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Transforming Waste into Compassion: A Case Study of Jagjit Singh's Social Entrepreneurship Initiative for Sustainable Animal Care

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Abstract
Urban India faces two interconnected challenges: rising volumes of solid waste and a growing population of stray animals requiring shelter and care. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as an effective approach to addressing such interconnected societal problems through innovative and sustainable solutions (Saebi et al., 2019). This paper presents a qualitative case study of Jagjit Singh, a social entrepreneur from Gurugram, Haryana, who transformed discarded fibre paint drums into weather-resistant shelters for stray dogs, through his organization, Stray talk India. Beginning with a simple observation in 2017, Singh's initiative evolved into a community-driven movement that has distributed 28000 of recycled shelters free of cost so far. This study aims to examine how a waste-upcycling initiative for animal welfare emerged, scaled, and sustained itself as a community-driven social enterprise, and to identify the key factors underlying its success. Drawing on secondary data from media reports, news narratives, and social media content, the study examines how a simple, low-cost idea grew into a sustainable, community-driven movement through upcycling, volunteer participation, and digital outreach. The findings indicate that resource innovation, environmental sustainability, compassion-driven leadership, and community engagement are critical factors underlying the initiative's success. The paper concludes with recommendations for scaling such models through collaboration with municipalities, animal welfare organizations, and citizen groups. Overall, the study demonstrates how waste materials

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can be converted into valuable social assets through entrepreneurial innovation, generating measurable environmental and humanitarian benefits.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Animal Welfare, Stray Dogs, Community Engagement, Compassion, Circular Economy Practices, Stray Talk India, Upcycling

Originality/value:

- A rare documented case linking citizen-led animal welfare, circular economy practices, and social entrepreneurship in an Indian urban setting.

Introduction

Rapid urbanization has significantly increased municipal waste generation in Indian cities. Simultaneously, urban areas continue to witness a growing population of stray animals that face inadequate shelter, especially during extreme weather conditions. Urban India faces a complex challenge in managing large stray dog populations amid limited resources, harsh climatic conditions, and contested legal and policy frameworks around animal welfare. In cities like Delhi and Gurugram, winter temperatures can drop to around five degrees Celsius during cold spells, exposing stray animals to severe cold stress and mortality risk, while summers and monsoons pose additional threats of heat, dehydration, and flooding. Conventional waste management systems often fail to recover reusable materials efficiently, while animal welfare remains largely dependent on voluntary organizations and compassionate citizens. Within this context, social entrepreneurs and citizen-led initiatives have emerged as important actors bridging the gap between formal institutions and the on-ground realities of stray animal welfare (Mair & Martí, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005).

Social entrepreneurship integrates entrepreneurial thinking with social value creation, addressing societal challenges through innovative, sustainable, and scalable solutions (Dees, 1998). Rather than focusing solely on profit maximization, social entrepreneurs pursue social and environmental impact alongside economic value, distinguishing their ventures from purely commercial enterprises (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). One such initiative is led by Jagjit Singh, a Gurugram-based industrialist who owns a paint manufacturing unit and converts discarded factory drums into insulated shelters for stray dogs, distributing them free of cost across Delhi-NCR under the banner of Stray Talk India (ETV Bharat, 2025; greenMe, 2024). Inspired by the sight of a stray dog taking refuge inside an empty drum at his factory, Singh repurposed waste materials into practical shelters and, together with his daughter Ishleen Kaur, gradually mobilized volunteers and community members to expand the initiative, now distributing hundreds of shelters every week and thousands to date (India.com, 2025; The Brighter World, 2025). This paper uses his journey to explore how industrial waste can be transformed into compassion through practical, scalable, and community-supported interventions. The case demonstrates how entrepreneurial innovation can simultaneously contribute to waste reduction, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009).

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Literature Review

Social Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Welfare

Social entrepreneurship has gained prominence as an effective mechanism for addressing social problems while ensuring long-term sustainability. Dees (1998) defines social entrepreneurs as change agents who pursue opportunities to create social value through innovation and resource mobilization. Building on this, social entrepreneurship is commonly understood as the pursuit of innovative solutions to social problems through entrepreneurial means, with an emphasis on social value creation rather than profit maximization, often through hybrid organizations that combine social and economic logics (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014; Mair & Martí, 2006; Saebi et al., 2019). While definitions vary, most emphasize a dual mission of social impact and financial viability, distinguishing social ventures from both traditional non-profits and purely commercial firms (Doherty et al., 2014; Zahra et al., 2009).

