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An Empirical Investigation and Conceptual Model of Perceptions, Support, and Barriers to Marketing in Social Enterprises in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Existing studies on social enterprises offer conflicting and contrasting perspectives on the impact of social enterprises on developing countries. Although several studies focused on social enterprises in developing countries, an empirical study that examines how social enterprises develop marketing strategies in an increasingly interconnected digital marketing environment is lacking. The current study empirically investigated the effects of consumer perceptions on social enterprises' marketing strategies in a developing country and, in particular, the perceptions of, and barriers to, social enterprises in Bangladesh. Drawing on the technology–organisation–environment framework and a social constructionist perspective, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals from social enterprises. The emergent data were analysed using thematic analysis. The current study proposed an enabler and impediment social enterprise conceptual framework. The present study suggests that social enterprise engenders self-reliance and community empowerment, however, technological imbalance and infrastructures are the key impediments to adoption of effective social enterprise. Our analysis contributes to the theory of social enterprises' marketing strategies and barriers, and suggests practical lessons in managing social enterprises and the development of marketing strategies

Keywords: social enterprise (SE); social business; non-profit; commercial; marketing; strategy; Bangladesh; thematic analysis

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the importance of social enterprises (SEs) and consumer perceptions as agents of poverty reduction in developing countries has grown [1]. Regardless of the immense importance of SEs around the world, their current marketing and business performance is far from sophisticated [2]. Significantly, SEs tend to try to find ways to attain opportunities offered in native, regional, and global markets where intensive competition exists. Staying competitive is the top-most consideration for every business in the age of globalisation [3]. Considering the restrictions of, for example, inadequate capital [4] (p. 1), SEs continuously compete with other social and commercial forms of businesses [5] which have more wide-ranging resources [6]. Scholars, such as [7,8], have called for more comprehensive research to look at how advanced social projects are established in order to comprehend the phenomena more clearly. In addition, since much of the published research has emphasised the charitable nature of SEs, their commercial role has never fully come into focus [7,9].

Indeed, most academic literature examines commercial enterprises rather than SEs when it comes to the topic of marketing (i.e., [10–12]). The result of this is that scholars have omitted the important context of SEs, which is a combination of the pursuit of profit

and social development. Researchers have tended to assume that social entrepreneurs are able to take full advantage of marketing, despite the fast-paced nature of technological developments [13].

Little is known about what has been achieved so far by SEs and the challenges they have faced when it comes to marketing. This is particularly true of Bangladeshi SEs. In addition, there is no data available related to the current level of marketing used by SEs from Bangladesh. Even though there are many SEs (approximately 150,000) working in Bangladesh [14], they are unable to achieve the required level of social impact. Most of these businesses face a number of challenges in seeking to expand. In acknowledging these challenges, there is a clear need for SEs to develop their marketing performance [15], for example, appealing to more consumers by establishing and expanding brand recognition. The research gap that this study addresses resides within the context of the developing world. Compared to developed countries, nations like Bangladesh are home to SEs that operate in the context of constrained resources. They routinely compete with other organisations for resources, cash, and expert employees. A lack of adequate funding is considered the main obstacle to the growth of SEs in developing countries, especially in Asia [16].

Emerging countries like Bangladesh have limited resources [17,18] and banks and financial institutions are unenthusiastic about funding. As such, governments have an important part to play in arranging sources of funds for the betterment of enterprises. However, the government cannot fulfil the overall requirement to grow SEs [19]. Therefore, SEs need to find a way forward. This research has been conducted to suggest marketing options that may bring about business sustainability and efficiency by increasing the awareness and sales potential of SEs in a way that has been achieved for other types of businesses. The main aim of this research is to investigate the perception of, and to evaluate the barriers to, marketing activities in the SEs of Bangladesh. The next section summarises the literature on SEs, marketing for SEs, and the technology–organisation–environment framework. This is followed by methods that were applied to fulfil the research aim. Next, a discussion is advanced that highlights several issues relating to the perception of SEs' enablers and barriers. Following these findings, the current study developed a conceptual framework (enablers and barriers of SEs). Lastly, we presented the implications for managerial practices based on the key findings.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

Social entrepreneurship is the arena in which entrepreneurs modify their actions to become directly involved with the central goal of bringing about social value [20,21]. The last few decades have seen social entrepreneurship become a progressively important global cultural phenomenon [22,23] because of the failure of governments and other responsible authorities to tackle a number of social challenges such as poverty, social expulsion, and the diverse nature of the environment [21]. As social entrepreneurs endeavour to create social value while safeguarding revenues [24,25] this leads to a twofold mission. According to [26], in terms of institutional logic, these dual goals are expected to be incompatible and create tension between societal and monetary activities. In competitive markets, businesses must decide what value to establish, how to deliver this value to end-users, and how to convey the value proposition to the marketplace.

Reduced resources and a dependency on donations often enforce restrictions on the daily operations of SEs, obliging them to depend more on selling products and services whilst becoming more financially self-reliant [7]. Hence, SEs need to carry out promotional activities, which entail designing, offering, and convincing customers about products and service propositions [7,27]. Social business entrepreneurs acknowledge the requirement to become more commercially positioned whilst also emphasising their social aims [28]. A SE can achieve high returns, with the majority of the revenue being reinvested into social developments to benefit society. Various authors [29,30] contended that SEs implement conventional business practices to continue their business in the industries in which they exist.

Marketing is a crucial activity for entrepreneurs to prioritise, and it is often understood as being the underlying act of a business [31,32]. Varadarajan [33] suggested that marketing decisions specify the marketing activities, options, or behaviours that businesses need to accomplish in the marketplace. The manifold phases and pursuits of marketing must be incorporated for an enterprise to thrive. Substantial segments of marketing consist of seeking out and distinguishing target audiences, and gaining insights into their rationale for purchasing, and creating policies [34,35]. Since the 1970s, marketers thought that offerings were constrained to goods or services that involved the provision of concepts to expedite behavioural transformation [36]. However, change arose when vendors acknowledged that commercial marketing could be employed for social causes [7], and this sub-discipline is seen as a clear example of social marketing.

