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# Voices of change through *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*: a case of women's empowerment in sport

International  
Journal of Sports  
Marketing and  
Sponsorship

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Received 14 April 2025  
Revised 6 August 2025  
6 September 2025  
Accepted 6 September 2025

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to explore the transformation and impact of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, a speaker directory initiative designed to diversify and amplify women's voices in sports. It addresses the historical dominance of male perspectives in sport speakership and highlights efforts to achieve gender inclusivity in this domain.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research is grounded in the field of sport and social entrepreneurship and employs a collective autoethnographic methodology. Rooted in collective action theory, this case traces the development of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* from its initial social media inception to its evolution into a global platform featuring 770 speakers in over 70 countries.

**Findings** – The study finds significant disparities in speaker representation within the sports sector, emphasizing the need for diverse voices. It documents the inclusive, non-hierarchical approach of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, which adopts a peer and self-nomination process. The findings highlight the directory's success in elevating women's presence in sports discussions, illustrating the benefits of equal representation.

**Originality/value** – This research offers a unique examination of a grassroots, social media-driven movement in sport speakership, underscoring the role of collective action in driving social change. By focusing on practical outcomes and leveraging an innovative methodological approach, the study contributes original insights into achieving gender inclusivity within the sports sector.

**Keywords** Speaking, Women in sport, Social entrepreneurship, Sports business, Collective action theory

**Paper type** Research article

## Introduction

The sports industry has long been characterized by a significant gender imbalance, particularly in leadership, speakership and decision-making roles (Burton, 2015). Historically, male voices have dominated conferences, business discussions and public discourse in sports, marginalizing women and limiting their opportunities to contribute to the field. This underrepresentation in leadership positions is a persistent issue (Burton, 2015), hindering progress toward gender equity. Sociological perspectives highlight the complex societal factors that contribute to these disparities, including gender stereotypes, lack of access to networks and organizational cultures that favor men (LaVoi *et al.*, 2019). While women are making strides in various aspects of sports globally, their pathways to leadership and influence often remain constrained by systemic barriers (Leberman, 2017). In recent years, there has been a growing movement to challenge this status quo, with women emerging as influential figures across various aspects of sports globally, though critical feminist perspectives emphasize the need to move beyond surface-level changes and address the underlying power structures that perpetuate gender inequality (Shaw, 2007, 2024). This paper presents the case of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, a transformative initiative that leverages a social media-driven marketing campaign to diversify voices in the sports sector by amplifying the presence of women speakers.



International Journal of Sports Marketing  
and Sponsorship  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
e-ISSN: 2515-7841  
p-ISSN: 1464-6658  
DOI 10.1108/IJSMS-04-2025-0165

As illustrated by [Flyvbjerg \(2011\)](#), cases of individuals, groups, organizations and events are essential for highlighting critical issues, anchoring societal processes in tangible ways and emphasizing stakeholder experiences. *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* exemplifies this approach, as it began as a grassroots movement initiated through a single social media call to action and has since evolved into a global platform featuring 770 speakers from over 70 countries ([www.collectivevisibility.org](http://www.collectivevisibility.org)). Unlike traditional ranking systems, the initiative operates on principles of inclusivity and peer/self-nomination, creating a comprehensive speaker directory rather than a hierarchical list. This case delineates the journey of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, from its inception to its current state, while examining the disparities in speaker representation within the sports industry and the broader implications of equal representation.

The paper is grounded in collective action theory (CAT), which provides a framework for understanding how individuals unite to achieve common goals and address systemic challenges. The theory underscores the importance of collaboration, shared identity and resource mobilization in driving social change – elements that are central to the success of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*. By analyzing the initiative's development and impact, this study highlights the transformative potential of collective efforts in challenging entrenched gender norms and fostering inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated spaces. As such, through this case, we aim to contribute to the growing discourse on gender equity in sports by showcasing how *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* is trying to disrupt traditional paradigms and create new opportunities for women to be seen and heard. The findings underscore the benefits of diverse representation and offer insights into how similar initiatives can be replicated in other sectors to promote systemic change.

