
COMMUNITY BASED MARKETING FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION.

LESSONS FROM A PARTICIPATORY MEDIA PROJECT

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Abstract:

This research focuses on the intersection of three areas: community-based marketing, participatory media and social inclusion. The study investigates the mechanisms through which co-creation process in media projects involving marginalized populations, can dismantle systemic barriers and foster a sense of belonging, framing it as a strategic tool for systemic change rather than just audience engagement. The research employs an instrumental case study methodology based on a single, multi-country participatory media initiative created by media and academic organizations and directly involving populations experiencing social exclusion. The paper is guided by two central questions: how do co-creation processes in these type of initiatives work to promote social inclusion?; what transferable insights can be drawn from this case to advance the theory and practice of community-based marketing?

Key words: community-based marketing, participatory media, social inclusion

1. Introduction

The modern world, characterized by increasing social fragmentation and predominantly digital communication, requires a fundamental reassessment of how organizations establish authentic connections with consumers and ensure fair representation of diverse marginalized groups. This challenge is of high importance for marketers, policymakers, and communities. Conventional mass-marketing strategies are often inadequate to address the diversified and nuanced needs of heterogeneous populations, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the exclusion of minority segments and marginalized groups. As an alternative, humanized strategic models have emerged, among which community-based marketing (CBM) stands out for its potential. It aims to develop sustainable relationships by engaging communities in their own cultural and social context. At the same time, the proliferation of participatory media has revolutionized communication, transferring authority from centralized broadcasters to decentralized networks of creators and consumers.

The synergy between CBM, social inclusion, and participatory media transcends a simple juxtaposition of concepts; it generates a structural transformation. CBM underpins the philosophy of authentic engagement, social inclusion introduces the ethical imperative,

and participatory media provides the technological infrastructure for their expanded implementation. Together, these three elements constitute an emerging paradigm for communication characterized by increased equity, representativeness, and effectiveness. By transitioning from one-way communication (broadcasting messages *at* people) to collaborative communication (building platforms with communities), this integrated approach facilitates the co-creation of value and meaning. For marketers, the result is a strengthening of brand loyalty and market relevance. For society, the prospect of a media ecosystem in which every individual has the opportunity to be heard, valued, and included in the collective discourse opens up. Therefore, the future of responsible marketing lies not in optimizing the message, but in cultivating dialogue.

Despite the growing content of literature concerning the individual domains of CBM, participatory media and social inclusion, a significant gap persists at their intersection. A comprehensive review of existing scholarship in Web of Science database revealed a complete absence of studies that address the interplay between all three topics. Given this absence of prior research at the intersection of CBM, participatory media, and social inclusion, a case study methodology is proper as it provides the intensive, in-depth investigation necessary to explore the complex, real-world dynamics and mechanisms of this novel phenomenon in its natural context, thereby establishing the foundational insights required for future, broader studies. Within this context, the purpose of this paper is to analyze how co-creation processes in participatory media initiative function as a CBM strategy for social inclusion, using a multi-country project as an instrumental case study. InMedia Project was funded by Erasmus+, Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices / Strategic Partnerships for adult education (InMedia Project 2020-1-DE02-KA204-007385). The project was designed and implemented by a consortium of media and academic organizations (Offener Kanal Magdeburg – Germany, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (LBUS) – Romania, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (USC) – Spain, Stowarzyszenie FILMFORUM – Poland, Fédération de L'audiovisuel Participatif – France, Teleduca Educació i Comunicació SCP – Spain) and directly involved a diverse range of socially vulnerable and marginalized groups (InMedia Project, 2023).

The paper contains six sections. The first one acts as an introduction in the topic. The second section provides an insight in the relevant literature. The third one defines the research objectives and describes the research methodology used for documentation of the case study. The fourth section introduces the project which is the subject of this case study. It describes its rationale, concept and design, implementation and dissemination of results, its overall impact and lessons learnt. The fifth section is focusing on implications of this case study to the field of CBM, highlighting the recommendations for different stakeholders working to serve the needs of the social excluded. The sixth section summarises the conclusions and defines potential areas for future research.

