

Inclusive Marketing Strategy as an Instrument for Empowering Marginalized Groups in Economic and Social Development

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ABSTRACT – This article examines the contribution of marketing practices in reinforcing social inclusion and the empowerment of marginalized groups by analyzing the economic and social dimensions of inclusive marketing strategies. The primary focus is directed toward understanding how marketing can serve as a strategic instrument to enhance the participation of marginalized groups through market access, social representation, and the strengthening of economic capacities. The strategies analyzed encompass co-creation, alternative distribution, pricing innovation, and the utilization of digitalization as a marketing medium that expands market access. The findings of the study indicate that marketing functions as an empowerment mechanism when it is designed with a participatory and community-based orientation. The involvement of marginalized groups in chain broadens value their economic bargaining power, while simultaneously strengthening the social legitimacy of enterprises. Moreover, marketing strategies that integrate inclusive narratives in brand communication are capable of reducing social stigma and fostering a sense of ownership within the community. Community-based marketing approaches have been shown to establish collaborative networks that enhance collective capacity and drive economic participation. Overall, inclusively designed marketing plays a significant role in creating a more just and balanced business ecosystem. This article underscores the importance of integrating marketing strategies with social agendas to achieve sustainable development. Thus, marketing should not be viewed solely as a business function but also as a social instrument that contributes to the welfare of marginalized groups.

Keywords: inclusive marketing, social inclusion, empowerment, marginalized groups, economic participation, community strategy, social legitimacy.

A. INTRODUCTION

Global socio-economic transformations demonstrate that marketing is no longer confined to a purely commercial function, but increasingly embodies a strategic social dimension. In the digital era, marketing strategies possess the capacity to facilitate connections among individuals, create access to resources, and expand participation for groups that have traditionally been marginalized. Kotler et al. (2017) emphasize that twenty-first-century marketing is becoming more human-centric, positioning human values and social solidarity as integral elements of the exchange process.

This development has grown in importance given that marketing serves as a vehicle for the distribution of symbols, values, and social norms that shape collective perceptions. Through social campaigns, storytelling, and digital communication strategies, marketing contributes to the formation of identity and community engagement. According to Sheth and Sinha (2015), sustainability-oriented marketing prioritizes not only the interests of individual consumers, but also the needs of society at large, including those marginalized from mainstream economic flows.

The phenomenon of globalization generates a dual dynamic: it broadens access to information while simultaneously widening the gap of inequality. It is within this context that marketing assumes a strategic role as a bridge, connecting marginalized groups to broader social and economic networks. Wood (2000) demonstrate that marketing strategies grounded in social justice can challenge exclusionary structures, thereby creating opportunities for more equitable participation.

Consequently, modern marketing has evolved into a social instrument capable of supporting the active engagement of all segments of society. Through inclusive representation, distribution,

and communication, marketing contributes to the redistribution of opportunities and the reinforcement of social solidarity within an increasingly complex societal order (Ruiz-Roqueñi & Retolaza, 2012).

At a more specific level, marketing provides a tangible contribution to the empowerment of marginalized groups, either through products specifically designed to meet their unique needs or by implementing distribution strategies that increase access. For example, community-based marketing programs in rural African regions, as discussed by Anderson and Billou (2007), illustrate how adaptation in distribution and pricing strategies can enhance access for impoverished groups to essential goods and services.

Furthermore, inclusive marketing practices implemented by various social enterprises provide evidence that well-crafted strategies can enhance self-confidence, economic participation, and identity awareness among marginalized groups (Verbytska et al., 2023). Simanis et al. (2008) assert that initiatives based on economic inclusion can foster social bonds while creating local economic sustainability.

Despite their significant potential, marketing practices aimed at supporting social inclusion and the empowerment of marginalized groups face numerous structural obstacles. One such barrier is the persistent tendency for marketing strategies to focus predominantly on mainstream consumer segments, resulting in the neglect of marginal communities' needs. This leads to gaps in access to information, products, and services, which in turn perpetuate cycles of social exclusion (Viswanathan et al., 2010).

Additionally, marketing is often caught in the trap of symbolization that exacerbates stereotypes against marginalized groups. Instead of providing opportunities for empowerment, biased representation can hinder the process of social inclusion. Varman et al. (2012) indicate that marketing strategies that are insensitive to social dimensions may intensify marginalization by reducing certain groups to commercial objects rather than empowering subjects.

