

WORKING PAPER

Behavioural Scripts and Youth Entrepreneurship in High-Income Subsistence Marketplaces

A Conceptual Framework with Implications for Practice

Nicola Martin

Marketing Strategist, Researcher, and Trainer | Fentro CIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding youth entrepreneurship in high-income subsistence marketplaces, using Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) in the South Wales Valleys as an illustrative context. Drawing on subsistence marketplace theory, marketplace exclusion research, and behavioural coping literatures, it proposes three ideal-typical behavioural scripts — Resignation, Rage, and Rebuild — that shape how young people who are NEET engage with markets, work, and entrepreneurship. The paper argues that enterprise education and community interest company design must work at the level of settings, scripts, and identity if they are to do more than invite young people into an already skewed game. Implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed.

KEYWORDS

NEET; youth entrepreneurship; subsistence marketplaces; behavioural scripts; Wales; marketplace literacy

1. Introduction

A quarter of the way into the twenty-first century, many young people in high-income countries are growing up in places where national prosperity coexists with local precarity. Former industrial regions such as the South Wales Valleys combine relatively high labour-market inactivity, low job density and long-term illness with dense clusters of fast-food outlets, gambling premises, high-cost credit providers and other "health-reducing" amenities (Health Foundation, 2022; Health Equity North, 2024). In Wales, an estimated 15.8% of 19–24-year-olds were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) in the year ending June 2023, with NEET rates approaching 40% among disabled young people (Welsh Government, 2023a). These conditions shape young people's encounters with markets, work and institutions in ways poorly captured by marketing concepts developed for affluent consumers and stable labour markets.

The subsistence marketplaces stream offers a powerful alternative lens. It focuses on the lived realities of consumers and micro-entrepreneurs in low-income, low-literacy contexts in the Global South (Viswanathan and Rosa, 2007; Viswanathan, 2021). Rather than treating "the poor" as a homogeneous segment, this work adopts a bottom-up, micro-level orientation to how people think, feel, and act in markets under chronic resource constraints, and develops marketplace literacy as a capability for navigating such environments (Viswanathan, Gajendiran and Venkatesan, 2008). To date, most empirical work has focused on low and middle-income countries. In a recent synthesis, Viswanathan (2021) calls for "similar research in advanced economies," noting that pockets of subsistence exist within high-income countries where individuals confront complex, often predatory marketplaces with limited knowledge and support.

Parallel work on marketplace exclusion and Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) documents how marginalised consumers in high-income countries experience markets as sites of humiliation, surveillance and affective inequality, and how urban redevelopment, retail withdrawal, and targeted marketing can deepen exclusion (Saren, Parsons and Goulding, 2019; Hutton, 2019; Burgess, 2017). Exclusion is not only a matter of being kept out of beneficial markets; it can also mean being disproportionately incorporated into harmful or exploitative ones.

At the same time, youth entrepreneurship has been widely promoted in the UK and elsewhere as a policy response to youth unemployment and NEET status. Evidence reviews suggest that enterprise education and support can improve confidence, skills and, for some, employment outcomes (Smith, 2020; Arad Research, 2022), while also highlighting persistent barriers, limited finance, weak entrepreneurial social capital, and institutional obstacles, especially for young people in deindustrialised and deprived areas (Smith, 2020).

This paper responds to these gaps by developing a conceptual framework for understanding youth entrepreneurship in high-income subsistence marketplaces, using Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), a post-industrial local authority in the South Wales Valleys, as an illustrative context. RCT exhibits many hallmarks of subsistence-like conditions within a high-income state: below-average employment rates,

above-average economic inactivity and long-term sickness, relatively high proportions of adults with no qualifications, and elevated NEET risk compared with national averages (ONS, 2024; RCT CBC, 2022; Welsh Government, 2023a). Yet it is also characterised by widespread digital connectivity and ready access to sophisticated consumer markets.