2. Literature review

CBM for social inclusion leverages community engagement, trust, and culturally relevant messaging to promote positive social behaviors and foster a sense of belonging among marginalized groups (Zainuddin & Gordon, 2020). At its core, community marketing

recognizes that nowadays consumers seek more than transactions - they want belonging, recognition, and shared experiences with brands that reflect their values (Moran, 2025). Customers are in fact active participants in a brand's story. It involves research to identify local barriers and benefits, the use of trusted local "messengers" and community-based activities, and a focus on building collaborative relationships to create lasting social change and increase involvement from diverse community members (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Moran 2025). This "bottom-up" methodology ensures that marketing initiatives are relevant, resonant, and genuinely serve the community's interests, making it an inherently more inclusive framework than top-down marketing approach. In parallel, participatory media describes communication where the audience shifts from being passive consumers to active creators and contributors. Although the concept has existed to a lesser degree for long time, the technology development in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries expanded the possibilities for average people to contribute to media changing them being strictly consumers of media to being active participants and creators (Jenkins et al., 2009). For marginalized communities, participatory media can serve as a vital tool for raising the awareness of their voices and narratives in the society.

While traditional marketing's primary goal is to drive sales, with success measured by commercial metrics, participatory media's main objective is community empowerment, giving citizens a voice for social, cultural, or political purposes (Carpentier, 2011; Cumming & Norwood, 2012).

Despite their different core motivations, these two fields (CBM and participatory media) are increasingly converging (Moran, 2025). Modern marketing now borrows heavily from participatory methods, encouraging user-generated content in order to build authenticity and brand loyalty. Participatory media provides the critical infrastructure through which the socially inclusive potential of CBM can be fully realized and scaled. It acts as the bridge connecting community-focused strategies with the broader goal of societal inclusion. Conversely, participatory media projects adopt marketing strategies - like branding and social media outreach - to expand their reach, secure funding, and ensure their message has a lasting impact. The relationship is symbiotic, as effective CBM for social inclusion uses the tools of participatory media as its primary means to empower groups to create and control their own narratives. The synergy between participatory media and inclusive marketing transforms brand-community engagement by enabling authentic co-creation, where collaborative user-generated content proves more persuasive and empowering than traditional advertising. This process simultaneously provides marginalized communities with the platforms to contest dominant narratives, articulate their own identities, and amplify their experiences. In conclusion, participatory media acts as a crucial catalyst, amplifying the inherent potential of CBM to advance social inclusion. By providing accessible platforms for dialogue, co-creation, and self-representation, participatory media transforms CBM from a localized strategy into a scalable force for empowering communities to shape their own narratives and advocate for their place in the wider societal discourse.

Despite these links between the two fields, several areas require further empirical investigation. First, there is a need for robust methodologies to measure the social impact of these integrated campaigns. While marketing metrics like engagement and reach are

easily tracked, quantifying improvements in social cohesion, community agency, or perceived inclusion remains a significant challenge. Second, this overlap creates significant ethical tension, primarily centered on the conflict between authenticity and commercial interest. The crucial question is whether an initiative genuinely aims to empower a community or is simply exploiting its creativity for commercial gain, a practice known as "astroturfing" (Cho et al, 2011). This raises further debates about whether encouraging user-generated content is an act of empowerment or a method of sourcing free advertising (Andrejevic, 2004). Therefore, while both fields now use similar tools to engage audiences, their fundamental goals - civic empowerment versus commercial promotion (Zwick et al., 2008) - remain the critical point of distinction. Finally, despite the increasingly popularity of CBM among practitioners, there is very little documented evidence of how this concept has been applied in practice and what factors have contributed to successful different program outcomes (Fries et al, 2020). This article is addressing this last knowledge gap.

3. Methodology

The study is guided by two primary research questions: 1) How do the co-creation processes in participatory media initiatives function to dismantle barriers and foster a sense of social inclusion? and 2) What transferable insights does this case study offer to advance the theory and practice of CBM? The findings aim to contribute to the extant literature on best practices in this domain.

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes inherent in CBM and to evaluate the program's outcomes and challenges, this research employed an **instrumental case study methodology** (Yin, 2003). This approach is particularly well-suited for exploratory research, as it enables an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of complex phenomena within their real-world context (Creswell, 1994; Crowe et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2018; Savescu, 2024; Cumming & Norwood, 2012).

A triangulation of data sources was utilized to ensure methodological rigor. Data collection involved three primary methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews**, conducted with key stakeholders, including community partners, project steering group members and operational staff. These interviews explored participants' experiences and their perceptions on project's impact.
- **Documentary analysis** of project-relevant materials, such as outputs, grant application and project reports. This analysis served to contextualize and corroborate data obtained from interviews.
- **Direct observation** of project's activities, such as workshops and meetings, to gain insights into the operational dynamics and the interactions among participants.