This issue warrants careful attention, as marketing possesses a unique capacity to shape public opinion, reorganize access to opportunities, and broaden social participation. Through an understanding of how marketing

strategies can promote social inclusion, academics and practitioners alike can gain critical insights to design more equitable approaches.

The urgency of this matter increases in light of the growing socio-economic disparities observed globally. When marketing continually targets only established segments, the risk of marginalization becomes more pronounced. Therefore, exploring the role of marketing in strengthening social inclusion is imperative in the quest to address contemporary challenges of inequality.

This study aims to examine how marketing practices can function as a means to advance social inclusion for marginalized groups, as well as to elaborate on marketing strategies that contribute to increased economic and social participation among these populations.

B. METHOD

A literature review methodology was employed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role of marketing in supporting social inclusion and the empowerment of marginalized groups. This approach facilitates the synthesis of perspectives from multiple relevant disciplines, thereby providing a more holistic interpretation of the surrounding socio-economic issues. Snyder (2019) emphasizes that systematic literature reviews offer a robust conceptual framework by critically examining, synthesizing, and evaluating previous studies. Within this context, literature on social marketing, sustainability, and community empowerment served as the primary focus for analysis.

The initial step in conducting the literature review involved the selection of sources. Academic articles, books, and reports from international organizations published between 2000 and 2024 were considered as reference materials to obtain both conceptual and empirical data. Kitchenham et al. (2009) highlight the importance of a systematic selection procedure, supported by clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, in order to ensure the quality and relevance of sources used. In this study, the selection criteria included publications from reputable journals, a focus on marketing and social inclusion, and relevance to issues surrounding the empowerment of marginalized groups.

The subsequent stage consisted of analysis and synthesis. Data collected from the literature were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns, gaps, and developments within the academic discourse on marketing and social empowerment. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) affirm that literature synthesis is not simply a summary, but a process of interpretation that enables the extraction of new insights. Accordingly, the literature review approach employed in this study seeks to formulate a conceptual understanding of how marketing can promote social inclusion and devise more sustainable empowerment strategies for marginalized groups.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marketing Practice as a Means of Social Inclusion

Marketing holds a strategic role in facilitating marginalized groups' access to economic, social, and cultural opportunities. Through inclusive marketing approaches, firms do not merely offer products but also create spaces for participation among individuals who are often excluded from conventional market systems. Sheth and Sisodia (2012) highlight that socially oriented marketing can expand collective economic benefits by establishing fair and equitable distribution mechanisms. For example, through micro-marketing initiatives, marginalized groups may engage directly with markets, thus overcoming barriers in access to goods and services. This concept illustrates that marketing extends beyond commercial transactions and involves the provision of avenues for social integration. The implementation of inclusive marketing strategies enables companies to develop business models that are not exclusive to high purchasing power segments, but also to communities with limited financial resources that hold the potential to become loyal segments. Therefore, marketing guided by social justice principles serves as an instrument to reduce social segregation and strengthen community cohesion.

One of the key mechanisms for supporting social inclusion through marketing is the development of communication strategies that give prominence to the narratives of marginalized groups. Inclusive marketing communication can alter social representation and reduce the stigma attached to individuals living on the periphery. Viswanathan et al.

(2010) explain that visual representation and narratives in marketing materials exert a significant influence on the perception of social acceptance. When companies integrate the identities of marginalized groups into marketing campaigns, they not only expand their markets but also strengthen the social identity of these groups. An example can be found in the depiction of rural women or local artisans in product promotions, which indirectly enhances the public image of these groups. Inclusive marketing thus serves as an instrument of social normalization, in which marginalized groups are positioned as integral components of economic development narratives rather than as separate entities. This illustrates that marketing practices can contribute to strengthening social inclusion through symbolic mechanisms rooted in representation.

