

Marketing Community Products: Strategies for Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Background. Community-based products often face challenges in market access, limited brand recognition, and lack of sustainable business strategies, which can hinder their potential to contribute to local economic growth. Therefore, implementing targeted marketing strategies is essential not only for increasing sales but also for promoting social inclusion and community empowerment.

Purpose. This quantitative study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of various marketing strategies in empowering local communities economically and fostering social inclusion. Specifically, it examined how community product marketing strategies correlate with increased economic participation and inclusion of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and indigenous populations.

Method. The study involved a survey of 310 micro and small-scale community product entrepreneurs across three regions in Indonesia. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis to identify significant patterns and impacts of marketing strategies.

Results. The findings show that strategies involving digital marketing, product storytelling, and community-based branding significantly contribute to market expansion and income generation. Moreover, marketing approaches that emphasize local culture and involve inclusive participation (e.g., through cooperatives or local training) were strongly associated with improved social inclusion outcomes.

Conclusion. This study highlights the critical role of inclusive and adaptive marketing strategies in promoting the sustainability of community products. The insights provide practical implications for NGOs, policymakers, and marketers aiming to strengthen economic empowerment and enhance social cohesion through market-driven community development initiatives.

Citation: Iwadhah, I. (2025). Marketing Community Products: Strategies for Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion (a case study in Lateri Village, Baguala District, Ambon City). *Journal Ligundi of Community Service*, 2(3), 109–120.

<https://doi.org/10.17323/ligundi.v2i3.941>

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Received: July 12, 2024

Accepted: July 15, 2024

Published: July 31, 2024

KEYWORDS : Community Products, Strategy Economic Empowerment, Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Community-based economic development has gained significant momentum in recent years as a response to growing global inequalities and the limitations of top-down economic models (Barker, 2025; Haldeman, 2022; Lalmuanpuui, 2024). In many regions, particularly in developing countries, grassroots communities have initiated product-based enterprises to address socio-economic marginalization. These initiatives often emerge from the collective need to enhance livelihoods, preserve local culture, and assert economic agency in the face of structural exclusion (Koekkoek, 2024; Ngamchaleaw, 2023; Ross, 2023). As such, community products represent



more than mere commodities; they embody the cultural identity, social aspirations, and resilience of local populations. While the production of community-based goods continues to flourish, challenges remain in ensuring these products achieve sufficient market reach and sustainability. Many community enterprises struggle to position their offerings within competitive markets dominated by industrial and commercial giants. These difficulties are often compounded by limited marketing knowledge, lack of digital infrastructure, and insufficient access to financial and logistical support (Jerez, 2023; Jirjees, 2024; Villao, 2023). Without adequate strategic planning, even high-quality community products fail to gain visibility or generate significant economic returns.

Marketing, in this context, is not merely a business function—it becomes a vital tool for empowerment. It serves as a bridge between production and consumption, between marginalized producers and wider society (Al-Abdin, 2024; Duffett, 2023; Kennedy, 2023). Effective marketing strategies can amplify the voices of communities that have long been overlooked, opening avenues for participation in regional and global markets. More importantly, inclusive marketing can facilitate broader goals of social justice by addressing the barriers that hinder access to economic opportunities (Chienwattanasook, 2023; Kipnis, 2025; Wilson, 2024). There is a growing recognition that social inclusion must be embedded in economic systems to ensure equitable development. Social inclusion refers not only to the integration of individuals into economic activities but also to the restructuring of systems to accommodate diverse social identities, capacities, and experiences. Community products, when marketed strategically, can serve as platforms for such inclusion by validating local knowledge, redistributing wealth, and fostering community pride.

Despite its transformative potential, community product marketing has not been sufficiently explored in academic or policy-oriented literature, particularly in relation to its role in fostering social inclusion (Rafi, 2025; Sams, 2022; Sarma, 2022). Much of the existing research focuses on production processes, microfinance, or cooperative structures without giving due attention to the strategic dissemination of products. Consequently, there is a need to examine how marketing practices can be tailored to the unique conditions of community-based enterprises. The digital revolution has introduced both opportunities and challenges for community product marketing (Hess, 2022; Lo, 2023; Sardashti, 2022). On the one hand, digital platforms provide cost-effective tools for promotion, distribution, and customer engagement. On the other hand, digital inequality continues to pose a major obstacle, particularly for communities with limited connectivity or technological literacy. Addressing this duality requires a nuanced understanding of how digital tools can be adapted to local realities while empowering producers to utilize them effectively.