### **Literature background and theoretical underpinnings**

The gender dynamics within sports are significantly shaped by historically entrenched patriarchal structures ([Hargreaves, 2002](#); [Theberge, 2000](#)). These systems have influenced the very fabric of sports entities, resulting in cultures that often prioritize male leadership and perspectives from the grassroots to the Olympic level ([Evans and Pfister, 2020](#)). This historical context also includes societal norms that traditionally limited women's participation in physical activity, stemming from Victorian-era ideals that confined women to more passive roles ([Eime et al., 2020](#); [Lim and Dixon, 2017](#)). Furthermore, media platforms, often designed through a Western, male-centric lens, have contributed to the under-representation of women athletes, reinforcing cultural biases regarding women's involvement in strenuous physical endeavors ([Isard and Melton, 2022](#)). While advancements like Title IX in the education sector have expanded opportunities for women, overcoming these deeply ingrained systemic barriers requires a critical examination of Western-dominated discourse and a more nuanced understanding of gender inclusivity also in sports ([Shaw, 2024](#)). A shift toward more equitable representation necessitates a conscious effort to dismantle these historically constructed imbalances and foster a more inclusive sporting environment ([Bekker et al., 2023](#)).

The participation of women in the sports sector, particularly in roles such as speakers, leaders and decision-makers, has been a critical area of scholarly discussion for decades ([Blinde et al., 1993](#); [Eime et al., 2020](#); [Felshin, 1974](#); [Lim and Dixon, 2017](#)). Longitudinal studies have explored trends, barriers and transitions related to women's participation in sports, often highlighting the gender-specific challenges they face in sustaining their involvement ([Eime et al., 2020](#); [Scheerder et al., 2006](#)). These studies reveal a persistent global disparity, with women consistently underrepresented compared to their male counterparts, not only in athletic participation but also in leadership and influential roles. There is, therefore, a growing need to examine their representation in leadership and public roles within the industry.

The challenges women face in sports leadership are further underscored by recent findings from UN Women, particularly in the context of the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics. These findings highlight persistent inequalities in media coverage, pay, sponsorship deals and

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representation in leadership roles (UN Women, 2024). For instance, women athletes earn on average only 1% of what men earn among elite athletes, and 85% of online abuse during major sporting events is directed at women (UN Women, 2024). These issues reflect broader structural problems, including globalization, digital technology, marketization and access, which women must navigate to achieve equitable participation in sports leadership (Weatherford *et al.*, 2018). These challenges are not unique to sports but are interconnected with the systemic inequalities women face across all sectors.

Despite these barriers, there are ongoing efforts at the grassroots, organizational and systemic levels to create a more inclusive environment for women in sports leadership (Eime *et al.*, 2020; Evans and Pfister, 2020; Spoor and Haye, 2013). These initiatives aim to address the structural inequalities and provide women with the opportunities and support needed to thrive as speakers, leaders and decision-makers in the sports industry. This paper builds on these discussions by presenting a case that explores how collective action can challenge these disparities and promote greater representation of women in influential roles within sports. To achieve this, CAT offers a relevant and robust framework, providing the necessary theoretical explanatory power to analyze the development and impact of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*.

The modern origins of CAT are found in the writings of economist Olson (1971), who explored how and why individuals choose to collaborate as a group. When applied in social and political sciences (for more, see Ostrom, 2009), one of its central tenets is to foster a strong sense of shared identity and solidarity among participants, as this is essential for motivating collaboration and sustaining collective efforts. For *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, building this shared identity has been an ongoing goal, aimed at uniting women from diverse backgrounds under a common purpose: diversifying voices in the sports sector. The initiative seeks to create a platform where women feel connected to a broader movement that values their contributions and challenges traditional gender norms in sports leadership and public speaking. By emphasizing inclusivity and representation, *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* aims to cultivate a sense of belonging and solidarity among its participants, encouraging them to actively engage in the movement and support one another. This shared identity is intended to serve as the foundation for sustained collaboration and collective impact.

Another important element that CAT posits is to identify and address barriers to participation, ensuring that collective efforts are accessible and inclusive. For *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, overcoming these barriers has been a critical goal, as systemic inequalities and structural challenges have historically limited women's opportunities in sports leadership and public speaking (Crawford, 2023; Evans and Pfister, 2020). The initiative aims to tackle these obstacles by leveraging strategies such as open communication, trust-building and peer/self-nomination processes. Indeed, *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* seeks to break down geographical, institutional and cultural barriers that hinder women's participation. Additionally, the initiative is designed to address structural inequalities by providing a platform that amplifies diverse voices and challenges the status quo. Through these efforts, *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* intends to create an environment where women feel empowered to participate and contribute, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable sports sector. These goals reflect the practical application of CAT in driving meaningful social change.

