

Engaging with Second Chances: How Familiarity, Stigma, and Media Exposure Shape Public Attitudes towards Ex-Prisoner-Focused Social Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Social enterprises provide an effective method for tackling various social problems, including ex-prisoners in the domains of rehabilitation, reintegration, and the reduction of repeat offenses. While this business model is prevalent in other countries, it remains uncommon in Malaysia. This study aims to uncover the issue from the public perspective. Specifically, the objective of this study is to investigate the effects of familiarity with social enterprise models, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure on public attitudes towards ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. Underpinned by Mere Exposure Effect Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Media Framing Theory, five hypotheses were developed and tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling on 139 cases. Results showed that familiarity with social enterprise models, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure significantly predict attitudes towards ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. However, the moderation role of familiarity with social enterprise models was not supported for the relationship between incidental news exposure and attitudes towards ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise, and when it interacts with stigmatization. These findings contribute to the understanding of how media exposure, social stigmatization, and personal familiarity shape public perceptions of social enterprises that focus on ex-prisoner rehabilitation. The study highlights the need for targeted strategies to reduce stigmatization and leverage incidental media exposure to foster more supportive attitudes towards social enterprises that assist ex-prisoners.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Familiarity, Stigmatization, Incidental News Exposure, Ex-prisoners

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INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises emerge as essential organizations in tackling social and environmental issues through entrepreneurial approaches emphasizing profit and societal benefit. They have garnered global attention for their capacity to address urgent community challenges while maintaining financial sustainability (Doherty et al., 2014; García-Jurado, Pérez-Barea, & Nova, 2021). Using the data from 2013 to 2023, the World Economic Forum (2024) reported that the estimated number of social enterprises globally is 10 million. In Malaysia, social enterprise establishments are expected to increase to 5,000 by 2025 from 414 establishments in 2023 (Aman, 2023). This growth is expected as the government of Malaysia launched the Malaysian Social Entrepreneurship Blueprint 2030 (SEMy2030) in April 2022, highlighting 45 initiatives to promote social entrepreneurship in Malaysia. Hence, social enterprises become the next big agenda in the face of intricate social challenges, delivering sustainable solutions that conventional corporations or governmental entities may find difficult to address.

The Malaysian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Cooperative Development listed 11 purposes of social enterprises benefiting 17 target groups. However, the prevalent social missions for social enterprises in Malaysia are poverty reduction, community development, and education (Palil et al., 2023). These social missions are undoubtedly important, but there is a gap in focusing on the social mission toward reintegration and support for ex-convicts. These marginalized groups often face obstacles to reintegration, such as stigmatization, limited employment access, and restricted social support networks (Ismail, Hashim, & Hussain, 2020; Jasni et al., 2019). By focusing on this social mission, social enterprises can provide pathways for ex-convicts to become productive members of society and assist the government in managing overcrowded prisons (The Star, 2024). Nevertheless, not much is known about Malaysian social enterprises pursuing this social mission. As such, the current study intended to explain neglect through the lens of the societal acceptance of this undertaking based on the notion that concentrating exclusively on assisting ex-prisoners could expose the organization to the risk of financial loss if society does not support its existence (Lee et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have examined the influence of attitudes toward social enterprises. For example, Lee et al. (2020) found that consumer's attitude significantly influences their intention to purchase inmates' social enterprise products. Abdullah et al. (2022) similarly discovered that Millennials' attitudes toward social enterprises considerably affect their intention to purchase from social enterprise cafés. In another study, Tsai et al. (2020) examined the effect of product and goodwill factors on attitudes toward purchasing social enterprise products, which subsequently affect purchase intention. Although not all antecedents of attitude toward purchasing social enterprise products significantly influence the construct, the relationship between attitude toward purchasing social enterprise products and purchase intention was affirmed. Given that the focus of the current study was on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise, the investigation was directed at examining three antecedents of attitude. Specifically, the objective of this study was to investigate the effects of familiarity with the social enterprise model, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

This study contributes to the literature on social enterprises by exploring a relatively under-researched topic: public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. It enriches understanding of the interplay among the three predictors in influencing the public attitude toward the social enterprise. The findings of this study also provide valuable insights for social entrepreneurs, policymakers, and media organizations. Understanding the impact of familiarity with the social enterprise model, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure can help social

enterprises, and policymakers develop appropriate targeted interventions and assist media organizations in creating more balanced coverage about ex-prisoners and the noble mission of social enterprises in assisting this targeted group. Ultimately, this study contributes to broader societal acceptance of ex-convict reintegration programs through social enterprise initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitude toward Social Enterprises