In the Indian context, social entrepreneurship has been associated with inclusive growth and institutional change, particularly in subsistence markets and underserved communities (Ansari, Munir, & Gregg, 2012; Datta & Gailey, 2012). This pattern extends beyond India: in South Africa, social entrepreneurship has similarly been identified as a mechanism for tackling entrenched socioeconomic problems such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, though the sector there continues to face barriers of weak institutional support and limited access to finance (Enaifoghe, 2026). Comparable findings emerge from South Asia, where mission-driven social enterprises have been shown to generate socioeconomic sustainability for marginalized populations through processes of opportunity co-creation between the enterprise and the community it serves (Ayoungman, Islam, Zhang, & Shawon, 2026).These ventures have frequently focused on health, education, sanitation, and livelihood, with growing attention to environmental and animal welfare domains, where social entrepreneurs attempt to address gaps left by under-resourced state systems, particularly in low-income or informal urban settlements (Saebi et al., 2019).

Animal welfare in India is shaped by legal protections under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, including debates over stray dog management, sterilization campaigns, and public safety. However, implementation gaps, limited infrastructure, and divided public opinion mean that many stray dogs remain exposed to harsh climates and violence, making localized, citizen-led welfare initiatives particularly significant.

Circular Economy, Upcycling, and Waste Minimization

The circular economy framework promotes restorative and regenerative systems that minimize waste and keep materials in use through reuse, refurbishment, recycling, and upcycling (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Hultink, 2017). Stray Talk India's drum-repurposing initiative closely fits this third category, illustrating a form of citizen-led circularity that existing typologies suggest remains undertheorized relative to formal, institutionally driven recycling systems. Upcycling, in particular, refers to creative reuse that increases the value or quality of discarded

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materials, often linking environmental benefits with social or economic outcomes (Bridgens et al., 2018). In industrial contexts, packaging such as drums and containers constitutes a significant waste stream, with potential for upcycling into socially useful products like furniture, housing components, or shelters (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppala, 2018).

Community-Based Animal Welfare and Citizen Participation

Community-based animal welfare emphasizes the role of local residents, volunteers, and civil society groups in providing food, shelter, medical care, and protection to stray and free-roaming animals. Studies note that citizen participation in such initiatives is often driven by compassion, ethical commitments, and community identity rather than direct financial returns (Mair & Martí, 2006). Digital platforms have become important tools for mobilizing such initiatives, enabling awareness campaigns, volunteer recruitment, and dissemination of DIY practices for animal care. Stray Talk India's use of social media to share tutorial videos and progress updates fits within this broader trend of digitally mediated community-based animal welfare.

Sustainability, Innovation, and Sustainopreneurship

Recent scholarship highlights "sustainopreneurship" as a hybrid field integrating sustainability, innovation, and entrepreneurship, in which entrepreneurs deploy resource-efficient, low-cost business models to achieve environmental and social outcomes simultaneously (Dean & McMullen, 2007; Saebi et al., 2019). Sustainable entrepreneurship studies emphasize experimentation with resource-efficient, low-cost solutions that address local environmental problems while empowering communities, making them relevant lenses for analyzing initiatives like Stray Talk India that combine upcycling, animal welfare, and citizen engagement (Dean & McMullen, 2007).

Research Gap

However, existing literature largely focuses on commercial recycling enterprises, waste management technologies, circular economy models, NGO-led animal welfare programs, and social entrepreneurship independently. Research integrating circular economy principles with compassion-driven entrepreneurship — initiatives that simultaneously address waste management and animal welfare through innovative entrepreneurial practices — remains scarce in the Indian context. This gap is consistent with recent observations that grassroots, community-embedded circularity practices remain critically understudied compared with formal recycling and industrial symbiosis systems (Goldstein et al., 2026), reinforcing the need for case-based research of the kind undertaken here. The present study attempts to bridge this gap.

Objectives of the Study

This exploratory case study aims to examine how an individual-led initiative utilizes waste resources to create social and environmental value, and what this implies for social entrepreneurship and sustainable urban practices.