In light of all this, it becomes evident that *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* represents a clear example of, and falls within, the realm of sport and social entrepreneurship. Despite the existence of various schools of thought within social entrepreneurship (Bjärsholm, 2017), *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* aligns more closely with the concept of social innovation. In this context, the individual is viewed as central and is considered a visionary who utilizes innovative solutions and resources to create social value or address social issues within their community (Dees and Anderson, 2006). Based on Bjärsholm's (2017) conclusions in his review article, this case aims to provide clarity on what sport and social entrepreneurship may look like in practice. By offering concrete insights, the case seeks to counteract the risk of "conceptual stretching" as noted by Sartori (1970), which can render concepts vague and meaningless. By concentrating on the vision outlined by the first author, our case aims to

enhance the understanding of the tangible applications and potential impacts of sport and social entrepreneurship.

## Method

### *Collaborative autoethnography*

Autoethnography, a qualitative method, redirects the focus from the perceived reality of research participants to the researcher as the subject. This approach allows the researcher to have a voice in interpreting the phenomenon under study through self-reflection and often critical analysis (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The knowledge derived from the perspective of an autoethnographer provides insights that traditional qualitative methods and fixed quantitative approaches often miss. These narratives capture everyday experiences (Hoerber and Kerwin, 2013; Kerwin and Hoerber, 2015; Misener, 2020) through creative storytelling that is easily understood by audiences outside academia, fostering improvements in both personal and collective lives (Trussell, 2015). As noted in the study by Anagnostopoulos and Begović (2025) on how sport policy is formulated in practice, analytical autoethnographies must demonstrate five key characteristics: (1) the researcher actively participates in the research environment, (2) they employ analytical reflexivity, (3) they maintain a visible narrative presence in the text, (4) they engage in dialogue with individuals beyond their own perspective and (5) they are committed to theoretical analysis that enriches the understanding of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006, p. 375). Consequently, analytical autoethnography transcends simple self-reflection and aligns with what Fiske (1990) referred to as “theoretically structured introspection” (p. 85).

Collaborative autoethnography involves conducting autoethnographic research with varying levels of participation from multiple researchers (Chang *et al.*, 2013). This approach enables individuals to share their personal experiences and engage in collective analysis and interpretation (Hoerber and Kerwin, 2013). In our case, we adopted this technique, where *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* represented the first author’s narrative, while the second author provided theoretical support. The first author, acting as a social entrepreneur, documented her actions and experiences and invited the second author to collaboratively analyze the intended shared identity and identify potential barriers to participation that *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* sought to address.

In alignment with Anderson’s (2006) features of analytical autoethnographies, data collection was conducted by the first author, the creator of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* and a full participant in the research context with a unique insider view of the entire project from the offset [see feature (a)]. Additionally, analytical reflexivity [see feature (b)] was demonstrated through a comprehensive collection of field notes, which included emails, official memos, meeting records and media appearances. Tables 1 and 2 offer a detailed overview of the dataset, reflecting the first author’s interactions with informants beyond her own experiences [see feature (d)].

To ensure analytical reflexivity [see feature (c)], the second author analyzed this narrative to identify the key tenets of collective action theory through an abductive approach, focusing on elements of shared identity and evidence of dismantled barriers that enabled women to voice their interests in or participate in this collective action.

### *Data analysis process*

The collaborative analysis between the first and second author was an iterative and recursive process. Following the initial data collection period, the first author shared her field notes, memos and communication records with the second author. The second author reviewed this material and identified potential themes and patterns related to collective action theory. This initial analysis was then discussed in a series of meetings between the authors. During these meetings, the authors explored the potential implications of these themes and patterns, and the

**Table 1.** Dataset reflecting the first author's interactions with informants, using the LinkedIn platform

Type	Content title	Date	Amount	
<i>Article (LinkedIn)</i>	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY: 100+ women speaking about sport	2023/01/10	2,014 words	
	750 women speaking about sport	2023/07/06	3,931 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY: 50+ women in sports organizations	2023/09/20	1,575 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY: 1,000 women in 100 countries speaking about sport	2023/10/12	3,348 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY: What's the why?	2023/10/26	2,264 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in Africa: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/11/01	1,891 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in Asia: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/11/08	1,947 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in South America: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/11/15	1,846 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in Oceania: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/11/22	2,045 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in North America: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/11/30	2,531 words	
	COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in Europe: Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport	2023/12/06	599 words	
	<i>Direct Mail (LinkedIn)</i>	Total number of "COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY" mentions in DMs sent from me to others, or from others to me	2022/11 to 2025/4	6,792 mentions
	<i>Connection (LinkedIn)</i>	New connections made (out of current total of 11,389)	2022/11 to 2025/4	4,420 connections
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own work				

first author provided additional context and insights based on her lived experiences. For example, guided by the CAT's principles, the second author initially interpreted a series of emails as evidence of strategic networking. This includes the initial email communications between the first author and a professor from the Center for Sports and Business at Stockholm School of Economics, which sparked an academic partnership. Through discussion, the first author clarified that these initial emails primarily focused on providing emotional support, mentorship and strategic thinking, highlighting the importance of social support in sustaining collective action.

