a desire for business growth and expansion, although such aspirations are framed within realistic boundaries. Rather than pursuing rapid or large-scale expansion, entrepreneurs tend to envision growth as a gradual, sustainable process, taking into account their existing limitations in labor, capital, and operational capacity. This indicates that growth is perceived not as an immediate objective, but as a long-term trajectory, shaped by incremental progress and adaptive strategies. Such perspectives reflect a nuanced understanding of entrepreneurship, prioritizing sustainability over rapid scaling.

Closely related to this is the expectation for collaboration and partnership, which emerges as a critical element in overcoming structural and operational constraints. For many EWDs, business activities cannot be fully separated from their social environment, and thus collaboration becomes both a strategic and functional necessity. The expressed need for assistance

“I hope there will be someone who can help...”

illustrates that the sustainability of these businesses is often dependent on access to supportive relationships, whether within the family, community, or broader networks. This underscores the importance of relational embeddedness, where business success is closely tied to the availability of social capital and collective support.

In addition to these expectations, there is a strong awareness of the importance of digital transformation as a pathway for future development. Entrepreneurs recognize that remaining competitive requires continuous adaptation to evolving technological trends, particularly in relation to digital platforms and online engagement. As one informant noted,

“We should not focus on only one platform... we must follow the trend.”

This reflects an emerging orientation toward digital adaptability, in which entrepreneurs are not only adopting technology but also actively expanding their presence across multiple platforms. However, this expectation is also accompanied by an implicit awareness of the challenges involved, including the need for digital skills, consistency, and the ability to navigate platform dynamics. Thus, digital growth is perceived as both an opportunity and a demanding process that requires continuous learning and adjustment.

Importantly, the expectations articulated by informants reveal an underlying tension between aspiration and constraint. While there is a clear desire for growth, independence, and expansion, these ambitions are consistently negotiated within the limits imposed by physical conditions, resource availability, and social structures. This suggests that future expectations are not formed in isolation, but are deeply embedded within the realities of everyday entrepreneurial practice. As such, they reflect adaptive aspiration, in which goals are continuously recalibrated in response to changing circumstances.

From a broader perspective, these findings highlight that the future of EWDs cannot be understood solely through an individualistic lens. Instead, it requires recognition of the interconnected roles of institutional support, social networks, and digital ecosystems in shaping entrepreneurial trajectories. The expectations for support, collaboration, and digital growth collectively point to the need for a more inclusive and enabling entrepreneurial environment that addresses structural barriers alongside individual empowerment.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the future expectations of EWDs are characterized by a balance between ambition and realism, shaped by both opportunity and limitation. These expectations underscore the importance of developing a holistic support system that integrates capacity building, social inclusion, and digital empowerment, thereby enabling EWDs not only to sustain their businesses but also to achieve meaningful growth and recognition within the broader economic landscape. The study also supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by empowering entrepreneurs with disabilities through inclusive economic opportunities, enhancing their participation in economic activities and promoting equitable access to entrepreneurship. The present study also contributes to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through research collaboration international knowledge exchange and strengthening global partnerships for inclusive and sustainable development especially to support business of EWDs and global business inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of business run by EWDs by examining innovation strategies, business survival mechanisms, the role of social support, consumer acceptance, challenges, and future expectations within the context of digital transformation. The findings reveal that EWDs demonstrate a high level of adaptability by leveraging both digital and relational strategies to sustain their businesses. Innovation is not only reflected in the use of digital platforms such as live streaming, but also in the ability to create experiential value and emotional engagement with consumers. In this context, innovation emerges as a dynamic, context-driven process shaped by technological opportunities and individual creativity.

Furthermore, the study highlights that a combination of digital engagement and relational dynamics influences business survival among EWDs. While digital platforms enhance visibility and market access, long-term sustainability also depends heavily on customer loyalty, emotional connection, and trust-building. The role of family and environment is found to be crucial in supporting business operations, particularly in overcoming physical and operational limitations. However, the findings also reveal disparities in access to support systems, indicating that not all entrepreneurs benefit equally from social capital. This suggests that business sustainability is not solely determined by individual capability, but also by the availability of supportive networks and environmental conditions.

In terms of consumer acceptance, the study demonstrates that perceptions toward entrepreneurs with disabilities are inherently dualistic and evolving, characterized by the coexistence of empathy and skepticism. While many consumers express admiration and support, underlying doubts regarding capability and service quality persist. Importantly, digital engagement, particularly through live streaming, plays a significant role in transforming these perceptions by increasing transparency, interaction, and trust. This finding underscores the role of digital platforms not only as marketing tools but also as mechanisms for social legitimization, enabling EWDs to challenge stereotypes and reconstruct their professional identity.

The study also identifies that EWDs face multidimensional and interconnected challenges, including physical limitations, technical constraints, human resource shortages, market vulnerabilities, and digital pressures. These challenges form a complex system of constraints that influence business performance and growth. Rather than operating in isolation, these barriers interact with one another, creating what can be understood as a constraint ecosystem. This

highlights that entrepreneurship with disabilities is shaped by both individual and structural factors, requiring a more holistic approach to support and development.

Looking forward, the findings indicate that EWDs have strong aspirations for growth, collaboration, and digital expansion, while remaining realistic about the constraints they face. Their expectations reflect a balance between ambition and adaptability, emphasizing the importance of external support, partnership opportunities, and continuous skill development. In this regard, digital transformation is perceived not only as an opportunity but also as a necessary pathway for future business sustainability.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by offering a holistic, integrative perspective on EWDs, highlighting the interplay among digital transformation, social capital, and structural constraints. The findings suggest that promoting the sustainability of business of EWDs requires not only individual resilience but also the development of an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports capacity building, digital inclusion, and social acceptance. Thus, this study supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by empowering entrepreneurs with disabilities through inclusive economic opportunities and contributes to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through international research collaboration.

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