Attitude refers to an individual's predisposition to respond positively or negatively to a particular object, person, or situation (Azjen, 1991). In the context of social enterprises, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, reflecting an individual's beliefs, emotions, and intended actions toward these organizations, shape the attitudes. Past studies revealed multifaceted factors influencing public attitudes toward social enterprises. For instance, Miller et al. (2012) found that familiarity with the social enterprise model plays a critical role in shaping positive attitudes, as individuals more knowledgeable about the concept tend to view these organizations as legitimate and impactful solutions to societal challenges. Trust in the organization's governance, transparency, and accountability are also crucial in shaping favorable attitudes, as public skepticism often arises from concerns over mismanagement or mission drift (Doherty et al., 2014).

Specific factors in the context of social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-convicts further complicate public attitudes. One of the primary factors is stigmatization, where societal biases against ex-prisoners may negatively affect such enterprises. The public often associates ex-convicts with crime and unreliability, which reduces their willingness to support initiatives directed at their rehabilitation (Jasni et al., 2019; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). In the digital era, incidental news exposure is another factor that could significantly affect public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. The way media frames the news portraying ex-convicts, either positive or negative, could reinforce existing stigmas, making it harder for social enterprises working with this group to gain public approval (Milićević, & Drndarević, 2023). Although people may not purposely search for information on ex-convicts and social enterprises targeting this marginalized group, incidental news exposure could be prompted by social media. As a result, such incidental news exposure influences their attitude formation.

The third factor relevant to explaining public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise is familiarity with the social enterprise model. The concept of familiarity has been applied in social entrepreneurship to explain the moderating role of social entrepreneurship awareness (Ab Aziz et al., 2022) and the predictive role of consumers' familiarity in predicting attitudes toward social enterprise products (Tsai et al., 2020). To date, familiarity with the social enterprise model has not been applied to explain public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. However, it is argued that familiarity with the social enterprise model could play an important role in explaining this research's target construct.

Familiarity with the Social Enterprise Model

Zajonc (1968) defines familiarity as being well-acquainted with or having knowledge and experience with a person, concept, or entity. The author also contended that familiarity often influences individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward something, as repeated exposure can reduce uncertainty and enhance positive perceptions. Numerous studies have shown that familiarity influences consumer attitude (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022; Rew & Cha, 2021). In the

context of social enterprises, familiarity with the model itself significantly impacts public attitudes and support. For example, Miller et al. (2012) illustrated that individuals familiar with the mission and objectives of social enterprises are more likely to view them positively and support their initiatives. However, Tsai et al. (2020) did not find support for the relationship between familiarity with the social enterprise model and purchasing attitude toward social enterprise products.

The relationship between familiarity with the social enterprise model and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise could be explained using the Mere Exposure Effect Theory (Zajonc, 1968). This theory assumes that repeated exposure to a stimulus increases an individual's preference for that stimulus. Hence, familiarity breeds liking even without conscious awareness or evaluation. When applied to ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises, mere exposure to information and products related to such enterprises may lead to more favorable attitudes over time. It is because familiarity reduces uncertainty and increases apprehension, allowing individuals to feel more comfortable and positive toward social enterprises that focus on reintegrating ex-prisoners (Zajonc, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Familiarity with the social enterprise model positively predicts public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Stigmatization

Stigmatization is frequently used to associate public perception of ex-prisoners (e.g., Baffour et al., 2021; Bidola et al., 2024; Ismail, Hashim, & Hussain, 2020). Link and Phelan (2001) define stigmatization as a social phenomenon where labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination lead to the exclusion of individuals from full societal participation due to their association with a particular attribute or condition. In the context of social enterprises, the influence of stigmatization on social enterprises that aim at assisting ex-prisoners could be explained using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, people classify others as in-group or out-group members depending on their social group affiliation. Due to ex-prisoners' criminal records, they are often treated as out-group members and subject to public stigma (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Rade, Desmarais & Mitchell, 2016). Since ex-prisoners generate stigmatizing beliefs, people who strongly identify with societal norms and remove themselves from the stigmatized out-group are more likely to dislike these enterprises. When social enterprises are related to ex-prisoners, people may sense cognitive dissonance between their in-group identity and the enterprise's inclusive ideals, resulting in unfavorable sentiments. Thus, more stigmatizations may lead to more negative sentiments about ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Stigmatization negatively predicts public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Incidental News Exposure