Marketing is an essential function, not only for profit-oriented businesses but also for social organisations [19]. Marketing can serve two critical roles for SEs. The first and most vital is the creation and delivery of social value for vulnerable recipients and communities. Many scholars (i.e., [29,37–39]) have acknowledged that marketing can assist social entrepreneurs in creating social value through the use of marketing tools. The second role is maintaining activities and operations in a market-based context [40]. Many definitions of marketing exist in the literature. This study adopts the definition advanced by [41], who stated that marketing is about generating value for different stakeholders and society in a profitable way. According to [42], to attain financial sustainability, SEs must compete in the market.

However, existing research into marketing approaches employed by non-profit organisations (NPOs) shows that marketing is still undervalued [43]. Modi and Mishra [44] evaluated three concepts that can hamper the adoption of marketing approaches in an NPO. These concepts are that marketing is a waste of money, and that it is insensitive and manipulative. These concepts can lead NPOs and social businesses to eschew marketing strategies. Researchers have examined the necessity for NPOs to tackle these weaknesses by implementing more market-oriented styles [45,46]. Besides, profit-oriented businesses, non-profit institutions also require marketing to reach their customers and notify them about the products, services, or ideas they offer [47]. They also argued that marketing has a key role to play in pricing, product development, communication, and the distribution of this type of NPO. Research has revealed that it is essential for NPOs to comprehend the value of the adoption of marketing, considering the pressure from local governments to generate positive outcomes and to bring about growth [48]. In an increasingly competitive environment, it is necessary for non-business establishments to engage in marketing efficiently to distinguish themselves in a functional setting [46]. Therefore, the study of marketing approaches in SEs has great practical and academic significance. Social entrepreneurs perform a substantial role in accumulating the resources required to capture market opportunities, even in resource-constrained subsistence markets [49].

Previous research conducted an explorative qualitative study to evaluate the differences between the marketing of commercial enterprises and the marketing of SEs [50]. The study found out that in the UK, SEs are involved in entrepreneurial marketing practices [50]. Using a quantitative approach, another study of SEs was conducted in Japan and the UK [51]. The authors assessed the impact of marketing competencies on the monetary and social performance of society; they concluded that only a few marketing approaches had a constructive impact on economic and social performance, and therefore suggested that SEs should choose promotional capabilities wisely. SEs were reluctant to recognise marketing as an essential organisational function [52]. Their assessment noted that this reluctance was relative because of the perception that marketing only contributes to the commercial rationality of an enterprise and will lead to some deterioration of social value creation.

The literature has examined both SEs and marketing; however, in the context of SEs, the focus was on the activities for social changes, or their types and characteristics. Only part of the literature concentrated on the operational efficiency of SEs. Unfortunately,

marketing in relation to SEs has been overlooked by most researchers. An underlying belief when it comes to the sustainability of SEs is their competence to take part in profit-making pursuits in order to fund their social mission [53]. Marketing safeguards sustainability through supporting cooperative and collaborative interactions between businesses and stakeholders. SEs use of marketing therefore benefits their multiple stakeholder groups and contributes to their longer-term sustainability [54]. At the same time, it frequently increases the aspirations of these stakeholders. Such an approach is key to settling the twofold tensions (societal and monetary) that are common in SEs [55]. Because of the absence of necessary resources and skills, many SEs find it difficult to employ marketing practices. Moreover, SEs fail to understand the significance of connections related to the product and fail to see marketing as vital to their sustainability. A study by Cheah [56] determined that marketing seems to be an "informal practice" in SEs as they believe that "pure" marketing is only for profit-oriented business. This lends legitimacy to the point that SEs need to demonstrate technical ability, competences, and expertise to carry out marketing.

Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) Framework

Technology–organisation–environment (TOE) is a well-known framework for researching IT implementation in organisations. It was first proposed as a theoretical outline to envisage the acceptance of different forms of IT innovation [57]. Later, it was expanded and reformed by other research [58,59]. Therefore, as a useful systematic framework, TOE has broad applicability and retains experimental power that is beneficial in the research of a wide range of technologies [60]. This model has been considered a standard theoretical framework for forecasting and describing the acceptance of any type of new technology [61,62].

The TOE framework has emerged as a well-established and robust framework to analyse different internal (technological and organisational) and external (environmental) factors that influence the adoption of different types of IT in the small and medium-sized enterprise setting. The IT technological characteristics that have been explored are IT infrastructure, relative advantage, compatibility, application and tools, complexity, and trust [57,63]. On the other hand, the organisational elements pertain to resources, size, structure, and prior experiences [63]. Environmental characteristics encompass competitive intensity, customer pressure, competitive pressure, market scope, and support needed.

Developing strategic marketing preferences is more challenging for a social entrepreneur than it is for either a typical NPO or a commercial enterprise, both of which are mostly concerned with a specific bottom line [64]. A typical NPO can continue to provide products and services that have a significant social impact, even if they make losses on them [23]. In contrast, commercial businesses will not. Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, must synchronously inspect the social impact and economic feasibility of each product and service [7].

3. Methodology and Methods

We utilised a social constructionist perspective to examine the phenomenon of interest. In social constructionism, humans create reality through participation, experience, and action [65] (p. 206). Compared to positivism which prompts researchers to separate social actors from social entities [66] (p. 21), social constructionism argues that people create social realities [67] (p. 189) by developing cognitive meaning of their experiences. Managers and employees of SEs, while operating in the competitive market, observe and judge the socio-economic phenomena in their surroundings and imagine possible futures for social development [68]. Managerial and marketing decisions within SEs are not simply based on emerging situations [69], but also on the decisions and actions of the managers and employees who mentally process information and perceptions of their surroundings before making a final judgement [68]. The decision to adopt specific marketing strategies may be framed by how SE managers and employees perceive their organisational surroundings and the circumstances of the market, which may vary between managers

and employees from different SEs. Individuals develop understandings following their experience of situations, which will vary among individuals; therefore, reality is perceived as unique, in contrast to the positivist approach which views reality as universal [70]. Thus, the researcher needs to understand the meaning of the social action [71] of SE managers and employees.