The central argument is that, in such contexts, young people's orientations towards markets and entrepreneurship are best understood as behavioural scripts that crystallise from repeated encounters with local structures, marketplaces, and institutions. Drawing on Behaviour Centred Design, poverty-related stress, and coping literatures (Aunger and Curtis, 2016; Wadsworth et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2019; Rajagopalan et al., 2024), the paper proposes three ideal-typical scripts:

Script	Core Orientation	Entrepreneurship Expression
Resignation	Protective withdrawal; effort does not pay; institutions are unresponsive	Dismissed as unrealistic or "not for people like us"
Rage	Oppositional agency; anger at "the system"; short-term, zero-sum logic	Instrumentalised for quick gain; often precarious or informal
Rebuild	Critical awareness of constraints; collective agency; place-based possibility	Pursued as community renewal; marketplace literacy as empowerment

Table 1: The Resignation-Rage-Rebuild Framework: summary overview

The paper aligns with the subsistence marketplaces stream by foregrounding micro-level thinking, feeling, and coping among young people in a high-income subsistence context, and by translating conceptual insights into implications for research, education, and practice. It is conceptual and non-empirical. Section 2 situates RCT as a high-income subsistence marketplace. Section 3 reviews relevant literature. Section 4 sets out the Resignation-Rage-Rebuild framework. Section 5 draws out implications for research, education and practice, including the design of youth-focused community interest companies. Section 6 concludes.

2. High-Income Subsistence Marketplaces and the Case of Rhondda Cynon Taf

2.1 Labour-market constraints in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Labour-market indicators in Rhondda Cynon Taf suggest a structurally constrained opportunity set. In the year ending December 2023, 69.1% of residents aged 16–64 in RCT were in employment, compared with 74.1% across Wales (ONS, 2024). Over the same period, the local unemployment rate stood at 3.8%, slightly above the Welsh average of 3.7%, while 27.0% of working-age residents were economically inactive, compared with 23.0% across Wales and 21.2% across Great Britain (ONS, 2024).

Job density estimates indicate that RCT had around 0.59 employee jobs per working-age resident in 2021, with roughly 87,000 jobs for approximately 148,000 working-age people (Nomis/ONS, 2022). Even if every available job were filled by a local resident, a substantial share of the working-age population would still need to remote work, commute out, or remain without work. This kind of low job density is typical of deindustrialised regions where local labour demand has not kept pace with population needs.

Health-related inactivity further sharpens the picture. Census 2021 data show that 7.6% of adults in RCT were economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability, compared with 5.9% across Wales (ONS, 2023). Long-term health conditions, including mental health problems, thus form part of the everyday context within which young people encounter the labour market.

2.2 Educational attainment, skills and NEET risk

Educational attainment in RCT remains significantly below the Welsh average. Census 2021 data indicate that 24.2% of residents aged 16 and over in RCT had no qualifications, compared with 19.9% across Wales (RCT CBC, 2022). Among working-age adults (16–64), 10.4% had no qualifications (NVQ level 0) as of 2021.

Across Wales, NEET statistics underline the continued fragility of youth trajectories. For the year ending June 2023, 15.8% of 19–24-year-olds in Wales were estimated to be NEET (Welsh Government, 2023a). Disaggregation by disability shows that 38.9% of disabled 19–24-year-olds were NEET, highlighting how poverty, health, and exclusion compound each other in late adolescence and early adulthood.

When young people in RCT adopt Resignation scripts ("nothing changes here", "school is pointless") or Rage scripts ("the system is rigged, politicians do not care"), these are not simply individual attitudes but socially reinforced responses to a specific configuration of constraints. Any attempt to build a Rebuild script around youth entrepreneurship and marketplace literacy must therefore take these structural conditions as a starting point rather than an afterthought.

2.3 Marketplace configuration: addictive and sustaining marketplaces

A distinctive feature of the RCT context is the density of what the Health Foundation (2022) terms "health-reducing amenities": fast-food outlets, gambling premises, vaping retailers, high-cost credit providers, and payday loan shops. These businesses cluster in areas of high deprivation, offering immediate gratification, low barriers to entry, and, in the case of gambling and credit, deliberately engineered compulsion loops.