Social media is a common source of information for many people nowadays (Keshavarz, 2021). With the emergence of artificial intelligence, social media users may be prompted with news they do not look for (Schäfer, 2023), including news about ex-prisoners and their reintegration (Xiao et al., 2024). This phenomenon is known as incidental media exposure, which occurs when individuals come across news or information without actively seeking it, leading to unintended learning or attitude shifts (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018; Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001).

The effect of incidental news exposure on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises depends on how the media content is framed. According to Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), media framing provides a context that influences how individuals interpret information, affecting their attitudes and behaviors toward specific social groups or initiatives. That is, the way media content is framed can significantly shape public perception by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. When applied to the context of ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises, incidental exposure to positively framed media about these organizations can prompt more favorable attitudes. Positive frames that emphasize rehabilitation, community integration, and economic empowerment foster public support, as these narratives resonate with broader societal values of second chances and social justice. On the contrary, negatively framed media about social enterprises pursuing this social mission will reaffirm unfavorable attitudes towards ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are frequently used to disseminate information about corporate social responsibility (Tench & Jones, 2015; Wang & Huang, 2018), which shares some similarities with social enterprises in terms of social impact emphasis, ethical consideration, stakeholder engagement, and Sustainable Development Goals compliance. In this regard, positive media framing has always been used to convey the message. Referring to social enterprise, Konecki (2024) found that social entrepreneurs in Croatia used social media such as Facebook and Instagram to promote their products, services, and other social initiatives. Hence, it could be summarized that positive framing is used to disseminate information that benefits society. Drawing from the Media Framing Theory and indirect empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Incidental news exposure positively predicts public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Moderating Role of Familiarity with the Social Enterprise Model

The current study also postulates familiarity with the social enterprise model as a moderator variable. First, familiarity with the social enterprise model could moderate the relationship between stigmatization and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. When individuals are familiar with the social enterprise model, they are more likely to focus on the social value created by the enterprise rather than the stigmatized background of the employees. As such, high but not low familiarity with the social enterprise model will dampen the negative impact of stigmatization on attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Familiarity with the social enterprise model dampens the negative relationship between stigmatization and public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Second, individuals with greater familiarity with the social enterprise model will likely interact more profoundly with the content they receive, including incidental news exposure. As they are familiar with the social enterprise model, they can align their understanding with the news on the enterprise's mission and social worth. Building on the work of Ruebottom and Auster (2018), it is argued that when individuals are exposed to narratives highlighting the social mission of social enterprise, they are likely to minimize or overlook negative connotations related to ex-prisoners. However, individuals unfamiliar with social enterprises may not be able to relate the organization's social mission to assisting ex-prisoners. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Familiarity with the social enterprise model strengthens the positive relationship between incidental news exposure and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design and Data Collection

Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey, data were collected from a convenience sample of Malaysians aged 21 and above residing in Selangor, Malaysia. The minimum age of 21 set in this study ensures that only respondents with financial independence can participate in the survey. The survey questionnaire was distributed by an enumerator in residential and office locations around Kajang and Bangi, Selangor, using drop-off and pick-up methods. A total of 158 questionnaires were obtained. However, 19 returned questionnaires were discarded from the dataset due to straight lining and having more than 10% missing values across the measures.

Measurement

The survey questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section A asked the respondents to provide their demographic information, which includes gender, age range, highest academic qualification attained, employment, and residential area. Additionally, they were asked to answer three binary-scaled (i.e., yes or no) questions: (1) Do they know any of their family members, neighbors, or colleagues who were imprisoned and released, (2) Are they aware of MyPride products, and (3) Do they perceive helping ex-prisoners to get a decent job will discourage recidivism.