3.1. Data Collection Methods

Using a semi-structured interview style is a good fit for when a researcher needs to understand how a specific phenomenon was developed [72]. Open-ended questions, typically applied in semi-structured interviews, are preferable for qualitative studies [73–75]. The social constructivist nature of the study required open-ended questions to enable respondents to answer in their own words [76] without a strict structure limiting their responses. However, the researchers applied a semi-structured approach to ensure conversations remained within the topic of the study. Semi-structured interviews trigger more talk from participants within the focus area of the research [77] and allows the researcher to make necessary moderations to questions throughout the interview [78]. Though unstructured interviews may generate more in-depth data [79], specific research questions enable the researcher to obtain specific answers from respondents to generate logical codes and themes relevant to the study.

3.2. Sampling Technique

The current study chose purposive sampling as the recruitment strategy by which its participants were selected. Purposive sampling enriches and provides higher-order recruitment of knowledgeable participants than other sampling methods due to the researcher's volitional choice of participants [80]. Although qualitative studies do involve generalisation, conversations in a study of the topic of marketing in SEs could lead to generic experiences rather than ones related to the narrowly defined research topic. The aim of qualitative data collection is to prompt a direction in which specific real-time events and situations are described without generating interpretive generalisations from the participants [81] (p. 618). A purposeful sampling procedure was applied to select participants who possess relevant experience and knowledge appropriate for the study [82]. According to [83], purposive sampling can be used to examine various perspectives and to develop an in-depth understanding of the study area. Considering the aims and objectives of the study and research design, purposive sampling was seen as an ideal choice. There is no standard definition in terms of the ideal sample size for qualitative interviews [84]. Theoretical saturation may occur during as few as five interviews. If overlapping themes keep appearing during interviews, a sample of as little as six interviews would be enough to develop themes and useful explanations [85]. A total of 22 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. The initial target for interview was determined to be 30 and, of these, 22 interviews were conducted. The length of the interviews ranged from 25 to 35 min. Several responses were discounted from the analysis as these were not relevant to the study, and responses that appeared similar to others or repetitive were also discounted.

3.3. Data Analysis

An analysis of data was conducted using a qualitative approach proposed to develop an understanding of the main constructs and relationships that emerged from the data [77]. Such an approach brings transparency to conducting inductive research, resulting in the data being summarised and interpreted using three stages of analysis (first, second, and third orders) [77]. In the first-order analysis, the researchers collected information from the rich narrative data provided by the participants through the interviews to generate codes or key words common to one or more interviews. A large number of primary codes were developed that identified potentially relevant factors. As the analysis progressed, similarities and differences between primary codes could be identified. In the second stage of analysis, the researchers developed second-order themes from the primary codes.

In the third-order analysis, the researchers constructed the data into major themes based on explicit and implicit ideas. Comments, as well as the words expressed by respondents, and the understanding of the researchers were all crucial to this process. By the third-order stage, the analysis had generated the main themes that described the generalised qualities of marketing within SEs. In addition, previous literature was examined to support the validity of the generated themes thus concluding the final analysis stage [77]. Three emergent themes were developed (see Figure 1) and each of these themes is discussed in the next section.

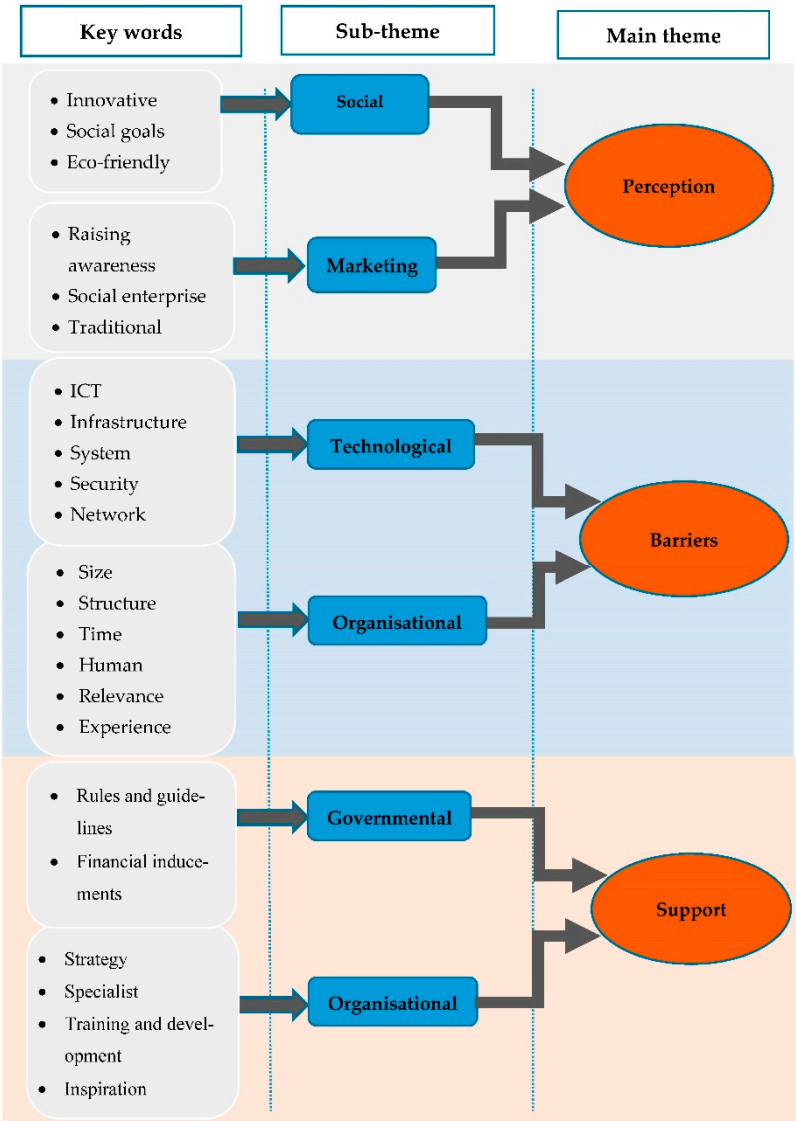

Figure 1. Main themes, sub-themes, and key words of this study.