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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative single-case design, treating the narrative of Jagjit Singh's initiative as primary descriptive data, supplemented by secondary literature on social entrepreneurship, circular economy, and animal welfare (Yin, 2018). The case narrative is reconstructed from media reports, video features, and social media content that describe the origin of the idea, materials used, production process, distribution mechanisms, and community engagement strategies. Data sources include media articles and features such as those from ETV Bharat, The Better India, greenMe, and India.com, alongside social media content from Stray Talk India's own channels. These provide information spanning several years of practice. Given the descriptive, non-interventional nature of the study, no primary fieldwork or interviews were conducted by the authors; instead, the paper focuses on synthesizing existing accounts and situating them within relevant theoretical frameworks.

Such qualitative case studies are common in social entrepreneurship research, particularly given that case study techniques have historically dominated empirical work in this still-emergent field (Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009), and are similarly well established in circular economy research exploring context-specific innovations (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

Case Description: Climate, Strays, and Waste in Delhi-NCR

North Indian winters, particularly in Delhi and surrounding regions, can be harsh, with temperatures reported as low as five degrees Celsius during recent cold spells (ETV Bharat, 2025; greenMe, 2024). While many urban residents can access heating, clothing, and sheltered housing, stray animals — especially dogs — remain exposed to open streets, vacant plots, and construction sites with little protection.

Simultaneously, industrial activities in the region generate considerable waste, including empty plastic and fiber drums used for storing paint and other chemicals. These drums are typically discarded or sold to scrap dealers, contributing to solid waste burdens and underutilized material streams. The convergence of climate vulnerability among stray animals and the availability of durable, weather-resistant waste materials creates a distinct opportunity for circular, socially beneficial interventions.

The Protagonist: Jagjit Singh

Jagjit Singh is a social entrepreneur and animal welfare advocate from Gurugram, Haryana, who has gained recognition for his efforts to protect stray dogs (India.com, 2025). A paint manufacturer by profession, he transformed an environmental challenge into a compassionate social initiative by recycling discarded plastic paint drums into safe, weather-resistant shelters for homeless dogs (ETV Bharat, 2025).

His initiative illustrates how entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, and compassion can be integrated to address a social challenge. By converting industrial waste into life-saving shelters, Singh has not only improved the welfare of stray dogs but has also encouraged other individuals

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and organizations to contribute toward a more humane and environmentally responsible community (greenMe, 2024). His work offers a notable example of social entrepreneurship driven by innovation, empathy, and sustainable development.

Origin of the Idea

Jagjit Singh's initiative originated when he observed a puppy curled up inside an empty drum at his factory premises during a cold winter. The animal's apparent comfort led him to reconsider the potential of discarded drums as micro-shelters, sparking an experiment in repurposing factory waste for stray dog welfare.

He cleaned four drums, lined them with mattress-like material, and placed them outside his premises; by the next morning, all four were occupied by stray dogs, confirming both demand and feasibility (India.com, 2025). Such bottom-up opportunity recognition — rooted in personal, lived experience rather than formal market analysis — aligns closely with social entrepreneurship literature on idea generation, which identifies personal experience as one of the primary sources from which social entrepreneurs derive promising ideas (Ayoungman et al. (2026; Guclu, Dees, & Anderson, 2002).

From Experiment to Sustained Initiative

Building on the initial success, Singh decided that no empty drum from his factory would be sent to scrap dealers; instead, he committed to repurposing them as shelters for stray dogs. In the early phase of the initiative (around 2017), he was able to set aside and convert a modest number of drums into shelters, reaching out to potential users via messages, social media, and word of mouth.

Production Process and Design

The production process begins with collecting empty drums from Singh's factories. These drums, made of fiber, are brought to his warehouse or residence, where they are cleaned, painted, and fitted with mattress-like materials on the interior surface to provide insulation and comfort. These modifications improve insulation and comfort while maintaining durability, consistent with upcycling practices that enhance functionality and perceived value (Bridgens et al., 2018).

Reports describe that Singh and his support team, including factory staff and household helpers, can prepare approximately 300 to 400 shelters per week during peak periods, particularly in winter (ETV Bharat, 2025). The final product is a compact, insulated "bedroom" that protects dogs from cold winds, dampness, and direct exposure to extreme weather, while being lightweight and durable enough to be placed in various urban locations.