Section B asked the respondents to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) on ten items tapping their attitude toward social enterprise products. The items were adapted from Lee et al. (2020). The respondents were instructed to read a short scenario describing a hypothetical social enterprise café before responding to the items. This short scenario ensured all respondents could relate to the same scenario. The decision was made based on Lee et al.'s (2020) finding. They used MyPride products made by inmates in Malaysian prisons as the point of reference, and they found that only 7.5% of 360 respondents had heard about MyPride products. Thus, the short hypothetical scenario was used as the reference point when responding to the measurement items. This café was portrayed as an establishment that employed ex-prisoners with basic baking skills and those interested in learning social skills. The café was also portrayed as an organization that donated 20 cents of each RM1 purchase to support ex-prisoner vocational training.

Whereas Section C included four items relating to stigmatization, adopted from Dum et al. (2022), Section D asked the respondents to respond to seven items tapping on incidental news exposure adapted from Ahmadi and Wohn (2018). Section E, which is the last section of the survey questionnaire, tapped respondent's level of agreement on five items of familiarity with the social enterprise model adopted from Tsai et al. (2020). In these three sections, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Model Specification and Data Analysis

All the constructs in this study were modeled reflectively. Although covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) could be used to analyze the proposed model and hypothesized relationships, the current study used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) based on two primary reasons. First, the current study intended to estimate a structural model that explains a key target construct: public attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. According to Richter et al. (2016), PLS-SEM is a better statistical analysis technique than CB-SEM in this respect. Second, the current study included a continuous moderating variable (i.e., familiarity with the social enterprise model), which can be handled more efficiently using PLS-SEM than CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler & Fassott, 2010). Figure 1 shows the PLS-SEM path model of the current study.

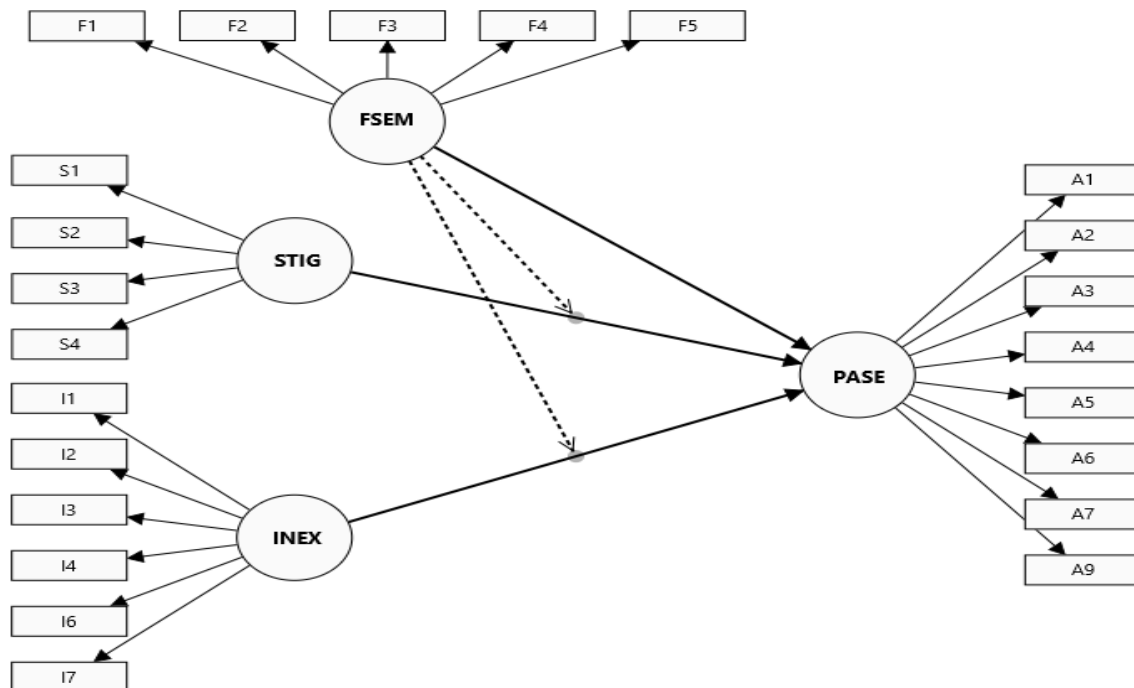
FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the demographic results. Most respondents were male (n = 101, 72%). The highest number of respondents was found in the age range between 30 and 39 years old (n = 60, 43.2%), followed by those in the age range between 40 and 49 years old (n = 36, 25.9%) and between 21 and 29 years old (n = 34, 24.5%). Only one respondent reported being 60 years old and above, and the remaining eight respondents were within the age range between 50 and 59 years old. Interestingly, most respondents reported completing only SPM/SPMV education (n = 87, 62.6%). Twenty-six respondents reported having completed a diploma and bachelor's degree, with 13 respondents in each group (9.4%).