4. Results

4.1. Main Theme 1: Perception

Perceptions comprise of insights, awareness, and explanations of sensory information. The behaviour of human beings and societies are moulded under the impact of numerous tangible and conjectural elements. In this study, participants' perceptions about SEs and marketing have been evaluated.

4.1.1. Sub-Theme 1: SE

It was considered important to observe how the participants in the study perceived SE as an approach to both engage in commercial activity and to carry out socially advantageous activities. Analysis revealed that diverse types of SE models exist in Bangladesh. For example, SE2P1 pointed out that, "Our organisation is a hybrid model of SE which is based on commercial and social development activities". Whereas SE11P1 stated, "We are a non-profit NGO. Our aim is only to help poor and needy women in our local area. We depend on various donor organisations and charity programmes".

Most SEs are involved with innovative, creative, and environmentally friendly products and services. For instance, to describe innovation, SE2P2 noted, "We provide microloans and banking services to the rural poor people". Similarly, with reference to innovation and the eco-friendly nature of the enterprise, SE1P1 stated, "We have many innovative products such as solar lights which don't require electricity; instead, they use solar energy".

On the other hand, the data and the direct observations suggest that employees, managers, and owners consider their SEs to be profit making, commercial entities. For instance, participant SE6P1 explicitly labelled the style of his organisation as glaringly different from other social sector organisations pursuing similar social goals: "Our organisation has taken lots of commercial approaches not typically seen in these types of SEs. Normally the SE has a low budget and people expect a low profile from this kind of enterprise. But our manager always takes phenomenal steps to represent our enterprise's competitive effect in the market".

SE1 maintains several independent SEs under its patronage and sees these as commercially successful. His business and his success are very well known and valued within the community. Indeed, this group of SEs is not only effective, but also profitable. The mindset of the employees is that commercial success is an essential goal for SEs to attain, in order for them to get away from the stigma of social service. "If people view us only as a social institute, they will buy out of charity, and we will not be able to survive. We need to act to provide our products and services in a manner that will motivate people to buy our products and services out of necessity. We do not want to make ourselves valueless; we are not a charity organisation; we do not expect compassion from others. Otherwise, we would be considered a social service instead of a social business" (SE1P3).

In line with the above comment, SE5P1 expressed that, "Sometimes we see that people don't take our activity seriously. They think we are only focussed on cheaper products and services. We have to change the views of these people". The information collected indicates that this concern that SEs are reminiscent of social services may be more widespread in charitable organisations than in commercial ones.

In terms of the non-profit participants, SE10P1 noted, "We are a non-profit agency. We do provide higher quality services and competitive prices. All our earnings and revenue are reinvested in the community. Some people do not take our services seriously. They view our services as sympathy, not necessity".

4.1.2. Sub-Theme 2: Marketing

Prior to asking respondents closed questions, participants were asked to state, in an open-ended manner, how they would personally define marketing. A few examples of the definitions given by employees of SEs include, "Marketing is all about displaying the company name or logo to the public" (SE2P1). Analogously, SE4P1 said, "It [marketing] is the exposing of products and services to the public through the use of various types of platforms". SE8P1 mentioned, "Showing our organisation in an appealing manner is key".

Analysis suggests that participants view marketing as an upbeat exercise, although there are still lingering doubts about employing marketing tactics. Participant SE4P2 stated that "Promotion and advertising are not evil actions ... These can be achieved by any organisation. I don't see any contradiction in using marketing in the SE". The views of these participants demonstrate that they consider marketing is not intrinsically something

to avoid. However, some pessimistic views prevail in the wider community in terms of engagement with social issues. The participants see marketing as a promotional exercise that is useful for raising awareness. SE8P1 argued that "It is very hard to differentiate promotion and marketing as both are related. As far as I can see, the main goal of advertising is to deliver messages and information. Normally advertising means (for commercial enterprises) pushing sales. However, our concept is a bit different, because our priority is not selling, although it is part of our activities. The main concern of our promotion is to deliver messages about what we do and how you and other people can get engaged with this curriculum".

On the other hand, some respondents suggested that marketing is only useful to signal presence and activity. For instance, participant SE9P1 suggested that "For us, marketing is not advertising a product or service on TV or on a billboard, it is a medium to spread the news about our activities". Similarly, SE4P3 pointed out that "Marketing is actually making sure that the people that we're attempting to reach are concerned with what our service is, how we provide it, and why they should desire it".

Most participants use marketing tactics in order to create advantage in competitive markets. SE3P2 said, "We have to carry out marketing otherwise we will not be able to exist in our market. The product we sell is handicraft, and you will be able to find lots of handicraft shops in this area. We need to publicise our product to the market so that people will be able to understand that the product is available in our store". Participants also stated that they do not use any advance type of marketing. Instead, they use traditional marketing options. For instance, SE7P1 pointed out, "We use leaflets and brochures to promote our service".

Many enterprises rely on word-of-mouth and face-to-face marketing. Thus, SE12P1 stated, "We sell our embroidering cloths to local customers, and they tell their friends about our services. They also come to us to buy sewing garments". Similarly, SE6P1 noted, "Our organisation does not carry out any marketing. We do not need it. Our service is about making handmade pottery. Thus, we do not require any kind of marketing. People refer to us verbally and that's the only way we get orders". SE11P1 said, "Actually we don't have any marketing strategy other than direct meeting. We describe our services to poor people and try to engage with them in our activity, so that they can be involved and improve their lives".

Many participants stated that they use traditional marketing approaches (i.e., non-digital marketing) and techniques. For instance, one of the participants noted, "We are still practising old-style marketing. We like to promote our services face to face. We still use leaflets to raise awareness amongst our clients about our services" (SE10P1). By way of further explanation, SE9P1 stated, "NGOs like us provide small credit to poor people who do not have technological devices or are not able to understand us via other platforms. Also, we have our own resource constraints to deal with. We like to get closer to the client and try to understand their issues and then offer our services. This is a long process, but it is effective". SE10P1 also justified their marketing approach by stating that, "A few NGOs post via website or on social media in order to showcase their activity, but I don't think it is all that effective for them. The people who buy our services do not have a clear understanding of how to obtain information from online".