This multi-method approach yielded rich, qualitative data, providing detailed insights into the experiences and outcomes associated with the project. After all documents have been organized and the semi-structured interviews and field notes have been transcribed verbatim, the data were then systematically processed in two phases to

extract meaningful information beyond the individual case. The first phase addressed the first research objective (*How do the co-creation processes in participatory media initiatives function to dismantle barriers and foster a sense of social inclusion?*) focusing on labeling the specific text paragraphs connected with the mechanisms of co-creation (stated goal of the project, gap between intent and reality in implementation, rules for the content to be produced, organization's intern capacity, peoples' skills) and mechanisms / barriers of exclusion (unfair representation of vulnerable groups in key roles, lack of material means or time to participate, lack of organizational self-analysis, access restrictions due to organizational structures and habits, lack of appropriate skills or methods for engaging diverse groups). The second phase synthesized these raw descriptive labels into larger themes which addressed the second research objective (*What transferable insights does this case study offer to advance the theory and practice of CBM?*) and defined the principles relevant to the theory and practice of CBM. These larger themes are further on described in details in Chapter 5 Discussions.

The ethical framework applied to data collection and analysis was built around transparency regarding the research scop, participants' informed consent and protection of their personal privacy.

4. Results/findings

4.1. Project rationale

The InMedia project was a direct result of the earlier Media Fellow project (2017-2020), an European partnership focused on media education, which found that participatory media organizations were failing to engage marginalized groups. Despite their mission of inclusion, they primarily served a privileged audience due to a lack of institutional strategy. Efforts to engage marginalized groups were sporadic and individual-dependent. InMedia was created to fix this by helping these organizations critically examine their own structures and practices to identify and dismantle the barriers preventing the inclusion of socially excluded groups.

4.2. Project concept, design and implementation

The main objective of the project was to develop, in partnership, a strategic framework for the implementation of participatory media initiatives, aimed at and created by populations facing social exclusion. This strategy was designed to achieve several goals: raising public awareness of the role of the media in stereotyping, stimulating institutional reflection on access barriers, promoting media literacy as a vector of social inclusion and strengthening the community media sector at European level through the development and dissemination of teaching tools and materials.

The project's core concept is based on theory of structural media education (Jörissen & Marotzki, 2009), which views media as a social force that shapes identity and must be understood within its societal context. This theory was put into practice using the "active media work" (Lampert, 2006), „media literacy" (Leavis & Thompson, 1977) and "edu-communication" (Freire, 2018), Mateus & Quiroz-Velasco, 2017) methodologies. This approach treats individuals as active creators rather than passive consumers, using hands-

on media production to foster personal development, critical reflection, and social participation.

To ensure that the project's objectives and its results are fully integrated and disseminated, the strategic framework was intentionally built on a multi-level structure, as follows:

- *Strategic Level.* The project's steering group was composed of representatives from the partner organizations. They met six times over the project duration to ensure effective management, content development and dissemination of project results.
- *Operational Level.* The working group brought together media and marketing practitioners (internal staff and freelancers) from the partner organisations. Their selection was based on their potential to act as multipliers of the project results. Participants were involved in collaborative learning activities aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, with the ultimate goal of permanently incorporating the project methodologies and knowledge into the current operations of their home institutions.
- *Community Level.* The practical component of the project was based on direct collaboration with external partners, including a wide range of vulnerable and marginalized social groups (refugee initiatives, members of a transgender association, single women, deaf individuals, youth from socio-economically disadvantaged areas, unemployed individuals and unaccompanied minor refugees). Essential to the project's approach was the fact that these participants had an active role, as co-creators, being integrated as equal partners in the development of the projects, not as passive subjects.

This multi-level strategy was essential for the success of the project. It created a bridge between the big picture and the practical activities in the organizations, while ensuring real collaboration with the beneficiary communities. Concretely, the project successfully implemented its capacity-building through four "train the trainers" workshops. These took place in Magdeburg, Warsaw, Marseille and Barcelona and consisted of five days of collaborative learning, with workshops, brainstorming and group discussions.