Figure 1

PLS-SEM Path Model



Note. PASE = Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise; FSEM = Familiarity with the social enterprise model; INEX = Incidental news exposure; STIG = Stigmatization

Source: Extracted from SmartPLS 4

Regarding types of employment, most respondents were full-time employees (n = 74, 53.2%). The next highest type of employment was reported by self-employed respondents (n = 37, 26.6%). The lowest type of employment recorded was contract workers (n = 9, 6.5%). The residential area was included as one of the demographic variables to ensure population homogeneity. The survey questionnaire was distributed in Kajang and Bangi, part of Hulu Langat, but 34 respondents also reported their residential areas in other districts. Specifically, 105 respondents (75.5%) reported residing in Hulu Langat, and the remaining 34 reported residing in Gombak, Klang, Petaling, Kuala Langat, Hulu Selangor, and Sepang.

Of 139 respondents, only 49 responded yes to the first binary-scaled question. That is, 35.3% reported that they know someone from their family, neighbor, or colleagues who were imprisoned and released. A smaller number of respondents (n = 27, 19.4%) reported being aware of MyPride products. This finding corroborates Lee et al. (2020), indicating that not many Malaysians are aware of this social enterprise product made by the inmates. Surprisingly, not all respondents perceived that helping ex-prisoners get a decent job will discourage recidivism. Specifically, 118 (84.9%) respondents had a positive perception compared to 21 (15.1%) respondents with a negative perception of this question.

Table 1
Demographic Results

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	101	72.7%
	Female	38	27.3%
Age	21 – 29 years old	34	24.5%
	30 – 39 years old	60	43.2%
	40 – 49 years old	36	25.9%
	50 – 59 years old	8	5.8%
	60 years old and above	1	0.7%
Education	SPM/SPMV	87	62.6%
	STPM	5	3.6%
	Diploma	13	9.4%
	Bachelor’s degree	13	9.4%
	Master’s degree	6	4.3%
	Doctoral degree	5	3.6%
	Others	10	7.2%
Employment	Full-time employee	74	53.2%
	Part-time employee	19	13.7%
	Contract employee	9	6.5%
	Self-employed	37	26.6%
Residential area (district)	Gombak	11	7.9%
	Klang	3	2.2%
	Petaling	7	5%
	Hulu Langat	105	75.5%
	Kuala Langat	1	0.7%
	Hulu Selangor	2	1.4%
	Selangor	10	7.2%

Measurement Model Assessment

Reflective measurement model criteria were used to assess the outer model: outer loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). All the outer loading values except three items (i.e., F1, I2, and I6) were above the 0.708 threshold after removing three problematic indicators (i.e., A8, A10, and I5). The three items with outer loading values lower than 0.708 were kept because their respective internal consistency

reliability and convergent validity were well above the cut-off values of 0.70 and 0.50, accordingly (Hair et al., 2022).

As shown in Table 2, the lowest Cronbach’s alpha was 0.804 (incidental news exposure), and the highest value was 0.941 (attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise). The composite reliability values for all latent variables were above 0.70, ranging from 0.858 (incidental news exposure) to 0.951 (attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise). The convergent validity indicated by AVE also exceeded the threshold value of 0.50, ranging from 0.504 (incidental news exposure) to 0.734 (stigmatization). The discriminant validity was measured using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Table 3 shows the results of HTMT. Since all the HTMT values were lower than the 0.85 conservative threshold, discriminator validity for all the latent variables was established.