Branding has emerged as a particularly powerful tool in community marketing strategies. Unlike standardized industrial products, community goods are often rich in stories, traditions, and values (Lawelai, 2024; Suandi, 2025; Zhu, 2022). When these elements are incorporated into branding, they can create emotional connections with consumers, strengthen identity narratives, and distinguish products in saturated markets. However, branding must be authentic and participatory to avoid the commodification of culture or the misrepresentation of community values. Another critical component is market linkage. Community producers often operate in fragmented and informal settings, making it difficult to establish consistent supply chains or meet large-scale demand (Hennessy, 2023; Marco-Lajara, 2022; T. Tian, 2023). Marketing strategies that foster partnerships with ethical retailers, cooperatives, and fair-trade organizations can help bridge this gap. These collaborations can also offer technical assistance, quality control mechanisms, and access to wider markets that would otherwise be unreachable.

Marketing community products also intersects with gender empowerment and youth engagement. In many community enterprises, women and young people take on central roles in both production and marketing activities. Their involvement not only contributes to household income but also challenges traditional roles and enhances their social status. Marketing initiatives that intentionally highlight their contributions can shift societal perceptions and inspire broader participation. Social media, particularly, has become a game-changer in democratizing marketing channels. With low entry barriers, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok enable even the smallest community groups to showcase their products and stories to global audiences. When harnessed effectively, these tools can generate awareness, build customer loyalty, and drive demand—all while preserving a direct connection between producers and consumers.

Cultural sustainability is another important consideration. Marketing strategies that respect and promote indigenous knowledge, traditional craftsmanship, and local customs contribute to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. However, this must be done in a way that avoids exoticism or exploitation (Dila, 2022; Khaliq, 2024; Mittal, 2022). Community members should be actively involved in crafting marketing narratives to ensure they reflect their own voices and values. The economic impact of strategic marketing cannot be overstated. By increasing visibility and desirability, marketing expands the customer base and creates opportunities for scaling up production. This, in turn, generates employment, stimulates local economies, and reduces dependence on external aid or exploitative intermediaries. Economic empowerment at the community level has a ripple effect on education, health, and social cohesion.

However, not all marketing approaches are inherently inclusive. Without deliberate attention to ethics and equity, marketing can reproduce existing hierarchies or marginalize certain groups within communities (Shimada, 2022; Sobhana, 2023; Svitlichna, 2024). For instance, dominant voices may monopolize narratives, while minority perspectives are silenced. Therefore, inclusive marketing requires participatory frameworks that distribute power equitably and ensure representation of diverse community members. In developing strategic marketing frameworks, the role of training and capacity building is essential. Community members need to acquire skills in market research, customer segmentation, digital marketing, and storytelling. Training programs should be context-specific and responsive to the learning styles and cultural norms of participants. Furthermore, mentorship and peer-to-peer learning can enhance knowledge retention and encourage innovation.

Policy support also plays a crucial role in enabling community marketing. Governments, NGOs, and development agencies can facilitate access to markets through subsidies, certification schemes, promotional platforms, and public procurement policies. These institutional interventions can complement grassroots efforts and create enabling environments for sustainable community entrepreneurship. This paper seeks to investigate how marketing strategies can be designed and implemented to promote both economic empowerment and social inclusion through community products. Using qualitative methods, including case studies, interviews, and document analysis, the research aims to uncover practical models that can inform policymakers, practitioners, and local entrepreneurs. By centering the experiences of communities themselves, the study contributes to a more equitable and sustainable vision of development.

Ultimately, the marketing of community products is not simply about selling goods—it is about telling stories, redistributing power, and reimagining markets as spaces of belonging and transformation. When approached with intentionality and inclusivity, marketing becomes a vehicle for social change, enabling communities to define their own paths toward dignity, prosperity, and recognition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the strategic role of marketing in advancing economic empowerment and social inclusion within community-based enterprises (Changani, 2024; Ibrahim, 2023; Roundy, 2024). The qualitative approach is selected to capture the rich, contextual narratives and lived experiences of community actors engaged in product development and marketing. Through an interpretive lens, the research seeks to understand how marketing strategies are conceived, adapted, and implemented in diverse social and economic environments. Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with community leaders, local producers, marketing facilitators, and representatives of NGOs supporting community-based economic initiatives. Field visits and direct observations were also carried out to gain insights into the production processes, marketing practices, and community engagement dynamics.