From a subsistence marketplaces perspective, this configuration matters because it shapes the behavioural scripts that young people develop. In RCT, the most visible, accessible, and culturally normalised marketplaces are those that offer short-term reward at long-term cost. Young people who develop their marketplace literacy primarily through encounters with these environments may internalise a logic of immediacy, risk-tolerance, and zero-sum competition that is poorly suited to the demands of sustainable employment or enterprise.

3. Literature Review and Conceptual Foundations

3.1 Subsistence marketplaces, marketplace literacy, and high-income pockets of subsistence

Subsistence marketplace research emerged in the early 2000s within macromarketing and Transformative Consumer Research, with the aim of understanding how low-income consumers and necessity-driven entrepreneurs navigate markets under chronic resource scarcity (Viswanathan and Rosa, 2007; Viswanathan, Sridharan and Ritchie, 2010). It adopts a bottom-up, micro-level perspective that foregrounds lived realities, cognitive constraints, and emotional coping in subsistence conditions (Viswanathan, 2021).

A defining contribution is the concept of marketplace literacy: the knowledge, skills, and orientations that enable individuals to understand products, prices, contracts, risks, and opportunities in the marketplace, as consumers and entrepreneurs (Viswanathan, 2021). Marketplace literacy encompasses basic economic concepts (cost, margin, risk), practical capabilities (comparing offers, recognising exploitation, basic record-keeping), and more abstract capacities, including perspective-taking and future-oriented planning.

Viswanathan (2021) explicitly calls for "similar research in advanced economies", arguing that high-income countries are increasingly marked by pockets of subsistence where individuals face complex marketplaces with low marketplace literacy and chronic precarity. This paper takes up that invitation by treating RCT as an example of a high-income subsistence marketplace inside a wealthy welfare state.

3.2 Marketplace exclusion and high-income pockets of deprivation

In parallel, macromarketing and critical consumer research have developed the concept of marketplace exclusion within high-income economies. This literature examines how markets and marketing practices marginalise particular groups by denying access to essential goods and services, and by shaping identities, emotions and spaces in ways that make some people feel "out of place" in the marketplace (Saren, Parsons and Goulding, 2019; Hutton, 2019).

Saren, Parsons and Goulding (2019) conceptualise marketplace exclusion as a multi-dimensional process involving representational practices, institutional and spatial arrangements, and lived experiences of resistance and coping. Exclusion is rarely a simple matter of being "in" or "out"; people can be selectively incorporated into harmful marketplaces while being excluded from beneficial ones.

3.3 Youth NEET and entrepreneurship in deindustrialised regions

The NEET category was formally introduced in UK policy in 1999 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) and has since become a primary target of youth employment policy. Evidence reviews suggest that enterprise education and support can improve confidence, skills and, for some, employment outcomes (Smith, 2020; Arad Research, 2022), while also highlighting persistent barriers: limited finance, weak entrepreneurial social capital, and institutional obstacles, especially for young people in deindustrialised and deprived

areas.

Welsh Government programmes such as the Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (2016–2022) have sought to address these barriers, with mixed evidence of sustained impact (Welsh Government, 2022). The literature consistently identifies the gap between the aspirational framing of enterprise education and the structural realities that young people in post-industrial communities face.

3.4 Behavioural scripts and coping under poverty

The concept of behavioural scripts, patterned, socially transmitted ways of interpreting and acting in recurring situations, draws on a long tradition in social psychology and sociology (Schank and Abelson, 1977; Goffman, 1959). In the context of poverty and deprivation, scripts can be understood as cognitive and emotional shortcuts that develop through repeated exposure to constrained environments (Wadsworth et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2019).

Behaviour Centred Design (BCD), developed by Aunger and Curtis (2016), provides a complementary framework by emphasising the role of settings, scripts, and identity in shaping behaviour. BCD argues that lasting behaviour change requires not just information or incentives, but the creation of new behaviour settings that make alternative scripts tangible and rewarding.

