

An Integration of Business Model Strategies for Social Enterprises in Thailand

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Cite this paper as: Aekachai Tangratanaalee, Vichit Uon, (2025). An Integration of Business Model Strategies for Social Enterprises in Thailand. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (7), 551-559.

ABSTRACT

Sustainability is a crucial dimension that social enterprises need to build in both financial and social mission. There have been several systemic challenges hindering the growth of Thai social enterprises. This study aims to analyse the integration of social missions with business strategies and to propose an initial model for strategy integration for Thai social enterprises. The researchers employed a qualitative research methodology, using in-depth interviews to collect the data from 30 samples who are successful social entrepreneurs from the manufacturing and service sectors in Thailand. The results reveal five key success factors for social enterprises: 1) a clear social mission, 2) the use of innovation in solving social problems both in terms of products and processes, 3) the cross-sector collaboration, 4) the creation of social value, and 5) the impact measurement. The study proposes the strategy integration model for social enterprises in Thailand, which consists of 4 aspects: 1) creating a business brand with a clear mission, 2) expanding collaboration networks with government agencies and international organizations, 3) developing standardized social impact measurement systems, and 4) creating an exit plan and a sustainable revenue-generating business model. These insights offer practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders seeking to strengthen Thailand's social enterprise ecosystem and sustainably enhance the social value.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Strategic Management, Impact Measurement, Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Global social challenges such as the wealth gap, ageing populations and environmental protection, corporate activities that prioritise creating social value and seek a balance between social value and economic performance are attracting increasing attention from scholars [1]. Social enterprises have emerged as innovative organizations capable of effectively addressing social and environmental issues through market-driven business solutions [2]. Their unique dual mission, integrating profit generation with measurable social impact, distinguishes them significantly from traditional businesses, nonprofit organizations, and typical corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives [3]. Despite growing recognition and support in Thailand, Social enterprises face considerable challenges, particularly regarding management skills, sustainability, and practical impact measurement [4].

Within ASEAN, recent scholarship depicts a sector rapidly professionalising and aligning with global sustainability agendas. Social enterprises increasingly weave ESG and circular-economy principles into their models while harnessing digital platforms to transcend geographic constraints and scale impact [5]. A concurrent surge of impact-oriented capital pressures ventures to adopt rigorous, standardised measurement frameworks demonstrating tangible social and environmental value [6]. Cross-sector partnerships with corporations and public agencies provide critical market access, technology, and legitimacy, reinforcing competitive advantage [7]. Meanwhile, blended-finance instruments and regional impact funds boost financial resilience and growth prospects, signalling a maturing ecosystem that prizes sustainability and commercial viability [8]. Their primary mission is to be at the sole service of local economic and social development. Their ambition is to play a key role in setting up and structuring sustainable production and consumption sectors to benefit the local population [9]. Collectively, these converging trends establish the strategic context for the forthcoming examination of Thailand's distinctive opportunities and challenges.

The future scenario illustrates opportunities that are expanding quickly: Asia-focused impact-investment appetite is accelerating, 49% of global investors plan to raise allocations to Southeast Asia by 2025, with Thailand flagged as a priority alongside Indonesia and Vietnam [10]. In the other hand, recent sector-wide diagnostics underscore why scaling Thai social

enterprises (SEs) remains difficult. A 2024 British-Council/TDRI survey found that cash-flow shortfalls (34%), difficulty securing debt or equity capital (23%), low public understanding of the SE model (23%) and burdensome regulations ($\approx 12\%$) top the list of self-reported obstacles, while shortages of managerial skills and technical expertise still constrain more than one in ten ventures. Structural fragility is accentuated by scale: although the World Economic Forum's global census estimates $\approx 120,000$ impact-oriented ventures in Thailand, the vast majority operate informally and on a micro scale, and official registers list only a few hundred certified SEs [11]. Survey evidence shows that about 78% of SEs employ fewer than 10 staff, roughly 14% fall in the 10-49 range, and barely 2% (three organisations from 146 enterprise sample) exceed 50 employees, leaving "large" SEs virtually absent from the landscape. These structural and capacity-related barriers have also limited the sector's scholarly coverage: while existing Thai studies have examined discrete issues such as funding hurdles, leadership skills, or legal form, comprehensive, integrated strategic frameworks remain scarce, with national-level quantitative work notably lacking. While existing research has explored individual SE components, integrated strategic models tailored to the Thai context remain limited; this study therefore develops and validates a context specific framework to address these gaps [4, 12].