A few participants also noted that marketing activities can hamper their mission and can give the wrong impression to stakeholders, especially donors and investors. For example, SE11P1 noted, "We depend on various donations and funding from other institutions. If we engage or invest in marketing, they might think we are doing it only for profit purposes, which is not our main objective. It is also hard for us to allocate some funds to marketing". Similarly, SE6P1 explained some of the reasoning behind the avoidance of marketing, "Our type of enterprise does not use marketing. If we do, then other people will think we are doing well, and they will not help us, especially in terms of financing matters".

4.2. Main Theme 2: Barriers

4.2.1. Sub-Theme 1: Technological Barriers

The adoption of a modern marketing approach is a technological development. Technological advancement is not straightforward, particularly for SEs in developing countries like Bangladesh. Technological development requires a great deal of determination on the part of an organisation. The focal point in terms of new technologies is to commit to building a strategy. IT is fundamentally utilised at two levels in companies: in operations and products. Both levels are vital for competitive business and a strong sense of needs and opportunities. However, the data shows that, in general, none of these SEs have put in place a strategy for IT.

Participants agreed that an IT policy should be based on two key features: ideas and planning. For example, participant SE2P2 cited, "This IT plan has to be based on a combination of ideas, planning, and funding". Cleary, ideas and planning are related to strategies, and funding can be categorised as a resource. To enable the development of a proper IT strategy, equivalent systems and related substructures should be implemented, and this will confirm the efficiency of certain IT systems. Under these circumstances, the various government policies for providing such systems should be examined and acknowledged. IT strategy is an essential part of business governance, and is typically the responsibility of owners, managers, and boards of directors.

To express the importance of IT and the deficiency of online transactions, SE1P3 noted that, "IT is an integral part of any kind of modern business. You need to have a good IT infrastructure if you want to use modern marketing strategies".

Most participants confessed that the present IT infrastructure in Bangladesh is not sufficient. SE9P1 commented that, "In comparison to other developed countries our IT system is lagging. It is not well structured and equipped. It needs an advanced level of development to be used for business-related activity". Equally, participant SE9P1 posited that, "Our IT sector requires further development. We need to compare our IT sector with other developed countries to realise how far behind we are. We do not have any security in terms of online payments. There are no rules, regulations, or laws regarding online transactions". This statement signifies the issue in relation to online payment systems in Bangladesh.

In terms of the internet and connectivity, participants reported experiencing difficulties with internet speed and coverage. Many spoke of inconsistent signals at certain locations. SE4P2 asserted that, "Speed-wise, our internet system is still weak. We have to wait a long time to upload or download documents and content. Sometimes it behaves erratically. It starts to buffer endlessly and stick. This is so annoying".

4.2.2. Sub-Theme 2: Organisational Barriers

The respondents spoke about the size of their enterprise in relation to the adoption of marketing options which had a significant influence on the implementation of many technologies. Surprisingly, the size of the SEs was not seen as a potential barrier. SE2P1 mentioned, "Although we are not a large established company, we are trying to use new technologies like digital marketing tools in our operation". SE5P1 clarified that, "Smaller enterprises than us are using digital technologies for marketing purposes. Therefore, I don't think it [size] is an issue". Thus, SE12P1 suggested that, "Regardless of size, marketing can be implemented in any type of enterprise . . . ". In demonstrating the reason behind the widespread adoption of marketing regardless of business size, SE7P1 posited that, "The size of an organisation is a motivating factor to adopt any type of technology-related system. But for modern type of marketing, such as social media, size does not have that much influence, as Facebook and other social media platforms are ready for use in any size of organisation".

Most managers and owners who are non-adopters of a modern marketing approach engage in all levels of operational work rather than focusing mainly on their management pursuits. Such firms are, after all, of smaller scale and subject to resource constraints. Thus,

they were unable to maintain their marketing sites as comprehensively as they may have liked. They felt they always faced tight schedules in the day-to-day running of the activities of their businesses, and this prevented them from being able to dedicate more time to marketing. Thus, a lack of adequate time was perceived by many of the respondents as a challenge and obstacle to the acceptance of marketing strategies. SE8P1 noted, "We don't have extra time to allocate to proper type of marketing strategies because we do not have a clear concept of how and when we should use them in our business activity. We have plenty of other responsibilities to maintain".

However, from direct observation it was seen that most enterprises have no IT professionals or experts. A few of them have no employees with elementary knowledge of IT. For instance, amongst the non-adopters, SE9P1 pointed out that, "The people who work in our enterprise do not know much about technology. They are mostly poor and unschooled". SE12P1 described that, "We can't recruit an employee who has good knowledge of technology. This is because we can't afford them".

Many business proprietors have no formal marketing systems and approaches. A lack of adequate knowledge and prior experience amongst business owners is one of the documented reasons behind their decisions not to use advanced marketing strategies. Adopters of a modern marketing approach in this study explained how prior experience is important. Respondents across cases noted, for example, that, "We have prior experience of adopting various types of technological tools and options, such as websites and email. We know that advanced tactics, such as social media, have the potential to increase our organisational efficiency" (SE7P1).

Some participants also observed that their previous marketing approaches had influenced them to adopt more advanced approaches. SE1P2 noted, "We used to do and still do E-marketing via TV ads, website marketing, and so on; thus, we have adequate knowledge and understanding of how this type of marketing has a positive influence on our operation. So, we have seen a similar type of influence and somewhat better prospect from social media, and this motivates us to implement it in our enterprise". SE8P2 stated, "Our enterprise has a website though it is only to provide information about our enterprise. This experience makes us understand that we should adopt strong marketing media".

4.3. Main Theme 3: Support

4.3.1. Sub-Theme 1: Governmental Support

Analysis suggests that there is insufficient government support for SEs to adopt and implement new marketing and communications options. There are several roles that government needs to play to support the activities of social businesses in Bangladesh regarding the adoption of a marketing strategy. The first supportive role that this research has identified is collaborative support. The findings suggest that the government could support key actors by connecting or linking them to other organisations with the right skills to help them carry out a knowledge-evaluation exercise. For instance, participant SE2P3 mentioned that, "We have less technological support from government. A training programme from government can be a good idea to teach about technology for organisations. They can link our organisation with some other training organisations, such as IT firms, to enable us to use new strategies in business, like digital marketing". Another participant noted, "We do not receive any direct support from the government. As our organisation does have plenty of resource constraints, the government should take the initiative to help and improve conditions, especially in terms of technology usage" (SE8P2).