These meetings typically occurred on a bi-weekly basis for over a period of five months and lasted approximately for two hours. In addition to these meetings, the authors also exchanged written feedback on drafts of the manuscript. This written feedback allowed for a more detailed and nuanced consideration of the data and ensured that the analysis was theoretically grounded. While the collaboration was largely harmonious, there were occasional points of tension. For example, the authors initially disagreed on the relative importance of online vs offline interactions in fostering collective identity. The second author argued that online interactions were primarily instrumental, while the first author emphasized the emotional and social dimensions of online engagement. This tension was resolved through further data analysis and discussion, which led to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between online and offline interactions in shaping collective identity.

The translation of reflective notes into the final narratives presented in the latter half of the manuscript involved a process of narrative synthesis. The authors collaboratively identified key themes and patterns in the data and then developed narratives that illustrated these themes. These narratives were then reviewed and revised by both authors to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and were theoretically informed.

**Table 2.** Dataset reflecting the first author's interactions with informants: other than LinkedIn

Type	Content title	Date
<i>Media mention</i>	Uppror väckte kvinnorna [ <i>Uproar awoke the women</i> ] in <i>Dagens Industri</i>	2023–11–10
	Så ska fler röster höras: "Löparskor är inte kvinnliga för att de är rosa" ["Making more voices heard: 'Running shoes are not feminine because they are pink'"] in <i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	2024–12–3
<i>Speaking engagement</i>	Keynote at Stockholm School of Economics	2024/3/7
	Keynote at online event co-organized by the Swedish Sports Confederation and the Stockholm School of Economics Center for Sports and Business	2025/3/11
	Fireside chat: "Empowering the next generation: A woman's perspective" for Olympic Channel Services and Olympic Broadcasting Services	2025/3/20
<i>Notebook</i>	Green notebook #1: What's the story	2022/7 to 2022/12
	Red notebook #2: Growing the list	2023/7
	Yellow notebook #3: Innovating women's representation in sport	2023/3 to 2023/7
	Blue notebook #4: Women's representation as speakers	2023/7 to 2024/1
	Green notebook #5: Contributing to more women speaking	2024/1
	Blue notebook #6: Contributing to more women speaking	2024/1 to 2024/3
	Blue notebook #7: Trademarking COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY	2024/4 to 2024/6
	Red notebook #8: Speaker directory	2024/6 to 2024/10
	Yellow notebook #9: Autoethnography	2024/10 to 2024/11
	Green notebook #10: Media interview + website launch	2024/11 to 2025/4
	Red notebook #11: Where from here?	2025/4

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

In the next section, the first author narrates the journey of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* using the personal pronoun "I". According to [Creswell \(2007\)](#), "qualitative researchers tend to embrace the rhetorical assumption that writing needs to be personal and literal in style" (p. 19). Similarly, [Richardson \(2000\)](#) observes that "... qualitative writers ... don't have to try to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal, a-temporal, general knowledge; they can eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific subjectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it" (p. 8). Essentially, we align with [Gummeson's \(2000\)](#) view that a "true" scientific approach is deeply personal; it represents a way of engaging with life in a quest for "truth" and meaning. After all, Gummeson emphasizes that "we do not find truth and meaning in social life by watching the world from a distance and detaching ourselves from its turmoil" ([Gummeson's, 2000](#), p. 11).

### **Toward *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY***

This study acknowledges the chronological development of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, structured across three phases: Phase 1, *Unfolding the "Beginning"*; Phase 2, *Presenting the "Present"*; and Phase 3, *Envisioning the "Future"*. However, to move beyond a descriptive account, we explore three interconnected themes (see [Table 3](#)) that illuminate the transformative impact of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* on the landscape of women's voices in