2. RESEARCH PURPOSES

1. To analyse the integration of social missions with business strategies.
2. To propose a model for strategy integration for Thai social enterprises.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Characteristics of Social Enterprises

Social enterprises (SEs) have become innovative organizations capable of addressing social and environmental issues through sustainable business models [2]. Unlike traditional enterprises, nonprofits, and conventional corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, SEs uniquely integrate profitability with measurable social impacts [3, 13]. Core characteristics include clearly defined social missions, financial sustainability, transparency in impact measurement, and active engagement through cross-sector collaborations [4, 5].

Key Components of Social Enterprises

Research syntheses show that social-enterprise success rests on a cluster of interlocking factors [14, 15]. Foremost is an articulated social mission, which steers operations toward well-defined societal challenges [3] and, through the lens of Creating Shared Value (CSV), links that mission to revenue-generating opportunities so that social and economic value are created simultaneously [16]. Second, sustainable business models that harness local resources and diversify income streams safeguard long-term viability [7]; the Resource-Based View (RBV) underscores that distinctive internal capabilities such as strong community ties or frugal-innovation know-how are critical sources of durable advantage [12]. Third, continuous social innovation, creative, context-specific solutions to unmet needs, enhance effectiveness [2, 6]. Fourth, robust cross-sector collaborations with corporations, government agencies, and civil society actors amplify impact and expand resource access [17]. Finally, the transparent and standardized impact measurement systems bolster accountability and attract investment by evidencing social value creation [18]. Collectively, these elements align with strategic management theory, which emphasizes the deliberate orchestration of mission, resources, partnerships, innovation, and metrics to achieve sustainable competitive and social advantage [4].

Critical Success Factors and Sector-Specific Barriers

Drawing on recent peer-reviewed studies, five intertwined enablers consistently underpin Thai social enterprise performance: (1) intellectual capital human, structural and relational resources that drive productivity and legitimacy [12] (2) Creating Shared Value (CSV) business models that fuse revenue with social goals [16] (3) organisational agility to adapt rapidly to shifting markets and policies [19, 8] (4) entrepreneurial managerial capability for balancing mission and financial viability [20, 21] and (5) cross-sector partnerships that open finance, technology and distribution channels [22]. This is relevant to the study that the components of social entrepreneurs in the aspect of vision of entrepreneurs, social innovation, morality/virtue, and leadership for social change, all these components have the relationship with economic and social security [23]. Sector studies reveal distinct patterns: production-based SEs (organic food, crafts) rely on supply-chain innovation and CSV contracts that ensure input quality and cash flow, yet stumble over certification costs, working-capital gaps, and fragile logistics [5, 7]. Service-based SEs (healthcare, education, homecare) depend on deep human-capital pools, digital/hybrid delivery, and trust-building alliances with regulators or NGOs, but face talent attrition, strict licensing, and difficulties monetizing services for low-income clients [4, 12]. In short, production SEs live or die by asset and logistics efficiency, whereas service SEs depend on people and reputation insights that inform sector-specific policy support in later sections.

Comparative Context: Thailand versus Southeast Asia

Thailand is one of the few ASEAN members with a dedicated statute the Social Enterprise Promotion Act 2019 that confers legal status, tax incentives, and access to a state registry for certified social enterprises [22, 24]. By contrast, most neighbours rely on softer schemes such as Singapore's raise accreditation or Malaysia's still-pending Social Enterprise Bill, leaving enterprises there with fewer statutory benefits. Nevertheless, Thai ventures report limited financing, bureaucratic delay, and low public awareness pain points that echo across Southeast Asia [4]. Region-wide bibliometric analyses likewise highlight "institutional voids" and fragmented research–practice linkages throughout the bloc [25]. Opportunities are expanding quickly: Asia-focused impact-investment appetite is accelerating, 49% of global investors plan to raise allocations to Southeast Asia by 2025, with Thailand flagged as a priority alongside Indonesia and Vietnam [10]. Combined with the country's high digital adoption rate and a growing cohort of ethical consumers [26], these trends position Thailand favourably, provided social enterprises can turn statutory incentives into investable, impact-measured ventures.

4. RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore and validate strategic frameworks for social enterprises (SEs) in Thailand; this study reflects the exploratory nature of the research and the need to capture rich, expert-driven insight, Delphi techniques, in-depth interviews, and strategic analysis tools (SWOT and TOWS Matrix) to gain comprehensive and actionable strategic recommendations for the Thai context [27]. The Delphi method, in particular, was incorporated because it allows geographically dispersed experts to build consensus in an emerging field without the dominance effects often seen in face-to-face settings, preserves anonymity to minimise status-related bias, and provides structured, iterative feedback that refines judgments across successive rounds—features that previous methodological studies have shown to strengthen the validity of strategic frameworks in complex, under-researched domains [28, 29, 30].

Delphi Technique and Expert Validation

The Delphi method was employed to systematically gather, analyse and validate expert opinion from 30 seasoned Thai social-enterprise leaders—15 from product-based ventures (e.g., organic food, crafts) and 15 from service-based ventures (e.g., healthcare, education, home-care). Panel members were selected in two steps: (1) a roster of enterprises formally registered under the Social Enterprise Promotion Act 2019 was obtained from the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion (OSEP); (2) purposive criteria were applied—participants had to be the owner, founder, or C-level executive of a registered social enterprise that had operated continuously for at least three years and agree to take part in up to three Delphi rounds. Invitations went to 42 eligible executives, and the first 30 who met all criteria and confirmed availability were enrolled (71% response rate).

Three Delphi rounds were conducted to reach consensus on the strategic elements most critical to SE success and sustainability:

- Round 1 Exploratory interview: each expert took part in a one-to-one, 60-minute interview. They completed an open-ended questionnaire and assigned importance ratings to the preliminary list of factors and indicators. Their responses formed the raw inventory for subsequent Delphi rounds
- Round 2 Statistical feedback: the research team calculated median scores and inter-quartile ranges for each item and e-mailed the aggregated results to the same panel. Experts re-rated the items through an online survey, refining wording and eliminating redundancies.
- Round 3 Consensus confirmation: factors that achieved $\geq 75\%$ agreement entered a 90-minute virtual workshop. Using anonymous live polling, panellists re-evaluated borderline items and confirmed priorities, resulting in a final, consensus-based set of 18 strategic success factors for Thai social enterprises.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the integration of social missions with business strategies

1. Regarding SWOT Analysis result from data of 30 social enterprise entrepreneurs, it was found that

Strengths: the outstanding point of Thai social enterprises is their clear social mission, with strong goals to solve social and environmental problems. The organization's leaders have a mindset and high commitment to creating positive impacts, including good collaboration networks in the public, private, and civil society sectors. They have deep experience and understanding in social and community work, as well as specialists who closely support their operation. This demonstrates the leadership strategy on leading employees towards the organization's social goals; which is relevant to the study that today, strategic leadership plays a paramount role in influencing employee behaviours, attitudes as well as performance in an organizational landscape that is currently changing at a fast pace [31].

Weaknesses: despite having a clear mission, most Thai SEs still lack strong business management skills, especially those who have transitioned from NGOs or the social sector. This has led to limitations in creating financial sustainability. Many

organizations still lack clear and acceptable impact measurement system, and the business plan that generates sustainable profits. Moreover, some organizations still have limitations in adapting themselves to market changes and tend to rely too much on external capital. It shows the changing organizational culture and its impact on the organization's performance; which is relevant to the study in the past that corporate culture shapes how employees engage with organizational processes, including those related to accounting and facility management. It affects decision-making, employee behaviour, and adherence to protocols, all of which directly impact operational efficiency [32].