4.3. Project outputs

The project produced 17 audio-visual items and a pedagogical guide titled "Inclusive Work in Educational Media" to explore themes of social inclusion and participatory media. The video content created includes: 4 educational videos explaining social exclusion and inclusion; 11 documentaries, including a 15-minute film about the "train-the-trainer" initiative featuring testimonials from all stakeholder groups (participants, experts, organizers, and partners), 8 short films featuring marginalized groups (like refugees, single women, unaccompanied minor refugees, deaf individuals, transgender persons, youth from socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and unemployed individuals), and 2 short documentaries showcase the participatory media projects "Tabasco-Video" in Marseille and "Anonymaux" in Aix-en-Provence; 2 studio talk shows discussing inclusion.

All materials were initially created during group learning activities and later edited for publication. The final results are documented and available on the project's website, www.inmedia-europe.com, which is itself a key project outcome.

4.4. Dissemination of results

The project's dissemination strategy was designed to engage a multi-tiered audience, ranging from internal members to influential external bodies. Internally, results were distributed among all personnel within the partner organizations, including staff, board members, and volunteers. Externally, dissemination targeted local and regional networks of cooperation partners, such as socio-cultural actors, civil society organizations, and affiliated educational institutions like universities and schools. This reach was expanded to national networks of participatory socio-cultural practice and higher education. Finally, the strategy encompassed key stakeholders and policymakers, including funding bodies and political decision-makers, as well as the interested general public, to enhance the project's reputation, ensure its trustworthiness, and influence the broader socio-economic landscape.

The project's dissemination strategy utilized a multi-channel approach. A dedicated project website was established as the central repository for all information, materials, and results. Scholarly outreach was achieved through articles published in the international journals, while local engagement was secured via a radio broadcast in Sibiu, Romania. The project's audiovisual outputs were distributed widely across digital platforms, including partner YouTube channels and German open channels. This digital presence was further amplified through the partners' own websites and coordinated social media campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

4.5. Project impact

The impact of the project was manifested on multiple levels (individual, organizational, network), generating significant consequences in both the short and long term.

Enhancement of Participant Competencies. The project contributed significantly to the development of human capital, with the main outcome being the increase of participants' knowledge and competences. 20 Teleduca staff and volunteers were directly engaged; LBUS reached over 200 students via class topics; the French Federation involved 15 people from 9 structures; and the FILMFORUM Association educated lecturers and students at the Warsaw Film School. USC's strengthened its capacity for media literacy training. The transnational training sessions allowed the assimilation of a robust set of skills, extending from specific participatory media pedagogical practices to valuable intercultural competences. This process cultivated a more nuanced perspective on the interaction between the media and minority or marginalized groups in different national contexts.

Organizational Capacity Building. The project brought valuable benefits to the organizations involved. They came to better assess their capacity to promote inclusion, which allowed them to work better and more effectively with different vulnerable groups. Teleduca started work on the La Veinal TV participatory channel; LBUS enhanced its

offerings by organizing two workshops for Master's students; the French Federation strengthened its internal cohesion and identity; and the FILMFORUM Association expanded organizational awareness of media exclusion among both regular staff and 20 festival assistants. Most importantly, the organizations learned how to identify and successfully collaborate with target groups that they had previously failed to reach, actively integrating them into their media production.

Development of Sustainable Pedagogical Materials. The project generated a significant set of practical and long-lasting educational materials, as presented in Chapter 4.3. These are not just simple outputs, but sustainable educational tools, specifically designed to be used in training programs and in public public awareness initiatives.

Consolidation of Collaborative Networks. The project created stronger professional connections at all levels: local, national and European. Participants became vectors of knowledge in their networks, thus strengthening the entire community media environment. Teleduca broadened its reach to include audiovisual and cultural professionals; LBUS extended its collaboration with the Teacher Training Department and made two agreements with local NGOs; USC reinforced its long-term network, while the FILMFORUM Association expanded awareness among festival helpers and cooperated with the Andrzej Wajda Film Culture Center. Crucially, the Open Channel Magdeburg served as a hub, presenting the project across major regional and national groups, including the local Integration Network, the regional Media Competence Network and the national Federal Association of community Media. More importantly, these new connections are a foundation for future collaborations and partnerships based on the exchange of expertise.

Dissemination successfully reached a broad audience. Teleduca engaged around 110 participants through a panel discussion, including city council members and a film screening. The French Federation reached about 150 people by presenting the project at its annual meetings in Marseille (2022) and Orléans (2023). The FILMFORUM Association widely promoted the project via the CINEMAFORUM festival catalog, presentations at the Warsaw Film School, and catalog distribution at the Andrzej Wajda Film Culture Center. The Open Channel Magdeburg was highly effective, reaching approximately 300 people directly across its extensive networks and presenting the project to 100 participants at the annual conference of the Federal Association of Community Media in March 2022.