Distribution and Community Engagement

Every Sunday during the winter months, especially between November and January, Singh and his team distribute the shelters free of cost from his residence in Gurugram. Citizens who care for stray dogs in their neighborhoods arrive from Gurugram, Delhi, Ghaziabad, Meerut, and other nearby areas, often using cars or mini-trucks to transport the shelters (ETV Bharat, 2025).

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These distribution events create a recurring community space where volunteers share experiences, learn basic shelter placement practices, and reinforce their commitment to animal welfare. This resonates with research on volunteer-driven, community-oriented models of animal welfare, which finds that engaged, coordinated volunteer participation is associated with improved welfare outcomes for animals (Thomsen, Thomsen, Copeland, Coose, Blackwell, & Dante, 2021). To reach those who cannot attend in person, Singh has shared DIY video tutorials on social media, further diffusing the innovation (greenMe, 2024).

Financial Model and Philosophy

The initiative is largely self-funded. Singh uses his own resources and waste materials and does not systematically solicit public donations. This aligns with social entrepreneurship models where founders initially rely on bootstrapping and resource bricolage — making do with resources at hand rather than seeking external funding at the outset (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

Singh's philosophy emphasizes the intrinsic value of animal life and frames adoption of strays as a "win–win" arrangement that benefits both animals and humans. Such prosocial motivations and ethical commitments are consistent with individual-level drivers highlighted in social entrepreneurship research (Mair & Noboa, 2006; Miller, Grimes, McMullen, & Vogus, 2012).

Extending Compassion Beyond Dogs: Sparrow Houses

In addition to dog shelters, Singh has installed more than 2,500 sparrow houses across Gurugram to support declining urban bird populations (India.com, 2025). This extension demonstrates a broader sustainability orientation and is consistent with sustainable entrepreneurship's focus on generating environmental and social value alongside economic outcomes (Dean & McMullen, 2007).

Findings

The initiative has raised awareness of stray animals' vulnerability, demonstrated feasible low-cost interventions, and fostered a culture of citizen responsibility toward animals. Such outcomes resonate with the broader observation that social entrepreneurship can catalyse shifts in norms and behaviours even when quantitative impact metrics are limited (Saebi et al., 2019).

Additionally, the initiative has generated media narratives around Singh as an individual changemaker, contributing to the kind of symbolic and motivational impact increasingly recognized as part of social value creation (Bornstein, 2004). Bornstein's (2004) profiles of individual social entrepreneurs similarly show how a single visible founder-figure can build public trust, attract volunteers, and sustain momentum for a cause well beyond what the material intervention alone would achieve.

Policy and Practice Implications

Integrating such models into municipal and NGO efforts

Municipal bodies and animal welfare NGOs can draw on this case when designing interventions that integrate waste management and animal welfare. Partnerships with small and medium

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enterprises (SMEs) could enable systematic repurposing of industrial containers as shelters, akin to other circular economy initiatives involving industrial products (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Korhonen et al., 2018). In line with calls for more systemic approaches to social entrepreneurship, such collaborations could position grassroots initiatives as small-scale, localized experiments that feed into broader transition processes toward more sustainable and inclusive systems.

Adopting Jagjit Singh's Stray Animal Shelter Initiative as a CSR Practice

The animal welfare initiative pioneered by Jagjit Singh — converting discarded factory materials into shelters for stray animals — exemplifies a CSR practice that industrial undertakings may adopt in compliance with statutory CSR regulations."

Encouraging replication and innovation

To support replication, public agencies and NGOs can disseminate open-source designs, provide micro-grants to citizen groups, and integrate upcycling projects into education and training programs. Engineering and management curricula can use such cases to teach circular design, social innovation, and community engagement, reflecting broader trends in sustainability- and social-innovation-oriented entrepreneurship education. These measures align with broader recommendations for fostering societies that are able to experiment with, learn from, and scale social innovations in response to emerging crises and unmet needs.

Future research could conduct fieldwork, including interviews with Jagjit Singh, volunteers, local residents, and municipal officials, as well as observational studies of shelter usage and animal health outcomes. Comparative studies could also examine similar initiatives in other cities or domains (e.g., human homelessness, informal settlements) to build theory on upcycling-based social entrepreneurship (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Saebi et al., 2019).