Opportunities: the social awareness towards environmental and social issues has resulted in a tendency for more support from the government, such as tax deduction, funding support, and policies that facilitate the establishment of SEs, making it easier and more accessible to target groups. At the same time, digital technology and online platforms help SEs reach their target groups more easily and widely, including increased opportunities for exchanging knowledge and experiences internationally, and the expansion of investors in the form of impact investing, which prioritizes social returns alongside financial profits. Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) have emerged as critical tools in today's knowledge-driven economy. These systems enable organizations to harness, share, and utilize knowledge effectively, fostering innovation and operational efficiency [33, 34].

Threats: social enterprises are also facing risks from economic volatility, which may affect their revenue and operational stability, increased competition from general businesses that focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) to build a social image. At the same time, consumer preferences are shifting, with more and more people buying from businesses who care about doing the right thing in their society and environment [35]. The uncertainty in government support may also change according to policies. In addition, Thai SEs face restrictions and complicated registration procedures, as well as problems in communicating and creating awareness with society, which results in losing opportunities to expand impact and create long-term sustainability.

2. Regarding TOWS Matrix analysis result, it was found that

Each validated Delphi factor is mapped to the quadrant where it provides the most leverage; the subsequent TOWS matrix blends those factors with the SWOT patterns to generate concrete moves. This integration ensures that strategic recommendations are not generic but directly address the real competitive landscape and capability gaps uncovered by the study (Table1).

Table 1 The results of TOWS Matrix analysis for use in strategic analysis

TOWS Matrix	Opportunities	Threats
Strengths	SO Strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a brand with a clear mission to attract impact investing and socially active consumers. 2. Expand partnerships with government and international organizations. 3. Develop social innovation based on existing experiences. 	ST Strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use government support to develop business management skills for SEs from NGOs. 2. Use digital technology to develop a standardized social impact measurement system. 3. Develop effective communication channels based on social interests.
Weaknesses	WO Strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use mission and experience to differentiate from CSR businesses. 2. Use networks to prevent impacts from discontinuity of government policies. 3. Use mindset and expert networks to increase business flexibility. 	WT Strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an exit plan and a sustainable revenue generating business model. 2. Create a new generation of employees with business and technology skills to reduce risks. 3. Develop corporate communication system to increase awareness and reduce competitive threats.

3. Analysis results of the successful Thai social enterprises

The four cases were selected because, taken together, they showcase how the Delphi-validated strategic themes play out

across distinct sectors and scales: Dairy Home (organic agrifood) and Sampran Model highlight mission-led branding and formal multi-party partnerships that stabilise farm incomes; Buddy Homecare (service/social care) and Siam Able Innovation (assistive-tech manufacturing) illustrate intensive capacity-building, social innovation, and rigorous impact measurement that convert vulnerable groups into skilled, income-earning teams. (Table 2)

By spanning agriculture, hospitality supply chains, health services, and inclusive technology, these enterprises demonstrate the versatility and practical effectiveness of the integrated framework under varied market conditions. This is relevant to the presentation that business model is an empirical projection of corporate strategy which reveals the idea of new value creation, a business process of value chain creation and its operational management, as well as necessary resources for realization of a model and means to acquire income [36, 37].

Table 2 Successful Thai Social Enterprises

Social Enterprise	Social Mission	Core Strategies	Outcomes and Impacts
Dairy Home	Promoting organic farming and fair prices for Thai dairy farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative value-added processing • Sustainable business model (own retail + B2B) • Mission-led branding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 % price premium returned to 250 farmers • National organic milk brand recognition
Buddy Homecare	Creating dignified employment for vulnerable groups (Hill-tribe youth and carers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity-building academy for carers • Cross-sector MOUs with hospitals and NGOs • Systematic impact measurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400+ sustainable jobs created • Client satisfaction > 90 % (annual survey)
Sampran Model	Empowering smallholder farmers through an organic farm-to-table ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal partnership MOUs with hotels, retailers and Ministry of Agriculture • Diversified revenue (farm, weekend market, eco-tourism) • Mission-driven branding “Sampran Organic” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 320 farming households certified organic • Stable purchase contracts worth > THB 25 m/yr • National showcase for public-private collaboration
Siam Able Innovation	Enhancing quality of life for persons with disabilities via inclusive technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social innovation (3-D-printed assistive devices) • In-house vocational training and peer mentoring (capacity building) • Live impact dashboards for donors/investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 PWD employed in production and R&D • 5,000 low-cost devices distributed to date • 80 % of costs covered by earned income