Recent work by Rajagopalan et al. (2024) on cultural identity affirmation as a coping resource for marginalised youth provides a further theoretical bridge: interventions that affirm rather than stigmatise young people's existing identities and knowledge are more likely to support the development of Rebuild scripts than those that implicitly frame participants as deficient.

4. Conceptual Framework: Resignation, Rage, and Rebuild Scripts

Building on the preceding literatures, this section develops a conceptual framework for understanding how young people in high-income subsistence marketplaces come to orient themselves towards markets, work, and entrepreneurship. The framework proposes three ideal-typical behavioural scripts that crystallise from young people's repeated encounters with constrained labour markets, skewed local marketplaces, and wider political narratives. These scripts are not fixed personality traits, but patterned ways of seeing and acting that are socially produced, situationally activated, and potentially transformable.

4.1 Resignation scripts: "Nothing changes here"

Resignation scripts are characterised by a durable sense that effort does not pay, that institutions are indifferent, and that "people like us" are structurally blocked from meaningful progress. Drawing on poverty and coping literatures, these scripts can be read as a form of protective withdrawal in the face of repeated experiences of disappointment, stigma, or institutional failure (Wadsworth et al., 2018). Disengagement becomes a way to conserve psychological resources in environments where investments of time and hope have historically gone unrewarded.

In high-income subsistence marketplaces, Resignation is reinforced by persistent underemployment, visible intergenerational worklessness, and high rates of health-related economic inactivity. Highly visible consumption opportunities coexist with thin opportunities for secure, sustaining work. For young people who see parents, neighbours, and older peers struggling to "get ahead" despite working hard, the implicit lesson may be that "the game is fixed".

Resignation is expressed in internal and social narratives such as "school is pointless", "all the good jobs are taken" or "nothing ever changes in this place". Behaviourally, it may show up as early disengagement from education, minimal participation in training schemes, low uptake of enterprise support, and reliance on short-term coping via benefits, family support, or informal work.

4.2 Rage scripts: "The system is against us"

Rage scripts share with Resignation the recognition that structural conditions are unfair, but instead of withdrawing, they are marked by anger, oppositional identity, and a desire to "flip the script". This anger may be directed at politicians, distant elites, welfare agencies, employers, or "the system" more broadly. The marketplace exclusion literature suggests that feelings of humiliation, disrespect, and being treated as "less than" are common among marginalised consumers in high-income countries (Hutton, 2019; Burgess, 2017).

In marketplace terms, Rage scripts are associated with a preference for short-term, high-reward, high-risk engagements: the informal economy, gig work, resale, and, at the extreme, illegal markets. The logic is one of "get mine before the system gets me": a rational response to an environment perceived as zero-sum and adversarial.

Rage scripts are not simply pathological. They contain important insights: a clear-eyed recognition of structural unfairness, a refusal to internalise failure as personal inadequacy, and a form of agency that Resignation forecloses. The challenge for enterprise education is to channel this energy towards sustaining rather than precarious or harmful forms of enterprise, without dismissing or pathologising the anger that drives it.

4.3 Rebuild scripts: "We can change this place"

Rebuild scripts are characterised by a critical awareness of structural constraints combined with a sense of collective agency and place-based possibility. They are not naive optimism; young people operating under Rebuild scripts typically have a clear understanding of the structural obstacles they face. What distinguishes them is the belief that collective action, community enterprise, and place-based investment can make a difference.

Rebuild scripts are most likely to emerge where young people have access to positive role models who have "made it" without leaving the community, where they have experienced settings that affirm their identity and knowledge, and where they have developed sufficient marketplace literacy to see beyond the immediate landscape of addictive and precarious opportunities.

Importantly, Rebuild scripts do not require the prior elimination of Resignation or Rage. They can coexist with, and indeed draw energy from, the anger and critical awareness that characterise Rage scripts. The task of enterprise education is not to replace one script with another, but to create conditions under which Rebuild scripts become available, credible, and rewarding.