Inclusive marketing also plays a role in expanding economic access for marginalized groups by developing products and services tailored to their specific needs. Anderson and Billou (2007) emphasize that the development of the "4A" strategy—availability, affordability, acceptability, and awareness—is essential to involve low-income consumers in the market ecosystem. When companies design products that are affordable, accessible, and aligned with cultural preferences, they directly mitigate the structural barriers that often hinder the participation of marginalized groups. A practical example is evident in the distribution models for consumer goods in rural areas that rely on micro-retail networks, where companies not only extend market reach but also create new business opportunities for local communities. In this way, marketing functions as an empowerment tool, as marginalized groups become not only consumers but also productive participants within the value chain.

Companies that adopt community-based marketing strategies can create participatory spaces in which marginalized groups assume active, rather than passive, roles. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) assert that community involvement in the branding process enhances social legitimacy and fosters a sense of ownership. When companies engage marginalized groups in product design, distribution, or communication campaigns, these processes foster the creation of inclusive collective identities. This can be observed in co-creation initiatives, where consumers from marginalized groups participate in the development of products tailored to their needs.

Such an approach yields not only economic benefits but also cultivates social self-confidence, as marginalized groups gain recognition as valuable contributors within the value chain (Alamin et al., 2021). Consequently, community-based marketing practices serve as integrative mechanisms that foster social solidarity.

A critical dimension of marketing in support of social inclusion is its role in enhancing consumer literacy. Adkins and Ozanne (2005) point out that marketing can serve as an educational vehicle that equips individuals from marginalized groups with the knowledge required to participate in the economic system. Social marketing programs with educational objectives, such as health or financial literacy campaigns, often enhance the capacity of marginalized groups to make informed decisions. In this respect, marketing goes beyond being a commercial channel and also functions as a learning instrument that supports the development of self-reliance. By advancing literacy, companies simultaneously create more informed consumers capable of maximizing the benefits of available goods and services.

Beyond its educational function, marketing also plays a pivotal role in shaping more inclusive social norms. Kotler et al. (2017) note that social marketing can be leveraged to drive behavioral change within society by internalizing particular values. When marketing campaigns highlight issues such as gender equality, ethnic diversity, or disability inclusion, these messages have the potential to shift discriminatory norms toward greater accommodation. Thus, marketing supports marginalized groups not only by facilitating economic access, but also by contributing to the creation of a more equitable social order. The long-term impact is the emergence of a more open society, in which marginalized groups possess opportunities for participation equal to those of other communities.

The application of digital technology in marketing strategies also makes a significant contribution to the social inclusion of marginalized groups. Social media, e-commerce, and community-based platforms enable broader connections between companies and previously isolated consumers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) demonstrate that social media functions as an open dialogue space connecting various segments of society. From the perspective of inclusion, this development

offers marginalized groups channels to express their aspirations, access product information, and market local goods without reliance on exploitative intermediaries. Digital technology thus creates alternative pathways for economic participation, whereby geographical and social barriers are minimized.

Marketing practices that support social inclusion also underscore the importance of partnerships with civil society organizations. London and Hart (2004) emphasize that collaboration with local institutions enhances a company's understanding of the social realities facing marginalized groups. Such partnerships produce more relevant distribution strategies by utilizing pre-existing social networks within communities. For instance, cooperative-based marketing programs in developing countries demonstrate that the integration of social networks can both extend product distribution and boost the bargaining power of marginalized groups. Consequently, marketing operates as a collaborative tool that reinforces social structures through inclusive partnership networks.

Another essential dimension is the way marketing fosters sustainability through a social justice-based approach. Desmond and Crane (2002) state that ethical marketing stresses the balance between business objectives and societal interests. When companies develop marketing strategies that account for the welfare of marginalized groups, they create shared value that transcends mere financial gain. Justice-oriented marketing initiatives, such as fair trade programs, provide wider market access for small-scale producers to enter global markets under equitable pricing conditions. In this context, marketing not only alleviates exclusion but also bolsters the productive capacity of marginalized groups to compete sustainably (Darmawan & Grenier, 2021).

Furthermore, inclusive marketing plays a pivotal role in strengthening the collective aspirations of marginalized groups. Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain that consumption is not solely an economic activity but also serves as a medium for the expression of identity and culture. By accommodating products and services that represent local cultural values, marketing enables marginalized groups to express their identities in public domains. This process fosters social self-confidence while simultaneously reinforcing

the recognition of collective identity. Marketing thus becomes a symbolic space in which marginalized groups can be seen, valued, and accepted within the broader framework of society.