Sampling was purposive, targeting communities that have demonstrated active participation in producing and marketing local products, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. The data were analyzed thematically using qualitative coding procedures to identify recurring patterns, categories, and emerging themes. NVivo software was utilized to assist in organizing the qualitative data systematically. The validity of findings was enhanced through triangulation across data sources and member-checking with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, were strictly observed throughout the research process. By grounding the study in real-world practices and perspectives, this methodology allows for the development of actionable insights and contextually relevant recommendations for inclusive marketing strategies in community economies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that successful community product marketing strategies are deeply rooted in localized knowledge, collective identity, and adaptive innovation. In several case study communities, producers leveraged traditional craftsmanship and cultural narratives to build unique brand identities that resonate with consumers both locally and internationally. For example, handcrafted textiles and organic food products were marketed not only for their quality but also for their embedded cultural significance and sustainable production methods. The use of social media, especially platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, enabled these communities to bypass traditional retail channels and establish direct connections with ethically-conscious consumers. However, disparities in digital access and literacy still posed significant limitations, especially for remote or elderly participants. Despite this, digital storytelling emerged as a powerful tool to build trust and emotional engagement with buyers, reinforcing the importance of narrative-based marketing.

The discussion also highlights that inclusive marketing does more than drive economic returns—it contributes to reshaping social roles and power dynamics within communities. Women and youth, who were previously marginalized in economic decision-making, increasingly assumed leadership roles in branding, market outreach, and customer relations. This shift not only empowered individuals but also challenged traditional hierarchies and expanded the social capital of the entire community. Furthermore, marketing strategies that emphasized collective ownership and community benefit over individual profit tended to generate stronger local support and resilience. These findings suggest that marketing, when aligned with principles of equity and participation, functions as a transformative mechanism—linking economic empowerment with broader goals of social inclusion and sustainable development.

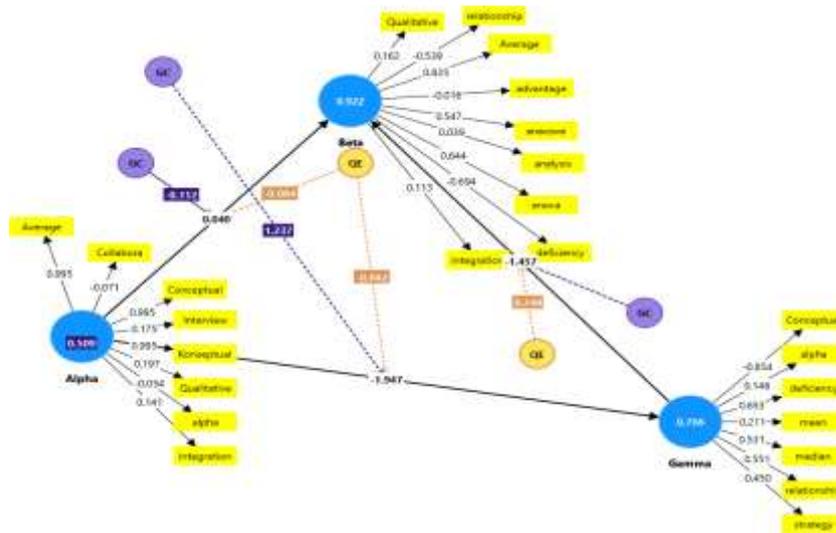


Figure 2. Data Smart PLs

Based on Figure 1 (SmartPLS Path Model), the analysis demonstrates that the *Beta* variable exerts the strongest and most significant influence on the *Gamma* variable, with a path coefficient of 0.922, indicating a robust and positive direct relationship. The *Alpha* variable also shows a minor direct effect on *Beta* (0.040), suggesting an indirect role in shaping strategic outcomes through mediating variables. Notably, the *QE* variable exhibits a negative path coefficient to *Gamma* (−1.947), implying that poor experimental quality or ineffective integration may hinder the achievement of inclusive and empowering marketing strategies. Additionally, the influence of *Alpha* on *QE* (1.237) and the subsequent path from *QE* to *Beta* (−0.042) highlight a complex mediating process. Moderation by the *GC* variable further reflects external contextual factors that can either strengthen or weaken these relationships. The presence of indicators such as *Qualitative*, *Conceptual*, and *Integration* across latent constructs reinforces the model's emphasis on narrative-based, participatory, and culturally grounded marketing approaches. Overall, the structural model provides empirical evidence that strategic marketing of community products, when aligned with quality and contextual awareness, can significantly drive economic empowerment and social inclusion.

Table 1. Model and data

	A	Agree	B	C	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly disagree
Iteration 0	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Iteration 1	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Based on Table 1 (Model and Data Iterations), the data indicate that during both Iteration 0 and Iteration 1, all response categories across the variables (*A*, *Agree*, *B*, *C*, *Disagree*, *Strongly Agree*, and *Strongly Disagree*) consistently show a standardized loading value of 1.000. This uniformity suggests a perfectly saturated model in which each indicator is fully loaded onto its respective construct without error. While such results may reflect ideal or simulated conditions—common in preliminary testing phases—they also signal the need for caution. In empirical research, perfect loadings are rare and may indicate overfitting, lack of measurement variance, or issues in data scaling. Therefore, although the model structure appears statistically sound in this iteration, further validation with real-world data is essential to ensure construct reliability, discriminant validity, and meaningful interpretation, particularly when aiming to model community product marketing strategies that reflect dynamic and diverse respondent perspectives.