The impact of the project is sustainable and goes beyond its completion. Partner organizations continue to apply inclusion methods internally and promote the project results externally, thus ensuring a long-term effect.

4.6. Lessons learnt

Although the stated goal of participatory media is to empower marginalized communities, the reality on the ground, observed in the InMedia project, shows that while the intentions are good, the reality in practice is different. There is a gap between inclusive ideals and their implementation. This phenomenon can be called a “paradox of participation”, in which mechanisms intended to include actually produce exclusion. The problems manifest themselves in three key areas: the unfair representation of diverse

groups, the lack of self-analysis of exclusionary practices by media organizations, and inadequate pedagogical frameworks for engaging diverse groups of population.

One of the major challenges of participatory media is that economically and socially vulnerable groups are underrepresented in key roles, such as content creators and decision-makers. Instead of reflecting the real diversity of the society, these “voices of community” platforms become homogenous spaces, inadvertently favoring the more-educated and more-resourced individuals. This problem does not arise by chance, but because of real obstacles. Many people do not have access to technology or do not know how to use it. In addition, people with socio-economic problems do not have the time or resources to participate in voluntary media projects. As a result, the stories and perspectives reflected are mainly of those who overcome these barriers – that is, of the already privileged. This represents a fundamental failure of participatory media organizations to capture the experiences of the very communities they claim to serve, to reach their mission to be truly inclusive.

Second, the inability of many participatory media organizations to critically analyze their own practices leads to an invisible exclusion. This lack of internal reflection prevents them from seeing how their own structures and habits perpetuate discrimination or how practical barriers block access. Whether it is the technology required, the specialized language, or the content-related criteria that determine which stories are deemed worthy of production and dissemination, these obstacles turn the theoretical openness of the platform into a practical closure for large segments of the audience.

Finally, the desire to be inclusive is not enough, because the skill to work with different people is lacking. Engaging communities that are socially and economically marginalized require a sophisticated toolkit of facilitation techniques, culturally sensitive communication strategies, and adaptive teaching methods. Otherwise, even if these people are invited to participate, the interaction remains superficial, like a formal gesture, which does not truly give them a voice.

In conclusion, for participatory media to truly work for everyone, organizations need to change from within. That means constantly reviewing themselves, investing in people who know how to work with diverse communities, and concretely removing any obstacles that stand in the way of fair participation for all.

5. Discussions

Analyzing InMedia project through the specific lens of CBM for social inclusion reveals an approach that uses marketing principles not just to engage an audience, but to actively dismantle inclusion barriers, shift power dynamics between the media organizations and marginalized groups, and build a more equitable and inclusive community from the inside out. The following lines underline the project's main contribution to the theory and practice in the field of CBM.

Before building inclusion, exclusion must be first identified. InMedia project's rationale was born from a critical market insight: the existing served "community" was not the intended one. Participatory media organizations involved in the project were serving a privileged audience, failing to engage their target community of marginalized groups. In order to build a truly inclusive community, an essential first step is an internal audit of

exclusion. This involves identifying the marginalized groups that the organization is failing to engage, despite its social mission. This process helps in identifying the "community gap" - the gap between the (often privileged) audience actually served and the intended target community. Therefore, effective inclusion does not begin with external marketing, but with this critical internal analysis to understand who is missing and why.

Implement a multi-tiered community oriented strategy. To ensure success, the InMedia project developed a complex community engagement strategy, structured on three distinct levels:

- Strategic level: provided the foundation for the project by involving top management and guaranteeing essential resources.
- Operational level: created an internal network of trained practitioners, true "ambassadors" of the mission. They not only promote inclusion, but integrated it directly into the daily operations of partner organizations. This approach transformed a one-time campaign into a long-term commitment, being a critical approach for sustainable inclusion.
- Community level: represented a paradigm shift, treating the target audience as an active and equal partner. The project evolved from simply co-creating content to developing the entire strategy in direct collaboration with the community. Thus, marginalized groups were given a real decision-making role, and the initiative was built organically, based on their authentic experiences and needs, unlike traditional marketing, which often imposes a vision.

Shift from consumer to "peer co-creator". InMedia project emphasized the importance of transforming the audience from passive consumer to "peer co-creator". This approach is the centerpiece of inclusive community marketing and involves eliminating the traditional hierarchy between the organization and its beneficiaries. By treating members of marginalized communities as equal real partners throughout the creative process, authentic and loyal relationships are built, based on mutual respect, and tokenism is avoided.