Similarly, while mentioning the support of the government, participants identified actions that can be taken, such as enterprise resource planning. "Government should come up with an Enterprise Resource Planning Centre like the government of Hong Kong has done for its enterprises. From there we can train and seek help when necessary" (SE7P1).

Most SEs lack the skills essential to comprehend the new technology they intend to adopt. The findings suggest that research is a role that government, and most associated agencies, can conduct to support these enterprises. SE11P1 pointed out that, "We, as a

social business, can't afford to do research on new strategy adoption, although this is one of the effective methods to see whether a new plan or approach is beneficial or not. Government and its agencies should come forward and investigate on behalf of us".

4.3.2. Sub-Theme 2: Organisational Support

Support from top-level management or owners is important for marketing engagement. Top-level management or owners play a central role in adopting new technologies. An understanding of how top-level managers use their IT resources is critical and vital to the effective use of IT.

Analysis suggests there are no clear guidelines or procedures for controlling and evaluating IT performance. As a result, there exists a clear contradiction when the owner or top-level manager has to decide whether to approve or continue to invest in IT in the face of a progressively sophisticated SE context. One of the owners of an SE (SE5P1) noted that, "Personally, I feel hesitant to make decisions on new technology usage. I infrequently use traditional financial measures to assess the performance of the devices or technology we use. Thus, there are no clear criteria for non-financial benefits". This comment reveals the importance of suitable project assessment to bring about top-level management's confidence in IT adoption.

5. Discussion

From the literature, it is clear that there is no consensus in Bangladesh on the best type of SE model [86]. In designing an SE system, some social entrepreneurs concentrate on particular social, ethical, or environmental objectives as well as the returns on initial investments. An analysis of the data suggests that the most common interpretations of social business practices consist of green (eco-friendly) products and services as well as businesses and NPOs working together. Some of these practices involve businesses financially supporting NPOs. The majority of SEs are relatively small, and only a few people are involved. The majority of SEs are managed by the owners or top-level managers directly.

It is clear that marketing practices amongst SEs are unique. The data suggests that Bangladeshi SEs are slowly engaging in marketing. To engage with potential users and customers, SEs use cost-effective and entrepreneurial marketing tools. Word-of-mouth and face-to-face marketing are the most popular forms of marketing tactic that are used.

The above forms of marketing tactics are validated in the literature [87,88], which found that the level of perceived risk amongst customers was reduced when information from others who had bought previously was received via word-of-mouth. The process of buying, communications between earlier purchasers and potential customers, in the form of word-of-mouth, were exceptionally important [89,90]. Additionally, [91] found in their research that information gained through word-of-mouth had a constructive impact on the levels of customer trust in the business. Researchers have also acknowledged word-of-mouth as an important means of gaining new customers [92,93].

One of the major factors identified through this research was the lack of reliable infrastructure to support new technology or systems adoption in Bangladesh. Compared to other countries, contemporary technologies are yet to achieve a reasonably high level of adoption in Bangladesh, since very few employees or owners of SEs have electronic devices, such as desktop computers, to integrate their operations online. Amongst some of the examples cited by participants to demonstrate the inadequacy of IT infrastructure in Bangladesh were the erratic power supply, the restricted and high-cost internet service, and poor telecommunications. Previous studies agreed that the adoption of new technological systems in a business context depends on the readiness of internal and external technological resources [94,95].

Previous studies have argued that the adoption of newer innovations does not depend on existing IT infrastructures [96,97]. However, others have insisted that one of the key duties of government is to develop infrastructural capabilities to sustain the advancement of business [98–100].

In terms of the various challenges relating to the adoption of modern marketing approaches, the cost of set-up, maintenance, and accessibility to technical support and personnel were identified as some of the key internal impediments to the acceptance of modern marketing techniques like social media. From an external perspective, the slow advancement of technology infrastructure, especially internet and digital payment systems, across the country hinders the use of a strong marketing tactic amongst SEs.

Analysis of the interviews and the literature review would suggest that IT infrastructure in Bangladesh faces many challenging issues that obstruct digital marketing options utilisation and pervasive acceptance. One of the most significant impediments to digital marketing cited by SEs was the lack of reliable digital transactional options. It was noted that online transactions in Bangladesh are very limited and there are few laws and regulations that encompass online transactions, resolutions, and fraud.

Previous research [100–103] suggests that to develop business value and achieve a competitive advantage, IT infrastructure must be appropriately designed, employed, and realistically applied. Infrastructural advancement is not a priority currently in Bangladesh. Thus, the nation has been slow to create internet and other IT-related technologies to expedite adoption and usage amongst businesses. It is also vital to note that some participants had not adopted internet technology at all. Inefficient IT network infrastructure is simply not good for business. A network that can sustain all corporate functions and obligations should be one of the leading priorities for businesses, especially for companies looking to expand and grow. Awareness of high-speed and advanced networks is gradually increasing, connectivity is still constrained to certain specific carriers and areas in Bangladesh [104].

Previous research [92,105–107] suggested that organisational resource availability is a substantial prognosticator of any type of innovative technology. The entrepreneurship literature implies that commercial entrepreneurs deny being restricted or constricted by a lack of resources in pursuit of their objectives or goals. Instead, they have used creative approaches to confront such impediments. In the social entrepreneurship field, entrepreneurs mostly function in limited-resource settings [108].

Although the structure or size of the SE does not in itself present as a barrier to marketing adoption, it has been found that size impacts on the implementation of new strategies for technology. In [109] it is noted that larger firms have a higher inclination to adopt advanced marketing strategies than smaller businesses. They also suggested that a variety of aspects, such as ownership type, available resources, structure, culture, and market orientation, vary between small and large businesses.