Table 2
Measurement Model Assessment

Constructs	Items	Outer loadings	α	CR	AVE
Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	[A1] Buying social enterprise products fits my personal values.	0.724	0.941	0.951	0.708
	[A2] Buying social enterprise products to support vocational training is a good idea.	0.842			
	[A3] I like the idea of consuming products under closed supervision of a qualified chef.	0.846			
	[A4] Buying social enterprise products makes me feel good.	0.851			
	[A5] Social enterprise products are unique and special.	0.888			
	[A6], I trust to consume social enterprise products.	0.903			
	[A7] Social enterprise products are of quality.	0.811			
Stigmatization	[A9] I can trust the brand of social enterprise products.	0.855	0.882	0.917	0.734
	[S1] Most people who have been incarcerated are dangerous.	0.810			
	[S2] Most people who have been incarcerated are dishonest.	0.876			
	[S3] I would avoid associating with anyone who has recently been incarcerated.	0.852			
Incidental news exposure	[S4] It would be a big deal if one of my neighbors was incarcerated.	0.887	0.804	0.858	0.504
	[I1] I come across missed stories about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners.	0.735			
	[I2] I find news about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners that I usually not read.	0.584			
	[I3] I stumble upon new interesting news content about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners.	0.738			
	[I4] I am sometimes exposed to information about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners that I would normally not seek.	0.797			
	[I6] I unintentionally read things about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners because someone has posted it.	0.679			
	[I7] I accidentally read news about social enterprises focusing on assisting ex-prisoners that were posted by someone else.	0.710			

Familiarity with the social enterprise model	[F1] I understand that social enterprises contribute a portion of their profits to non-profit organizations (i.e., NPOs).	0.657	0.840	0.888	0.614
	[F2] I understand that social enterprises give back to their local community.	0.776			
	[F3] I often purchase social enterprise products.	0.844			
	[F4] I know the meaning of social enterprise.	0.809			
	[F5] I knew what a social enterprise was before I completed this survey questionnaire.	0.819			

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted

Table 3
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of Correlations

	PASE	FSEM	INEX	STIG
PASE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FSEM	0.606	n/a	n/a	n/a
INEX	0.485	0.586	n/a	n/a
STIG	0.348	0.296	0.163	n/a

Note. PASE = Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise; FSEM = Familiarity with the social enterprise model; INEX = Incidental news exposure; STIG = Stigmatization; n/a = not available.

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model assessment involves analyzing the collinearity of latent variables, path magnitude and significance, coefficient of determination, effect size, and out-of-sample predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). Results of inner VIF revealed that the highest VIF value was for familiarity with the social enterprise model; hence, collinearity was not an issue. Using the bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 subsamples, all the direct hypotheses (i.e., H1, H2, and H3) were supported, as shown in Table 4. The effect sizes for stigmatization and incidental news exposure were small, with 0.059 and 0.064, respectively. Only familiarity with the social enterprise model has a medium effect size of 0.198. The model's coefficient of determination, R^2 , is 0.435, which means that 43.5% of the variance in public attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise was explained by the three predictors.

Table 4
Path Magnitude and Significance

Hypothesized relationships	β	Sig.
H1: Familiarity with the social enterprise model \rightarrow Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	0.400	0.000
H2: Stigmatization \rightarrow Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	-0.190	0.003
H3: Incidental news exposure \rightarrow Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	0.220	0.021
H4: Familiarity with the social enterprise model \times Stigmatization \rightarrow Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	-0.032	0.318
H5: Familiarity with the social enterprise model \times Incidental news exposure \rightarrow Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise	-0.248	0.001

The current study also posited two moderated relationships. As illustrated in Table 4, H4, which specifies familiarity with the social enterprise model dampens the negative relationship between stigmatization and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise, was not supported ($\beta = -0.032$, $p = 0.318$). Interestingly, the moderating role of familiarity with the social enterprise model on the relationship between incidental news exposure and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.248$, $p < 0.05$). However, the results also revealed a negative direction, rendering H5 not supported.

The out-of-sample predictive power was tested using the $PLS_{predict}$ procedure. The $Q^2_{predict}$ value for attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise was 0.322. To further substantiate the predictive power of the proposed model, a comparison of the root mean square error (RMSE) for all items in PLS-SEM and linear regression model (LM) was made. Table 5 shows that the model has high predictive power because all indicators in the PLS-SEM model yield lower RMSE values than the naïve LM benchmark (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 5
PLS_{predict} Results for the Target Construct (PASE)