5. Implications for Research, Education, and Practice

5.1 Implications for research

The framework generates a number of empirical research questions that could be pursued through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. First, how prevalent are Resignation, Rage, and Rebuild scripts among young people in RCT and comparable high-income subsistence contexts, and what structural and marketplace factors predict script dominance? Second, how do scripts change over time, and what are the conditions under which young people transition from Resignation or Rage to Rebuild? Third, how do enterprise education programmes interact with pre-existing scripts, and what programme design features are most effective at activating Rebuild orientations?

The framework also invites cross-national comparative research. High-income subsistence marketplaces exist in many deindustrialised regions across the UK, Europe, and North America. Comparative work could examine whether the Resignation-Rage-Rebuild typology travels across contexts, or whether local institutional and cultural configurations produce distinct script patterns.

5.2 Implications for enterprise education

The framework has direct implications for the design of enterprise education programmes targeting NEET young people in high-income subsistence contexts. Three principles follow from the analysis. First, programmes must begin by acknowledging and validating the lived logic of Resignation and Rage scripts, rather than treating disengagement as a deficit to be corrected.

Second, marketplace literacy education should be contextualised to the specific marketplace landscape that young people inhabit. This means explicitly addressing the addictive and health-reducing marketplaces that dominate many high-income subsistence contexts, helping young people to critically read and renegotiate these environments rather than simply teaching generic business skills.

Third, programmes should invest in the creation of Rebuild settings: physical and social environments where alternative scripts are modelled, rewarded, and normalised. This may involve peer mentoring by young people who have successfully navigated the transition from NEET to employment or enterprise, place-based community projects that make collective agency tangible, and explicit attention to identity affirmation as a precondition for engagement.

5.3 Implications for community interest company design

The analysis has specific implications for the design of youth-focused community interest companies (CICs) operating in high-income subsistence contexts. A CIC that aims to support young people who are

NEET must do more than provide skills training or enterprise support; it must function as a Rebuild setting that makes alternative scripts tangible and rewarding.

This means attending to the physical and social environment of the CIC, not just its programme content. It means recruiting staff and mentors who embody Rebuild scripts and who can model the possibility of sustaining enterprise in the local context. It means designing programme activities that begin with young people's existing interests, obsessions, and knowledge, and build marketplace literacy from that foundation rather than imposing an external curriculum.

It also means taking seriously the data-generating potential of CIC activity. Every young person who engages with a CIC programme contributes to a growing evidence base about what works, for whom, and under what conditions. Systematic collection and analysis of this data, and its translation into policy-relevant insights, is one of the most valuable contributions a youth-focused CIC can make to the wider ecosystem of NEET support.

6. Conclusion

This paper has developed a conceptual framework for understanding youth entrepreneurship in high-income subsistence marketplaces, using Rhondda Cynon Taf as an illustrative context. The Resignation-Rage-Rebuild framework proposes that young people's orientations towards markets, work, and entrepreneurship are best understood as behavioural scripts that crystallise from repeated encounters with constrained labour markets, skewed local marketplaces, and wider political narratives.

The framework has implications for research, enterprise education, and the design of youth-focused community interest companies. It argues that effective intervention must work at the level of settings, scripts, and identity: creating environments that make Rebuild scripts tangible and rewarding, explicitly validating the lived logic of Resignation and Rage, and building marketplace literacy from young people's existing knowledge and experience.

The paper is conceptual and non-empirical. Its primary contribution is to provide a theoretically grounded vocabulary for understanding and addressing the gap between the aspirational framing of enterprise education and the structural realities that young people in post-industrial communities face. Empirical testing of the framework, through qualitative fieldwork, survey research, and programme evaluation, is a priority for future work.

More broadly, the paper contributes to the growing body of subsistence marketplace research in advanced economies. It demonstrates that the theoretical tools developed to understand market engagement in the Global South have direct relevance to pockets of high-income subsistence in the UK and beyond, and that translating these insights into practice requires sustained attention to the behavioural, psychological, and structural dimensions of youth market engagement.

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