**Table 3.** Data analysis

Phase 1: Unfolding the “beginning”			First author’s memos and notes	Second author’s memos and notes
<p>Examples of data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>LinkedIn direct messages</i>: To nine women in sport (Nov 2022)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn post</i>: Tagged nine women, 10 pictures of women speaking at conferences and panels (Nov 2022)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn Direct Message</i>: Edit request asking me to change women’s countries to match their nationalities (Jan 2023)</li> <li>• <i>Voice call</i>: I called my friend and mentor, Mr. Chris, to share the news that we had 1,000 women listed</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn post</i>: The goal set for the Paris 2024 Olympics was reached 282 days ahead of schedule (Oct 2023)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn Direct Message</i>: From male peer in sport referring to list as “Who is who in sports marketing”. (Jan 2023)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn article</i>: 100+ women speaking about sport</li> <li>• <i>Appointment</i>: Indian Sport Management Association (INSMA) Global Advisory Committee (Jan 2023)</li> <li>• <i>Announcement on LinkedIn</i>: #SIGAWomen Global Mentorship Program appointment by Sport Integrity Global Alliance (Feb 2023)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn page</i>: COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY set up (Oct 2023)</li> </ul>	<p>Sub-themes</p> <p><i>Challenging the Canon</i></p> <p><i>Creating Counter-Narratives</i></p>	<p>Theme</p> <p>Amplification as Disruption: Re-voicing the Dominant Narrative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A single voice can initiate alignment around a shared purpose – without requiring institutional or financial backing</li> <li>• <i>COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY</i> debunks the myth that women don’t uplift each other</li> <li>• Peer/self-nomination does not need a critical mass from the beginning; it grows exponentially</li> <li>• My decision to only use LinkedIn allowed me to focus all energy, time, and problem-solving in one place, climbing many unexpected barriers unknown to me prior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reading your notes on challenging the canon, it strikes me how much the initial act of dissent is a powerful form of collective action. Your frustration with the lack of diversity wasn’t just a personal feeling; it became the catalyst for change. It’s almost like you were saying, “If we don’t see ourselves represented, we’ll create our own representation”, and that in itself disrupts the established power dynamics. Your intuition there was spot on – just naming the problem was the first act of mobilization</li> <li>✓ Your emphasis on building counter-narratives really highlights the power of storytelling in collective action theory. By actively showcasing women’s voices, you weren’t just filling a gap; you were constructing a new reality. It’s fascinating how each profile becomes a testament to the fact that women are not only present but also leading in the sports world. You took the initiative to re-write the story, and that is so aligned with the theory, which promotes that a good narrative and identity is necessary for successful collective action</li> <li>✓ I’m intrigued by how you describe the seemingly small actions – a LinkedIn post, a tag – creating such a powerful ripple effect. It shows that resource mobilization doesn’t always require massive resources. In this case, the existing social networks and the willingness to share them became the primary fuel for growth. Your intuition to leverage LinkedIn was brilliant; it transformed existing connections into a collective force for change</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Phase 1: Unfolding the “beginning”	First author’s memos and notes	Second author’s memos and notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Media mention</i>: Swedish financial newspaper <i>Dagens Industri</i> op-ed by Olof Lundh (Nov 2023)</li> <li>• <i>Meeting notes</i>: About consent with GDPR consultant (Jan 2023)</li> <li>• <i>My notes</i>: <i>I’m doing a speaker analysis on sports conferences, and I feel like I’m on Tinder</i>. (Jan 2023)</li> <li>• <i>Exhibition</i>: <i>Forerunners</i> by Stockholm Museum of Women’s History (Aug 2024)</li> </ul>	<p><i>The Power of Collective Voice</i></p>	
<i>Phase 2: Presenting the “present”</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Microsoft Form</i>: Speaker Directory entry with 19 questions (March 2023)</li> <li>• <i>Collectivevisibility.org</i>: DIY self-marketing to create COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY branded graphic (Jan 2025)</li> <li>• <i>Registration</i>: COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY® trademark by European Union Intellectual Property Office (Jan 2025)</li> <li>• <i>Email</i>: <i>International Women’s Day</i> buzz to 600 women (Jan 2025)</li> <li>• <i>LinkedIn announcement</i>: All-woman advisory board (Feb 2025)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Bridging Boundaries</i></p> <p><i>Shared Resources—Shared Power</i></p> <p><i>Digital Solidarity</i></p> <p>The Networked Commons: Building Community Through Digital Connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I felt very proud to break through the social media clutter to get so many women’s attention with a message to “diversify speakers and thought leaders in sport”</li> <li>• A speaker directory coming to life with 770 women is a testament that you can migrate to new platforms, and bring your fans with you, even with very limited resources—if they get the “WHY”</li> <li>• Our trademark registration cemented our credibility, which is very important as you build a brand on the go</li> </ul> <p>✔ While your pride in breaking through the social media clutter is definitely warranted, I wonder if relying solely on those initial methods might limit future growth. The lack of paid advertising, while resourceful at first, could become a barrier as the platform scales. According to the collective action theory, resource mobilization is an ongoing process, and we need to be open to exploring new strategies, even if they require investment. How can we balance that initial spark with a more sustainable approach?</p> <p>✔ The generosity and reciprocity you’ve observed within the community are undeniably powerful. However, is there a risk of this reliance on shared resources becoming unsustainable in the long run? CAT suggests that collectives often face challenges in maintaining equal contributions from all members. Are there structures in place to ensure that the burden of resource sharing is distributed fairly, and that those who contribute the most are adequately recognized? Maybe it’s something we need to explore</p> <p>✔ The digital aspect is fantastic for connecting women globally. Yet, I wonder if it also creates a sense of distance. Collective action theory highlights the importance of strong social ties within a collective. Are there opportunities to foster more personal connections among members beyond the online platform, perhaps through virtual or in-person events? It might strengthen the collective identity</p>