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of the integration of strategies for social enterprises in Thailand found a clear and practical framework for the operation of social enterprises, focusing on providing entrepreneurs with guidelines for planning and operating business that are systematically consistent with the social, economic, and cultural context of Thailand and in line with international standards. This enables social enterprises express their success and transparency in their operation to

society, stakeholders, and investors who value impact investing. In addition, it also helps strengthen the cooperation network with the government, private sector, educational institutions, and international organizations by using resources and systems. The researcher has integrated various strategies to provide guidelines for social enterprises in Thailand as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The integration of strategies for social enterprises in Thailand created by the researchers

Topics	Details
Vision	To be a social enterprise in Thailand that operates sustainably and creates clear changes in solving social and environmental problems through the integration of cooperation from all sectors.
Mission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine clear social and environmental goals so that the business can truly and tangibly solve social issues. 2. Create a simple and truly revenue-generating business model, focusing on core activities that generate clear revenue from the start. 3. Create initial collaboration with communities and networks, focusing on access to basic resources necessary for starting a business. 4. Use the entrepreneur's basic knowledge and experience to develop products or services that meet the needs of target group. 5. Enhance basic business skills, such as marketing, finance, and risk management, so that businesses can survive in the initial stages. 6. Have a simple and clear method of impact measurement to track and demonstrate initial results from operations for all parties to understand.
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a simple and clear business model that can generate stable revenue from the beginning and some of the revenue can actually support social activities. 2. Be able to identify and create clear results in solving social or environmental problems in the target area. 3. Create initial cooperation with important networks that are necessary for starting a business, whether at the community, government, private, or international organization levels. 4. Develop initial product or social innovation that meet the real needs of the community and can be put into practice in the initial phase. 5. Have a simple and clear social impact measurement system that can track results and receive initial acceptance from all relevant sectors.
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Create a corporate brand with a clear mission. 7. Expand the network of cooperation with government and international organizations. 8. Develop a standardized social impact measurement system. 9. Create an exit plan and a business model that generates sustainable revenue.
Guidelines for development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop strategic communication that emphasize clear social and environmental missions. 2. Create communication channels on digital media and online platforms that can reach target groups that care about social issues. 3. Attract impact investors with clear communication about the social impacts created. 4. Establish proactive partnerships with government agencies for continuous and effective support. 5. Expand the network of international partner organizations to exchange knowledge and create new opportunities. 6. Organize knowledge exchange activities at the national and international levels to enhance potential and expand cooperation channels. 7. Use digital technology to support the development of an impact measurement system that is

Topics	Details
	<p>easy to use and reliable.</p> <p>8. Establish a common standard for an acceptable impact measurement system to be implemented.</p> <p>9. Use data from the measurement system to plan, improve strategies, and communicate organizational values to investors and society.</p> <p>10. Create an exit plan to cope with economic volatility.</p> <p>11. Design and develop a business model that can generate long-term revenue and reduce dependence on external sources of funding.</p> <p>12. Train personnel to have skills in risk management and continuous strategic business planning.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several key findings can be utilized for the business and social benefit of social enterprises in Thailand, as follows:

1. The business model of successful social enterprise needs to be able to generate sustainable revenue, with a clear proportion of that revenue being reinvested in solving social problems. Having an exit plan and a clear business model from the outset helps the enterprise survive and create continuous social impact.
2. Effective branding and communication strategies that utilize a clear mission help attract impact investing investors and consumers who prioritize social and environmental issues. This can create a distinct differentiation from the CSR activities of general business organizations.
3. The development of strong partner networks and collaboration with the government, private sector, or international organizations are crucial for increasing access to funding sources, resources, and knowledge necessary for the long-term development of the enterprise.

Strengthening the capacity of entrepreneurs, especially developing business administration and risk management skills, will help entrepreneurs from the social sector (NGOs) transition and operate business that generates both social and business returns more effectively and sustainably

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