On the other hand, studies have also found that organisation size does not correspond to a barrier to the use of marketing [110,111]. A probable justification for the lack of a considerable correlation between firm size and the usage of online marketing is the cost-effectiveness of digital marketing tactics. Therefore, even small- or medium-sized businesses can participate and fulfil their marketing objectives.

In [92] it is noted that large companies tend to have sufficient financial resources to appoint a full-time employee to handle and operate marketing. The lack of financial resources and skills identified in this investigation also supports previous findings [98,100,112]. However, time constraints in terms of the use of different modern technologies is a significant barrier to using advanced marketing techniques [107].

Poor IT skills and awareness are also seen as barriers to the success of a SE. Fear of an adverse response is also recognised as a barrier to SEs undertaking marketing. Based on this analysis, it is clear that most SEs are aware of the importance of marketing and want to use advanced marketing tools like social media. However, they lack the required skills to do so. Top-level management engagement and experience are seen as crucial for businesses seeking to adopt IT, and this is a significant finding in this study. This finding resonates with earlier findings [113,114]. They suggested that the acceptance of marketing and new technology in SEs is driven by top-level management who influence staff to use it for strategic or marketing purposes.

Earlier studies suggest that government support and policies are necessary for any type of enterprise to adopt new technology [115,116]. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the most important environmental factor influencing the use of marketing amongst SEs was trend and market pressure. This is consistent with findings advanced by [117], who argued that many companies embrace new technology because of market trends. As a result of resource deficiencies, SEs in Bangladesh need external support. This study finds that government has a major role to play in developing a sustainable IT strategy to support SEs in their implementation of marketing. The need for support has been confirmed by earlier scholars [118].

Respondents that took part in this study conceded that most SEs and small businesses could benefit from the launch of a government programme about adopting advanced marketing approaches. However, participants were not optimistic that this would happen. In their view, it is not possible to obtain support directly from government sources or associated groups. Studies have argued that there is less government assistance for the adoption of IT in most developing countries than in developed countries [119,120].

The participants that took part in this study recommended that policymakers, government ministries, and agencies come up with favourable internet surfing rates and e-business plans to promote technology adoption in order to grow SE businesses. The study finds that the government of Bangladesh should offer funding to empower SEs to adopt the necessary technology to advance the sector. The aim should be to ensure SEs can support poor, rural, and unemployed people. In line with other governments (for example in Japan), the Bangladeshi government could authorise tax exemptions for obtaining computers and other IT tools. In [121] environmental factors that have an impact on the acceptance of IT outsourcing were investigated. They discovered that in states where the legal system is comprehensive, and the implementation mechanisms are resourceful, businesses are far more willing to adopt technologies since these are protected and facilitated by established laws.

6. Conceptual Framework

This study recommends a viable strategic framework for the adoption of effective marketing for SEs. The recommended conceptual model was created based on the information provided by participants and previous literature. The proposed framework contributes to the decision-making procedure for successful marketing implementation. For a more comprehensive insight into the adoption process, the study considers the different encompassing factors, enablers, and difficulties that influence marketing adoption in SEs in Bangladesh.

From the earlier literature it has been found that, although there is a rising interest in SEs, this interest remains unfocused and is emerging because of definitional debates. The literature review revealed that SEs are an important and growing part of the Bangladeshi economy and that few studies have been conducted to explore marketing activity within them. Previous studies suggested that in order to survive and persist in providing social services, SEs must take part in the entrepreneurial process of identifying resources [5,122]. Analysis suggests that SEs in Bangladesh engage with marketing activities in spite of earlier findings which suggested otherwise. However, such engagement remains "traditional" and not particularly sophisticated. As a result of resource limitations, SEs are unable to develop advanced approaches to marketing. The findings of this research confirm a number of constraints which are classified into two main groups: technological and organisational. These constraints hinder marketing adoption and diffusion in Bangladesh.

Most marketing options are well known and affordable, and they offer great opportunities for SEs with few resources to market themselves and engage customers [19]. This study found that few social businesses have adopted marketing procedures. However, many SEs face issues and challenges while adopting technology-based marketing, such as social media. A lack of knowledge and skills related to advanced technology were identified as the major challenge for participants. Many studies [123,124] have found that

a lack of appropriate finance is the single most important limitation to the development of SEs. In profit-oriented businesses, formal and informal business capital are vital sources of growth finance [125]. However, the non-distribution of profits dwindles the interest of investors to finance SEs. Likewise, when access to human resources is necessary, low-cost business practices that have been implemented due to resource limitations negatively influence the recruitment of potential employees [126]. The data reflects that most owners, managers, and employers of SEs in Bangladesh have little knowledge and lack the time to fully take part in marketing activities.

Earlier literature [55,127] suggests that SEs are mindful of the importance of advertising and they intend to engage in it, but their lack of necessary skills often prevents them from adopting a proper marketing strategy. Limited expertise in marketing appears to be a constant fret for SEs. Consequently, this lack of knowledge converts into a weak pricing strategy and less attention is paid to packaging and lower levels of interfaces with customers [15,128].

Since most SEs are small or medium in size, the marketing adoption process is directly affected by the owner or top-level manager [129]. According to [130], management's encouragement will lead to a higher level of commitment and participation among the members and workers in their firm and, consequently, a stronger involvement in new technology adoption. Owners of SEs must take critical steps towards the adoption of advanced marketing options and recognise suitable types of devices and applications that meet strategic objectives. They must recognise the cost of financing plans and hire skilled staff to manage and deliver effective marketing plans. It is also recommended that top-level management or proprietors should prioritise the training of employees, mainly those in charge of marketing products and services. This would mean that SEs could develop the skills needed to carry out advanced marketing approaches.