Analytical Discussion

Social entrepreneurship framing

The Stray Talk India initiative displays key features of social entrepreneurship: a clear social mission (animal welfare), innovative use of resources (upcycled drums), and hybrid logics combining social and operational considerations (Mair & Marti, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). Singh's approach exemplifies what Zahra et al. (2009) describe as "social bricoleurs" — entrepreneurs who address small-scale, locally discovered social needs by creatively recombining resources they already have access to, rather than pursuing large-scale systemic change. Saebi et al. (2019) further note that such ventures often emerge in environments of resource scarcity, where unmet local needs create space for exactly this kind of grassroots, resourceful response.

Moreover, by mobilizing citizens to co-produce animal welfare outcomes — providing space, placing shelters, feeding animals — the initiative aligns with the community-venture paradigm that emphasizes distributed, collective social entrepreneurship (Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012). Montgomery et al. (2012) characterize collective social entrepreneurship as collaboration among diverse actors who jointly frame problems, convene resources, and mobilize collective

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action to address social needs — a description that closely matches the way Stray Talk India relies on ordinary residents rather than a single centralized organization.

Sustainability through resourcefulness is also evident: by using factory waste and personal funds, the initiative reduces dependence on external funding and enhances continuity. This resonates with the broader literature's emphasis on resourcefulness as a distinguishing trait of social entrepreneurs operating with limited capital (Zahra et al., 2009). Viewed this way, the weekly free distribution of shelters is not merely a resource-constrained operating model but an enactment of generosity that constitutes the initiative's ethical core.

Taken together, these characteristics align with conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship that emphasize creativity, resourcefulness, and community engagement in addressing social problems.

Circular economy and upcycling in practice

Stray Talk India operationalizes circular economy principles by diverting industrial drums from scrap markets and landfills into long-lived social infrastructure (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Hultink, 2017). The process exemplifies upcycling: the drums are not merely recycled but upgraded into higher-value goods — insulated shelters with direct welfare benefits.

This case supports arguments that circular economy transitions are facilitated by grassroots and community-based innovations that reconfigure material flows in socially beneficial ways (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). It also demonstrates how circular practices can be embedded in small and medium enterprises, with social impact as a primary driver rather than regulatory compulsion or purely economic incentives — a pattern consistent with Korhonen et al.'s (2018) critique that much circular economy literature over-emphasizes top-down, economically driven implementation while underplaying grassroots, mission-driven versions of it.

Community engagement, digital outreach, and scaling

The initiative's scale and longevity depend heavily on community engagement and digital communication. Weekly distribution events create a shared space where social and material resources are exchanged, consistent with the broader observation that social ventures often scale through informal networks and community relationships rather than formal organizational hierarchies (Montgomery et al., 2012).

Social media amplifies this effect by enabling storytelling, visibility, and grassroots (DIY) diffusion, which Murray, Caulier-Grice, and Mulgan (2010) identify as critical mechanisms for spreading social innovations beyond their point of origin. The interplay between physical participation and digital engagement reflects broader trends in community-based animal welfare and social entrepreneurship more generally.

Conclusion

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The Stray Talk India initiative demonstrates how entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, and compassion can be integrated to address social challenges. By converting industrial waste into life-saving shelters, Jagjit Singh has not only improved the welfare of countless stray dogs but has also inspired individuals and organizations to contribute toward creating a more humane and environmentally responsible society. His work stands as a clear example of social entrepreneurship driven by innovation, empathy, and sustainable development.

It exemplifies social entrepreneurship's potential to integrate circular economy principles, community-based animal welfare, and sustainability-oriented innovation in a resource-constrained urban setting (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Saebi et al., 2019).

As climate risks intensify and cities grapple with both environmental and social vulnerabilities (Meerow, Newell, & Stults, 2016), such grassroots initiatives demonstrate how citizens and entrepreneurs can co-create adaptive, compassionate responses at the local scale. Embedding these innovations into broader policy and institutional frameworks — as discussed above — can help realize the promise of social entrepreneurship as a driver of inclusive, sustainable urban futures, echoing the emphasis on scaling and systemic diffusion found in the wider social innovation literature (Murray et al., 2010).

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