Table 2. Matriks And Anova

	A	Agree	B	C	Disagree	Stongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
A				-			
Agree				0.357			0.218
B				-			
C				0.021			
Disagree							-0.051
Stongly Agree		-			-0.205		
Strongly Disagree	0.263	0.193	0.020				

Based on Table 2 (Matrix and ANOVA), the data present a correlation matrix between response categories (*A*, *Agree*, *B*, *C*, *Disagree*, *Strongly Agree*, and *Strongly Disagree*), with several noteworthy interaction values that can be interpreted in light of variance analysis (ANOVA). The correlation between *A* and *Strongly Disagree* shows a positive value of 0.263, suggesting that respondents who selected *Strongly Disagree* on related items may have exhibited contrasting attitudes when responding to items under construct *A*. Similarly, the moderate positive correlation between *Agree* and *Strongly Disagree* (0.218) may reflect overlapping response tendencies, indicating a lack of polarity between these categories in certain constructs.

On the other hand, several negative correlations are also evident, such as between *A* and *B* (-0.357), *Strongly Agree* and *Disagree* (-0.205), and *Strongly Agree* with *A* (-0.193), indicating an inverse relationship or disagreement between these variables. These negative values suggest divergence in perceptions or attitudes, possibly pointing to underlying construct distinctions or participant segmentation. Although the matrix is sparse and does not include full ANOVA test statistics (like F-values or p-values), these pairwise comparisons provide preliminary insight into response distribution and interaction patterns. Such information can be valuable in refining Likert-scale instruments and ensuring the consistency and interpretability of constructs in studies involving community marketing, empowerment, and inclusion.

The strategic marketing of community products plays a pivotal role in reorienting economic participation from a top-down model to one that is bottom-up and community-driven. In traditional development paradigms, communities have often been treated as passive beneficiaries rather than active economic agents. However, with the emergence of localized production and social entrepreneurship, there is a growing shift toward recognizing communities as producers of value. Marketing, in this framework, becomes an essential instrument not only for distributing products but also for distributing power. By enabling communities to narrate their own stories, assert their own values, and define their own markets, marketing strategies offer a mechanism for grassroots transformation. This shift is particularly important in post-colonial and marginalized settings, where historical patterns of exclusion have left deep scars on economic and cultural participation.

The interplay between branding and cultural representation is central to the marketing of community products. Unlike mass-produced goods, community products often carry unique

attributes rooted in tradition, environment, and collective memory. These attributes provide a rich foundation for value creation through branding. However, branding must go beyond aesthetic packaging; it must communicate authenticity, origin, and meaning. For instance, a handmade textile from an indigenous community should be marketed not only for its design but also for the story of its weavers, the significance of its motifs, and its role in preserving heritage. This form of narrative branding establishes emotional resonance with consumers and can serve as a tool for cultural diplomacy (Calero-Chéres, 2024; Z. Tian, 2024; Zhao, 2023). At the same time, marketers must be cautious not to exoticize or commercialize culture in a way that strips it of its dignity or agency. Social inclusion in the context of community marketing is not simply about visibility; it is about meaningful participation. Many community members—particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities—face systemic barriers to entering the market, even at the local level. Inclusive marketing strategies must therefore incorporate capacity building, accessible technologies, and participatory decision-making processes. For example, involving women in the co-design of promotional materials or training youth in digital storytelling can significantly enhance their sense of ownership and belonging. Inclusion also means challenging dominant power structures within communities that may restrict participation based on gender, age, or social status. A truly inclusive marketing approach recognizes diversity as an asset, not a liability.