(continued)

**Table 3.** Continued

Phase 3: Envisioning the “future”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Collectivevisibility.org</i>: 770 women in speaker directory</li> <li>• <i>Pitch deck</i>: Positioning <i>COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY</i> beyond Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) for a commercial opportunity for the sports sector</li> <li>• <i>Brand assets</i>: Scalable brand identity for expansion beyond sport</li> </ul>	<p><i>Values-Based Growth The Double Bottom Line</i></p> <p><i>Collective Impact</i></p>	<p>Purpose-Driven Entrepreneurship: Scaling Impact Through Collective Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The future of <i>COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY</i> is co-created with our users and has potential as long as the women benefit, and our purpose remains unchanged</li> <li>• Social entrepreneurship built on peer/self-nominations and a common purpose can enter “Phase 4”, a commercial model, helped by – and benefiting – the massive talent pool we have created</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✔ Your concern about maintaining values-based growth is valid, but how do we define and operationalize those values in practice? The theory emphasizes the importance of clearly defining the collective’s goals and principles. Have we articulated these values in a way that guides decision-making at all levels? It’s not enough to simply state our values; we need to actively integrate them into our strategic planning and day-to-day operations. That is a tough challenge</li> <li>✔ I appreciate your focus on benefiting the speakers through a commercial model, but what are the potential risks of commercialization? The theory suggests that introducing market-based incentives can sometimes undermine collective solidarity. How can we ensure that the commercial aspects of <i>COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY</i> don’t create competition or division among members? It’s a delicate balance to strike, so we need to study successful cases of commercialization without compromising the collective</li> <li>✔ While the collective impact is undeniable, how do we measure and demonstrate that impact effectively? The theory highlights the importance of evaluating the outcomes of collective action to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Are we tracking the number of women who are speaking at conferences, securing new opportunities, or gaining recognition in their fields? Without concrete data, it’s difficult to demonstrate the true value of <i>COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY</i> and secure resources for future growth. However, I’m so grateful for all the women who are engaged with us</li> </ul>
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**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

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sports. Specifically, Phase 1 lays the foundation for understanding “Amplification as disruption: Re-voicing the dominant narrative”, analyzing how the initiative challenges traditional power dynamics by actively elevating and celebrating women speakers. Phase 2 informs our understanding of “The networked commons: Building community through digital connection”, highlighting how *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* leverages social media to foster a sense of shared purpose and collective action. Finally, Phase 3 provides insights into “Purpose-driven entrepreneurship: Scaling impact through collective action”, examining how the initiative integrates its social mission into its organizational structure and entrepreneurial strategies. By analyzing these themes in relation to the initiative’s phases, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*’s success in promoting gender inclusivity and its potential as a model for other social entrepreneurship endeavors.

*Phase 1: U. the “beginning”*

The theme – “Amplification as disruption: Re-voicing the dominant narrative” – captures the critical foundation of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*. Analyzing how it challenges traditional power dynamics, we find strategic efforts that “*challenge the canon*”, “*create counter-narratives*” and use the “*power of collective voice*”.

*COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* did not happen overnight. From the starting point – a LinkedIn direct message on Nov 9, 2022 – to the website going live on Dec 3, 2024, there was 755 days of consistent messaging interlinking identity and purpose: United as women in sport, I set out to diversify speakers and thought leaders in sport. As a curator of the movement, in real time, I identified barriers blocking women’s participation – including my own – because as a key person driving this forward, I had to safeguard my own health too. Communications, community management and commitment were rooted in purpose and accessibility. Nine LinkedIn articles, 11 notebooks, media mentions, mails and memory offer a peek into social entrepreneurship hitting the world running.