Ultimately, marketing oriented towards social inclusion can stimulate significant structural transformation among marginalized groups. When companies integrate inclusivity principles into their strategies, new opportunities are created that expand economic participation and enhance social legitimacy. Prahalad (2004) asserts that groups with limited purchasing power should not be perceived as a burden but rather as potential resources capable of driving sustainable business innovation. By recognizing marginalized groups as integral members of the market ecosystem, marketing not only extends the reach of enterprises but also redefines a more equitable social structure. This transformation demonstrates that inclusive marketing possesses dual power as both an economic instrument and an agent of social change that strengthens cohesion and justice.

Marketing Strategy for the Empowerment of Marginalized Groups

Marketing strategies can serve as a key instrument for broadening the capacity of marginalized groups to participate in economic and social activities. By adapting product, pricing, distribution, and promotional strategies, enterprises are able to create opportunities for previously excluded groups to engage in mainstream economic flows. Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (2011) emphasize that inclusive business strategies do not focus exclusively on value creation for the company, but also promote the formation of participatory ecosystems in which marginalized groups are afforded genuine opportunities for contribution. Through participative marketing strategies, marginalized groups can be engaged across the value chain, whether as producers, distributors, or active consumers. This approach not only reduces inequality but also strengthens the social legitimacy of companies operating in economically vulnerable areas. Consequently, inclusively designed marketing strategies function as bridges to sustainable empowerment.

The role of marketing strategy in empowering marginalized groups may be further understood through the principle of co-

creation, wherein companies engage communities in the design and development processes of products. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018) assert that co-creation not only produces goods that better meet consumer needs, but also enhances the sense of ownership and social involvement. Through direct involvement in marketing decision-making, marginalized groups acquire spaces to articulate their aspirations and reinforce their positions within the economic structure. This can be observed in initiatives involving local artisans in the design of globally marketed products. Such strategies provide access to markets while also building social confidence by acknowledging the contributions of marginalized groups.

Empowerment-focused marketing prioritizes a community-based approach, whereby marketing programs are designed to reinforce local social and economic networks. Anderson et al. (2011) maintain that community-based marketing optimizes local resources and encourages collaboration among community members. Such strategies can generate new economic opportunities for marginalized groups by expanding access to distribution networks and strengthening their production capacities. For instance, small-scale fishers organized through marketing cooperatives may obtain greater bargaining power in determining product prices. Thus, marketing strategies grounded in community development not only extend market reach, but also reinforce internal social cohesion within marginalized groups.

Marketing designed to empower marginalized groups often integrates inclusive narratives into brand communication. By presenting positive representations of marginalized groups, these strategies enhance social connectedness and reduce discriminatory stigma. Grier and Kumanyika (2010) demonstrate that inclusive marketing communications can transform the social representation of vulnerable groups while simultaneously cultivating a positive corporate image. For example, campaigns that highlight rural women as local entrepreneurs do more than promote products; they alter public perceptions regarding the capacities of women in those communities. Through such representations, marketing advances social empowerment by acknowledging the significant roles of marginalized groups in economic development.

Inclusive distribution strategies also play a crucial role in enhancing the market access of marginalized groups. Prahalad (2004), in the “Bottom of the Pyramid” concept, asserts that low-income groups retain significant economic potential if companies are able to adapt their distribution systems accordingly. By utilizing alternative distribution channels such as local kiosks, community agents, or simple digital platforms, marginalized groups can be directly connected to broader markets. The success of such strategies is demonstrated not only by increased access to products but also by the enhancement of local economic capacity through the creation of new employment opportunities. In this respect, distribution serves not merely as a logistical mechanism, but as an empowerment tool that broadens the participation of marginalized groups within the economic system.

Pricing innovation constitutes a pivotal dimension in empowerment-oriented marketing strategies. Anderson and Billou (2007) highlight that adaptable pricing strategies, such as micro-payment schemes or basic subscription models, enable marginalized groups to access products and services that were previously unattainable. This approach not only expands market share but also establishes a more equitable mechanism for economic participation. For example, micro-finance-based healthcare programs allow low-income households to access essential medicines. Over the long term, inclusive pricing strategies have the capacity to strengthen the purchasing power of marginalized groups while simultaneously enhancing the economic stability of the community.