Empowerment as the core value proposition. InMedia project's had a significant impact by improving the skills and competences of participants from marginalized communities. For these social and economical excluded groups, the value proposition wasn't a product or service, but empowerment. Gaining tangible skills in media production and intercultural communication provided community members with tools to advocate for themselves and their communities long after the project ended.

Authentic storytelling and social proof. The cornerstone of InMedia project's content strategy was authentic representation. The project chose to feature the stories and testimonies of members of targeted communities (such as refugees or transgender people) directly in the documentaries. This direct approach generated a high degree of trust and functioned as compelling social proof, giving the community back power over its own image.

Marketing outputs that fights stereotypes. InMedia project's main outputs, the documentaries which feature social excluded groups, are not just promotional materials. They are powerful tools for social change, as they were made in direct collaboration with the participants, allowing them to tell their own stories. Through this model of user-

generated, but professionally supported content, the project actively combated stereotypes and gave visibility to voices that were not usually heard. Thus, marketing becomes an act of inclusion, much more credible and captivating than traditional corporate advertising.

Distribution strategy: go where the community already is and use trusted nodes to spread the message. InMedia project used a multi-channel strategy that tapped into existing and credible networks, such as partner organizations, universities, and civil society groups. Even though the project was European, the emphasis was on local actions and marketing channels. This approach is essential to reach marginalized groups, who are often skeptical of large institutions. Using local, familiar, and trusted channels is crucial to building an authentic relationship and gaining credibility.

Success measured by systemic change, not just metrics. InMedia tracked views, but its true key performance indicator was systemic change. The project focused on building sustainable institutional capacity so that media organizations are able to identify, engage, and effectively integrate marginalized groups and dismantle structural barriers. This marketing strategy focused on retention and organic growth. For social inclusion, instead of a one-off campaign, the most important marketing outcome is a permanent improvement in an organization's ability to be inclusive. InMedia project invested in the infrastructure needed for the community to thrive long after the project's official end.

For long-term collective impact, build the ecosystem, not just the brand. InMedia project focused on building a strong network of partners - like media organizations, universities and civil society organizations - at all levels (local, national, European), considering that no single group can succeed alone. By teaming up, these allies could share ideas, support each other, and work together to create positive social change and to create space for collective growth. A key part of this strategy was to share the „participatory” message directly with politicians and decision-makers. This goal wasn't just to be well-known, but to influence laws and policies in order to fix the root causes of social and economical exclusion.

In **conclusion**, using findings from InMedia project, we can say that this study proposes a new model of CBM for social inclusion, grounded in the real experiences of participants from different vulnerable groups. It makes **contributions to the field of CBM on three levels**: i) **theoretical**: the case study results are pioneering a preliminary conceptual framework by inductively identifying the core constructs and proposing descriptive models that characterize the previously unexamined topic at the intersection of community-based marketing, participatory media and social inclusion; ii) **practical**: it provides a set of guidelines and best practices for organizations, marketers and researchers on how to identify and address exclusion (a strategic roadmap that shifts focus from transactional metrics to systemic, long-term collective impact by prioritizing identifying exclusion, enabling peer co-creation and empowerment, utilizing authentic storytelling and leveraging trusted community distribution channels); iii) **political**: the results can inform funders and policymakers about the need to create long-term support systems for community initiatives.

6. Conclusions

This study provides a critical, evidence-based analysis of a real-world social inclusion project. The results of this research demonstrate that designing and implementing a CBM for social inclusion strategy is a multi-layered approach that dismantles systemic barriers by empowering marginalized groups as co-creating partners to build a more equitable community from the inside out. This approach signifies an evolution for the marketing field, transforming it from a tool for audience engagement into a strategic framework for systemic social change, where success is measured by institutional capacity-building and community members are treated as empowered co-creators rather than passive consumers.

At the same time, the analysis reveals some critical areas like: *ethical questions of power dynamics* (is the "co-creation" process truly equal or merely tokenism, given the inherent power held by the funding organizations?), *participant safety* (are the vulnerable participants fully aware of the risks of sharing their stories and what safeguards and long-term support are in place for them?), *ownership and exploitation* (who ultimately owns the created content?; are the participants fairly compensated for their emotional labor and stories?). Such unaddressed questions can be considered opportunities for future research investigations.

7. References

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