Too many all-male panels had appeared in my LinkedIn feed and I “*challenged the canon*”. Nov 9, 2022, at 11.25 PM JST, I hit *SEND* and my direct mail (DM) reached its first recipient:

Hi [Name], hello from Tokyo!

Would you like to be one of 10 mentioned in a post I’d like to post on LinkedIn?

Post:

In my experience, women speakers are still underrepresented in sports-related talk sessions. Yet we are terrific communicators, often speaking with empathy and a sense of purpose. We are good at getting the point across.

I wanted to contribute positively by listing 10 women who are all experts across the sports business. I’ve had the pleasure to speak with them at events in Tokyo, Madrid, Barcelona, Malaga, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and virtually.

I hope we will all grace more stages and add value to any speaking events in the future.

My first participant responded positively. From one (me), to two, we soon became 10 with my next action: A LinkedIn post tagging nine women, with 10 pictures of women speaking at conferences and panels, photo descriptions for accessibility measures, and a “call to action” (CTA): “Please add to this list in the comments below!” with five carefully chosen hashtags: #Speaking #WomenInSports #SportsBusiness #SportsMarketing #WomenEmpowerment.

Engagement on this LinkedIn post was unexpectedly high. Users tagged women in the comments to prompt them to read my post, or as an indication for me to add them to my list by editing the post. I clicked on their profiles and searched for a sports experience or evidence of speaking. While very low follower counts triggered credibility concerns, it felt wrong to judge a woman by her LinkedIn presence. I sourced names by searching sports events and summit websites and scanning my LinkedIn feed for upcoming speakership. I asked a dozen men in my

network to nominate women and received positive responses. A disclaimer is timely: Not everyone on this initial peer/self-nominated list was an experienced keynote speaker or panelist. When in doubt, my decision leaned toward inclusion – expanding the pool of speakers rather than keeping them on the sidelines. Women faced enough gatekeepers. To “*challenge the canon*”, we needed a critical, diverse and global mass: Different backgrounds and ethnicities; athletes and non-athletes; able-bodied and disabled; C-level and students.

I identified as a woman, a she/her, but recognized that my binary lens – though rooted in my own experience – risked excluding non-binary individuals. The drive for inclusion drove me beyond the binary. “Women” was used in communications, but I moved forward with an inclusive approach welcoming all gender identities except man/male. One of many potholes was how to verify gender. Guided by she/her pronouns, woman-sounding names, profile pictures, third-person descriptions, Google and image searches, I sometimes skipped individuals due to uncertainty. In the case of they/them pronouns, and only when I had the bandwidth, I reached out one by one to ask if they were interested in being featured on the list. Managing the project on my own limited thorough background checks, and out of respect, asking individuals if they were women was never an option.

A 40-tag limit on LinkedIn posts I didn’t know existed until I crashed into it suddenly barred me from progressing. I resolved it by pasting all the names into a LinkedIn article which allowed me to add pictures, sourced individually by direct mail (DM). Low-resolution pictures were a recurring issue. I always included alt text for the visually impaired. Accessible content was essential to reaching a critical mass.

Despite LinkedIn barriers, I followed a single platform digital strategy, sacrificing broader communication options such as Instagram and YouTube, along with women not on LinkedIn. The focus preserved my energy and safeguarded my well-being. An equally deliberate decision to power up against and “*challenge the canon*” was to list women’s locations, not nationalities. Logistically, conference organizers benefited from knowing women’s geographic location.

Community management was crucial to clear up misunderstandings. When I received edit requests to change women’s countries to match their nationalities, I explained the reasoning behind my approach, including the fact that LinkedIn did not list nationalities. When women asked, by DM, why they were so far down the list, I explained that the order corresponded to when each person came to mind or was brought to my attention. I reiterated that it was a list, not a ranking, and that names were continuously added. I listened to feedback that I should list names alphabetically, but I lost hyperlinks when cutting and pasting names and LinkedIn articles did not support dragging pictures.

The list had become a massively manual and time-consuming task. I worked on it during my free time, outside of my regular job, and at 60, the struggle felt real. Were there enough women for me to reach 100?

JUST DO IT, and I JUST DID IT, and bang, 100 women speaking about sport caught the attention of a professor from the Stockholm School of Economics, who sent a DM. We jumped on an impromptu Teams call on a Saturday, kicking off an academic collaboration.

Doubt struck again when hit by a single link fear: All the engagement was centered on a single URL. What if there was a technical error? What would be my trace if LinkedIn closed down? I checked comments on my posts, clicked profiles of peer/self-nominated women, and grabbed a screenshot. I secured my digital footprint in Google Drive, inputting names with a formula alerting me of duplicates, and added them by editing and updating the article. *Name, Country, Continent*. I lost and redid hyperlinks and decided to double it and go for 200. Then more . . .