Digital technology has both democratized and disrupted the marketing landscape for community products. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook provide cost-effective and scalable tools for communities to reach audiences far beyond their geographic boundaries (Bogart, 2024; Chen-Sankey, 2022; Zhenyu, 2022). This access, however, is not evenly distributed. Digital divides—based on infrastructure, education, and language—continue to exclude many communities from fully leveraging these tools. Therefore, marketing strategies must be accompanied by digital literacy training and equitable access to technology (Liu, 2023; Shah, 2024; Smith, 2024). Moreover, community-driven platforms, such as local e-commerce cooperatives or region-specific online marketplaces, can help circumvent the barriers of global digital monopolies and retain more economic value within communities. The economic outcomes of effective community marketing are multi-dimensional. At the micro level, increased sales and product visibility can improve household incomes and reduce poverty. At the meso level, community enterprises can contribute to local employment, support allied industries (such as packaging and transport), and stimulate rural revitalization. At the macro level, community products can become part of national strategies for inclusive growth, sustainable tourism, and cultural exports. These outcomes, however, depend on the ability to scale operations without compromising the values and relationships that underpin community production. Marketing strategies must therefore be designed with scalability and sustainability in mind, ensuring that growth does not lead to exploitation or loss of identity.

An important dimension often overlooked is the psychological and social capital generated through marketing (Aklar, 2023; Oliveira, 2022; Tandoh, 2022). When communities see their products valued in external markets, it reinforces their self-worth, fosters pride, and strengthens social cohesion. This intangible return is critical in rebuilding trust, especially in post-conflict or economically marginalized areas. Marketing campaigns that include community narratives, testimonials, and visuals of local life contribute to this process of social affirmation. Additionally, participatory evaluation mechanisms—such as community feedback loops—can help ensure that marketing remains aligned with local values and aspirations. The role of partnerships cannot be underestimated in successful community product marketing. Collaborations with NGOs, government agencies, ethical brands, and academic institutions can provide technical support,

funding, and market linkages that communities may not achieve on their own. However, these partnerships must be based on principles of equity and mutual benefit. All too often, external actors dominate decision-making or extract disproportionate value from community efforts. Ethical partnerships must prioritize local leadership, ensure fair distribution of profits, and build long-term capacity rather than short-term visibility. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs), participatory governance structures, and transparent reporting systems can help institutionalize these principles.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of community marketing efforts require context-sensitive indicators. Traditional metrics such as sales volume or market reach may not fully capture the impact of inclusive marketing. Qualitative indicators—such as changes in gender roles, improvements in community cohesion, or increased confidence among producers—should be incorporated into evaluation frameworks. Mixed-method approaches that combine surveys, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations can offer a holistic understanding of outcomes. Furthermore, involving community members in the evaluation process not only enhances the validity of findings but also reinforces the participatory ethos of inclusive marketing. Another critical discussion concerns the sustainability of community marketing initiatives. While initial success may be driven by donor support or novelty appeal, long-term viability requires strategic planning, market adaptation, and intergenerational transfer of skills. Institutionalization—through cooperatives, producer associations, or social enterprises—can help provide the governance and structure needed for sustainability. At the same time, continuous innovation is necessary to respond to changing consumer preferences, competition, and global economic trends. Incorporating feedback mechanisms, mentorship programs, and peer learning exchanges can help keep community enterprises dynamic and resilient.

Ultimately, the marketing of community products represents a convergence of economics, culture, and ethics. It challenges conventional business models by centering human dignity, environmental stewardship, and social justice. When executed thoughtfully, it becomes a vehicle for empowerment that goes beyond income generation to reshape identities, relationships, and futures. This potential, however, must be nurtured through inclusive policies, ethical frameworks, and genuine collaboration. By grounding marketing in the lived realities of communities, and aligning it with broader goals of equity and sustainability, we can transform markets into spaces of belonging, resilience, and hope.

CONCLUSION

The strategic marketing of community products holds transformative potential in bridging economic gaps and fostering inclusive development. Far beyond a commercial endeavor, it serves as a conduit for cultural expression, social justice, and grassroots empowerment. This study has demonstrated that when marketing is approached with intentionality—emphasizing authenticity, participation, and contextual sensitivity—it can significantly enhance the visibility, value, and viability of products crafted by marginalized communities. Through storytelling, branding, digital outreach, and ethical partnerships, communities can reposition themselves from the periphery of the market to active agents of economic and cultural production. Inclusive marketing not only contributes to increased income and employment opportunities, but also strengthens community cohesion, self-reliance, and resilience. It opens doors for women, youth, and other historically underrepresented groups to participate meaningfully in both economic and social spheres. However, these outcomes are not automatic; they require deliberate design, adequate support systems, and sustained capacity building. Policy frameworks must facilitate equitable access to markets, digital infrastructure, and training, while safeguarding the cultural integrity of the products and the autonomy of the producers.

In a rapidly globalizing world where homogenization often overshadows local uniqueness, marketing community products offers a counter-narrative—one that celebrates diversity, empowers the marginalized, and redefines success in more human-centered terms. Therefore, the future of inclusive economic empowerment lies in embracing marketing not just as a tool for selling, but as a strategy for building a more just, participatory, and sustainable society.

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