Indicator	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE _{PLS}	RMSE _{LM}	RMSE _{PLS} - RMSE _{LM}
A1	0.160	1.167	1.215	-0.048
A2	0.181	1.046	1.103	-0.057
A3	0.153	1.109	1.142	-0.033
A4	0.190	1.104	1.198	-0.094
A5	0.229	1.102	1.160	-0.058
A6	0.305	1.025	1.080	-0.055
A7	0.251	0.976	1.038	-0.062
A9	0.272	1.048	1.080	-0.032

Note. RMSE = Root means square error; LM = Linear model; A1 – A9 = items of the target construct; PASE = Public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise

DISCUSSION

The objective of the current study was to investigate the effects of familiarity with the social enterprise model, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. The results of this quantitative study provide support for the direct relationships of the three predictors on public attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise but not the moderating role of familiarity with the social enterprise model.

Consistent with the Mere Exposure Effect Theory (Zajonc, 1968) and Miller et al. (2012), this study affirmed that familiarity with the social enterprise model positively affects public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises. Currently, social enterprise is gaining remarkable attention in Malaysia. The Malaysian government has introduced numerous initiatives to enhance the social entrepreneurship ecosystem by launching the Malaysia Social Entrepreneurship Blueprint 2030. The public may have encountered or participated in these activities, thus enhancing their awareness and understanding of the social enterprise model. In the context of ex-prisoner reintegration, the public is likely to show a favorable disposition toward social enterprises aimed at ex-prisoners when they comprehend the social mission of these enterprises, which is to aid ex-prisoners in reconstructing their lives. This positive attitude is evident in their perception of how well buying social enterprise products made by ex-prisoners fits their values, believing that such social enterprise supports ex-prisoners' vocational training and trusting the quality of the products produced by ex-prisoners working in the social enterprise.

Likewise, the results of this study correspond with current work on incidental news exposure, demonstrating that unintentional exposure to media content might positively affect public attitude. With social media increasingly serving as a primary information source (Keshavarz, 2021), the advent of AI-driven content algorithms enhances incidental exposure to news, encompassing issues related to ex-prisoners and their societal reintegration (Schäfer, 2023; Xiao et al., 2024). Social media users may be prompted to receive news related to ex-prisoners

and social enterprises. When these incidental exposures are presented positively, as proposed by Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), they can diminish stigma and bolster public support for social enterprises centered on ex-prisoners. Specifically, exposure to narratives emphasizing rehabilitation and societal contributions redirects public attention from the past criminal behavior of ex-prisoners to their potential for economic and social reintegration. These findings highlight the significance of positive media framing in influencing public perception, enhancing acceptability, and supporting social enterprises that facilitate ex-prisoners' reintegration.

In studies involving ex-prisoners, stigmatization is frequently mentioned as a negative predictor of successful reintegration (Baffour et al., 2021; Bidola et al., 2024; Ismail, Hashim, & Hussain, 2020). In the social enterprise context, the current study provided empirical evidence that stigmatization negatively influences public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. This shows that stigmatization, which includes labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001), could affect organizations that are associated with ex-prisoners beyond this group of marginalized individuals. According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people frequently identify others as in-group or out-group members, resulting in biases that increase the stigma associated with ex-prisoners. As unfavorable stereotypes about ex-prisoners remain, they impact public impressions of social enterprises aiming at their reintegration, often leading to a lack of support for these activities.

Although familiarity with the social enterprise model was theoretically expected to moderate the direct relationships, the empirical evidence did not substantiate it. First, familiarity with the social enterprise model did not dampen the negative relationship between stigmatization and attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. It highlights that even when people understand how social enterprises work, familiarity with the social enterprise model does not mitigate the deeply ingrained biases associated with ex-prisoners. This is consistent with prior research, which shows that stigmatization can overshadow social enterprises' potential advantages and good missions (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Second, the results of the current study revealed that familiarity with the social enterprise moderates the relationship between incidental news exposure and public attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. Interestingly, the interaction was negative instead of positive. This finding demonstrates that familiarity with the social enterprise model might increase comprehension, but it does not always translate into a more favorable attitude when combined with incidental news exposure. One possible explanation is that people who know more about social enterprises may become more critical or dubious of their potential usefulness, particularly when reintegration involves stigmatized groups such as ex-prisoners (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Study Implications

Theoretically, the current study adds to the knowledge corpus of social enterprise by focusing on social enterprises with a social mission to assist ex-prisoner reintegration, which has not received substantial attention in the past compared to other social missions. This study also extended the existing attitudinal model by including familiarity with the social enterprise model, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure as predictors of attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. As such, it went beyond the general attitudinal model. In addressing the theoretical gaps, this study relied on Media Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Mere Exposure Effect Theory (Zajonc, 1968) as underpinning theories. The study findings support the utility of these three theories,

demonstrating that familiarity with the social enterprise model, stigmatization, and incidental news exposure predict public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. This study confirms that the basic assumptions of Media Framing Theory and Mere Exposure Theory also hold true in social entrepreneurial research.