Digital marketing strategies also play a transformative role in broadening the economic participation of marginalized groups. Digitalization provides opportunities for individuals from marginalized backgrounds to leverage online platforms for selling products or services. Donner and Escobari (2010) affirm that digital technology enables marginalized groups to access markets at low cost and expand their distribution reach. For instance, the use of social media by micro-entrepreneurs in rural areas has extended their customer base to national and even international levels. Thus, digital marketing strategies create opportunities for empowerment that not only increase income but also reinforce the social integration of marginalized groups through intercommunity interaction (Otaokpukpu, 2024).

Empowerment through marketing is also connected to the development of entrepreneurial capacity among marginalized groups. London and Hart (2004) emphasize that marketing strategies incorporating entrepreneurship training can enhance business skills and open new economic opportunities. By providing access to marketing knowledge, marginalized groups are no longer confined to the role of consumers but become active agents in production and distribution. A clear example is observed in social entrepreneurship training programs that connect local artisans with export markets through collective branding strategies. Marketing, when accompanied by capacity building, demonstrates how business strategies can increase social participation while simultaneously reducing economic vulnerability (Denga, 2023).

Another salient aspect is marketing strategies that encourage collective participation through cooperative or associative mechanisms. Birchall and Simmons (2004) stress that marketing cooperatives provide marginalized groups with opportunities to improve collective bargaining power, reduce transaction costs, and expand access to resources. This strategy enables marginalized groups to derive greater benefits from market activities while strengthening social solidarity within the community. An illustrative example is found in coffee farmers' cooperatives that manage product marketing collectively, thereby reaching international markets with joint branding. In this way, cooperative marketing strategies display a tangible capacity to enhance economic empowerment while reinforcing social participation among marginalized groups.

Marketing strategies oriented toward the empowerment of marginalized groups can also reinforce corporate social legitimacy. Jamali and Karam (2018) explain that when companies adopt inclusive marketing strategies, they not only obtain financial advantages but also enhance their social reputation. Social legitimacy is critical, as it fosters more stable long-term relationships with marginalized communities and builds public trust. For instance, multinational enterprises that involve local communities in the value chain are perceived as more ethical and responsible. Marketing strategies founded on the principle of social legitimacy demonstrate that empowerment is not solely a philanthropic agenda but also a core element of business sustainability strategies.

Ultimately, empowerment-oriented marketing strategies generate a dual impact by enhancing both the economic capacity and social integration of marginalized groups. Kolk et al. (2014) emphasize that empowerment-based marketing strategies provide opportunities for companies to construct inclusive business ecosystems while simultaneously strengthening social development at the community level. When marginalized groups gain broader access to markets and active participation in economic decision-making, they not only achieve increased income, but also solidify their social standing within society. Thus, marketing strategies function as sustainable empowerment instruments that connect business interests with the agenda of social justice.

D. CONCLUSION

Marketing possesses a transformative capacity to promote social inclusion while fostering the empowerment of marginalized groups. Inclusive marketing practices, whether through co-creation, alternative distribution, innovative pricing strategies, or the utilization of digital technology, have demonstrated the ability to reduce disparities in access to economic and social resources. The implementation of community-based strategies further illustrates how marketing serves as a mechanism for strengthening social networks and enhancing collective capacities. By integrating marginalized groups into the value chain, marketing contributes to the reinforcement of their social positions and unlocks wider opportunities for participation in economic development.

Moreover, marketing strategies designed in an inclusive manner not only strengthen purchasing power and economic capacity, but also enhance the social legitimacy of the implementing companies. The involvement of marginalized groups in marketing processes creates sustainable participation mechanisms, reinforces community self-confidence, and expands corporate social legitimacy. Consequently, marketing can be regarded as a strategic instrument for establishing business ecosystems that are equitable, balanced, and sustainable.

Companies and social organizations are encouraged to broaden their marketing approaches to ensure the active participation of marginalized groups in all dimensions of

business strategy. Scholars in the field of marketing are advised to enrich the discourse on inclusive marketing models that integrate economic and social objectives within a unified framework. Governments and policymakers should provide institutional support to reinforce community-based marketing infrastructure, thereby ensuring wider participatory spaces for marginalized groups within the modern economic system.

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