On the other hand, the government needs to set rules and guidelines to support SEs, and to offer financial inducements and loan agreements to SEs to purchase new technological devices, to support IT training centres, and to take action to disseminate and adopt advanced marketing strategies. Crucially, the government should make sure that the owners of SEs have access to consistent infrastructure, including reliable energy, consistent telecommunication lines, and other IT-related infrastructural resources that will reduce the cost of adopting new technology. The government and social entrepreneurs can play a vital role in establishing awareness and delivering support to SEs as to the value of digital marketing. Governments can also organise workshops and develop programmes on advanced marketing so that owners and employees of SEs can realise the importance of technology for marketing. The study also suggests that governments and other stakeholders should encourage social entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by granting access to credit and by sponsoring training. In having easy access to finance, SEs will be able to fix their IT infrastructure and reap the benefits of contemporary marketing tools, such as digital media. This can help businesses to expand their operations. In addition, by offering SEs adequate training, SEs will be able to comprehend and learn how to leverage marketing to fully capitalise on their potential. By integrating all of the elements from the above discussion, this study proposes the enablers of and impediments to SEs in developing countries (see Figure 2).

This conceptual framework can be applied to enhance our understanding of the enablers of and impediments to effective marketing implementation in developing countries, which can assist decision-makers in those organisations, particularly in Bangladesh, to implement more effective strategies towards the successful adoption of marketing.

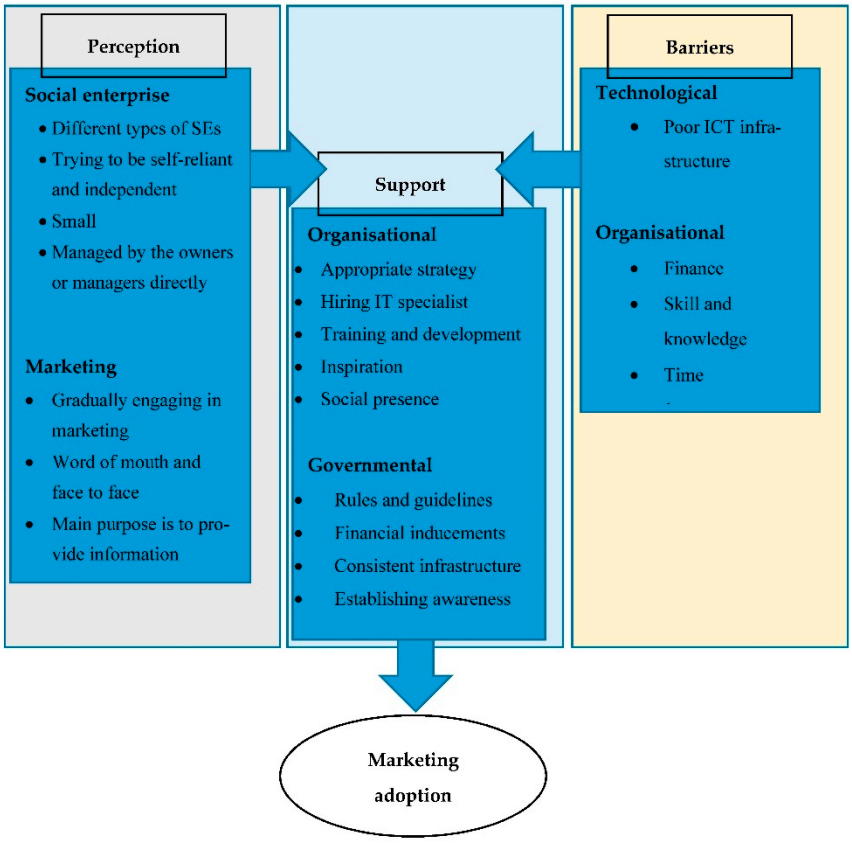

Figure 2. Enablers and impediments of social enterprises.

7. Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

In recent decades, investigations have been performed to consider the antecedents and outcomes of different marketing systems [131–133]. In the context of SEs, there is a lack of research into the organisational usage of advanced marketing strategies [134]. Very few investigations have acknowledged the impact of marketing practice on social business contexts. Therefore, from an academic standpoint, the findings provide better insight into ground-breaking information systems practice in the context of SEs.

This research adds to the current marketing and SE literature. It has reasoned that the acceptance of marketing pursuits is influenced by many aspects. Specifically, the research is formed on the TOE framework to investigate issues addressing marketing activities acceptance in the organisational context of SEs. The key usages and barriers to adopting marketing among SEs in Bangladesh have been examined. A list of benefits and barriers were acknowledged through this qualitative study. The key output of this research is the development of a conceptual framework for SEs in Bangladesh to adopt marketing as a business option. This study will also help to increase cognisance of the diverse issues manipulating decisions as to whether to accept marketing options in social business circumstances. The results obtained from this investigation might benefit not only SEs but also other enterprises, including large organisations, which are struggling with the same problems and intend to adopt marketing activities. Consideration of the complications that SEs face when employing business activities like marketing might aid government associations in projecting essential guidelines so that social business operations can progress and, consequently, the economies of developing countries can grow.

This study serves as a setup point for researchers to execute and carry on marketing strategy adoption research, specifically in emerging nations. The model developed from this study can be used by Bangladeshi SEs to appraise their current conditions. SE owner–managers could make use of the conceptual model developed in this study. The model may also serve as a point of reference for other sorts of businesses that are contemplating

an advanced type of marketing strategy. Ultimately, representatives can modify or create new guidelines for SEs from the insights of this study.

Even now, in Bangladesh, the topic of social entrepreneurship remains under-researched, regardless of the fact that the state is recognised globally for preventing many social entrepreneurs from making changes at the grassroots level. To date, there are few studies that have investigated the meaning and elements or ideas coming together to establish social entrepreneurship in Bangladesh.

This study is constrained by several limitations that create opportunities for further research. Initially, the sample size limits the probability of generalising the assessment at an industry level. Further research could identify cross-industry similarities and discrepancies concerning the aspects that drive marketing adoption and its effects. This study could also stimulate future research focusing on the use of different online marketing platforms by SE customers or users. This study stresses that the most important justification for the use of marketing by SEs is to develop their presence and increase awareness. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to examine whether or not different marketing options (i.e., social media, digital marketing) meet this objective by addressing the issue from a customer viewpoint. Future research could take the views of other stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, and government units in charge of innovation adoption. This may extend deeper understandings of the factors affecting marketing adoption and lead to an improved interpretation of the adoption decision in SEs. Also, in future studies, researchers can follow different strategies (i.e., mix methods), theories (i.e., technology adoption model), or analysis processes (such as content analysis) which may provide further insights into the subject area.

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