The current study highlighted three practical implications. First, people familiar with the social enterprise model usually show a more favorable attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. This suggests that increasing public awareness and education on the social enterprises aiming at assisting ex-prisoners may play a crucial role in improving public perceptions, enhancing support for initiatives targeted at ex-prisoner reintegration, and accepting ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises. Therefore, policymakers should focus on developing targeted communication strategies, such as using multi-channel media campaigns and community engagement programs through seminars and workshops highlighting this social enterprise's broader social and economic advantages.

Second, the current study illustrates that the public's perception of social enterprises that focus on ex-prisoners is influenced by incidental news exposure. Hence, the government must take a more nuanced approach to media regulation and content management. Instead of concentrating only on strictly regulating news content on social media, the government should encourage ethical reporting and foster an atmosphere conducive to truthful, fair accounts about social enterprises and ex-prisoners. This can be accomplished by establishing guidelines for lowering stigmatizing or deceptive content and pushing media outlets to highlight success stories about recovery and reintegration. A strategy like this could ensure unintentional news exposure promotes a fairer and more knowledgeable public discourse, eventually resulting in more positive attitudes toward social enterprises helping ex-prisoners.

Third, the ongoing discussion regarding ex-prisoners' reintegration frequently focuses on the problem of stigmatization. This study corroborates previous research by demonstrating that stigmatization continues to be a substantial obstacle to the development of social enterprises aimed at improving the lives of ex-prisoners. This stigma can adversely influence public perceptions, obstructing support for these activities and undermining their social objectives. To address this problem, specific actions are required to challenge preconceptions and reform public perceptions. Responsible government agencies and social enterprises should cooperate on educational initiatives and public engagement strategies that highlight the rehabilitative potential of former inmates and the societal advantages of their successful reintegration. Mitigating stigmatization can improve unfavorable public attitudes, cultivating a more conducive atmosphere for social entrepreneurs to fulfill their objectives.

Limitations and Future Direction

The current study has several limitations. First, the study found significant direct effects on the targeted outcome for all predictors but not for the moderating effects. This problem may relate to this study's relatively small sample size. The post-hoc power analysis using G*Power shows that the statistical power level is at 0.660, which means that the low statistical power could explain the insignificant findings of the moderating effect. It also increases the risk of Type II errors. While the study findings should be interpreted cautiously, more sample size is needed in future research that intends to replicate this study.

Second, the explained variance in public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise was 0.435 based on the contributions of three predictors identified in the current study. This leaves many opportunities for future researchers to include other relevant predictors that could

be identified by applying different theories and more refined constructs. For example, future researchers may adopt the Social Judgment Theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961) to explain why and how people react differently to the same information. This could provide further insights into the effect of stigmatization on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise. Future researchers may also include specific mediators such as trust and empathy to explain the underlying mechanisms between the three predictors and public attitude toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

Last, this study used a cross-sectional survey to collect the data from the respondents. This method was deemed appropriate for the study because the target population comprises Malaysians aged 21 or above residing in Selangor. However, future research could benefit from identifying specific populations, such as working adults in the government or private sectors. Using a sample from this population, future researchers may adopt a longitudinal design to identify the effect of long-term incidental news exposure on public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprise.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the substantial roles of incidental news exposure, stigmatization, and familiarity with the social enterprise model in shaping public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises. These findings highlight the importance of addressing the public perception of such social enterprises through media, reducing stigmatization toward ex-convicts, and promoting awareness of social and economic benefits resulting from this social enterprise. This study prepares the groundwork for future investigations into how these factors can impact public attitudes toward ex-prisoner-focused social enterprises and provides practical insights for policymakers and social enterprises aiming to foster a more favorable environment for ex-prisoners' reintegration.

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