Hyperlinked names made profiles accessible with just one click, which helps to “*challenge the canon*”. At 159 women, I maxed a tag limit barring me from hyperlinking more names. I then maxed the LinkedIn photo limit at 170 women. My consistent run of *Name, Country, Picture* was over. I’d set a goal of 1,000 and started a new article (on a different link) and continued the list. To alleviate the stress of communicating many shared links with a consistent

CTA, I transitioned from collecting photos to using hyperlinked names and locations only. My evergreen approach was the reason I omitted title and employer which could change anytime.

I reached 200, and in early 2023, after hashtag and Google searches, I gave it a name: *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*. An adjective and a noun, an uplift together. To cater for future expansion “*challenging the cannon*” we adopted a scalable brand identity fit for other industries by swapping out the “O” in COLLECTIVE with relevant industry-specific symbols (see [Figure 1](#) below).

Intent to bring researchers into the conversation, I posted a CTA urging people to tag women in academia. A second CTA followed, strategically intent to expand our representation in the Global South beyond countries already prominent on the list; USA, Canada, Great Britain and Australia. To be intersectional, I had to think intersectional. The impact of my two CTAs fueled such high engagement that we soon hit 800 women.

The war in Ukraine was ongoing and with that conversations about Russian athletes’ rights to participate in the Paris Olympics. I reflected on my personal as well as *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* stance. Grounded in a purpose to diversify speakers in sport, I had prioritized locations over nationalities and included women based in Russia on our list. Equally, I considered my options after Hamas attacked the Supernova festival and other targets in Israel on October 7, 2023 ([AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES, 2023](#)). Atrocities followed with Israel’s airstrikes in Gaza ([BBC, 2023](#)). I was hyper mindful when communicating with women in war zones and chose my words carefully, while cognizant about other wars as well.

Reaching 1,000 women speaking about sport was an emotional milestone and I called my friend and mentor to share the news. We had not hit the 100-country mark, so I asked a select few to help fill the geographical blank spots. Meanwhile, plenty of CTAs were out in circulation and many LinkedIn users continued to peer/self-nominate on multiple posts. I could not keep up with the engagement. The struggle had become a matter of how to politely decline names – and how to communicate it. The goal set for the Paris 2024 Olympics was reached 282 days ahead of schedule on Oct 18, 2023 – proof that we had collectively “*challenged the canon*”. I edited as many posts as possible to include the following:

We reached our goal: 1,000 women in 100 countries speaking about sport.

Names submitted before Monday October 22, 2023, (JST) will still be added to our list of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*.



**Figure 1.** The collective visibility logo (for sport). Source(s): Authors’ own work

📣 UPDATE 📣

We reached our goal: 1,000 women in 100 countries speaking about sport. Names submitted before Monday October 22, 2023, (JST) will still be added to our list of COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY.

📣 END OF UPDATE 📣

The list grew to 1,300, positioning me as a representative and spokesperson “*creating counter-narratives*”. A male peer in sports marketing referred to the list as “Who is who in sports marketing”. Opportunities included 2023 kicking off with my appointment on the Indian Sport Management Association (INSMA) Global Advisory Committee [1] and the Digital Commission of the World Squash Federation. I mentored a young British woman on #SIGAWomen Global Mentorship Program by Sport Integrity Global Alliance.

“*Creating counter-narratives*” required a voice and platform beyond that of a founder’s personal LinkedIn account. In October 2023, I set up a COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY LinkedIn page to shift focus away from me, allowing the movement to be represented as its own entity. This helped ease some anxiety, as I was a full-time employee concerned that COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY might be perceived as my only, or too big, a focus. Choosing a LinkedIn page over a group was a deliberate decision to keep conversations open. A gated community where women spoke in a vacuum was out of the question, and it was in this vein that I began writing more.

A series of LinkedIn articles, all published in 2023 with a total word count shy of 24,000 and accessible to those without an account, described the “*counter-narrative*” strategy. 100+ *women speaking about sport* described a collective narrative, selflessness and togetherness shaped by an “I for us” mindset declaring my confidence in our skill as speakers and storytellers. The global-native element was shaped by my international experience in Stockholm, Barcelona, London, Tokyo, Kobe and Olympia. COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY was borderless from the start – “*creating counter-narratives*” serving women worldwide.

A series of five articles grouped the total list of 1,300 women by continent. Intent to create digital solidarity through a relevant geo-based context, and to spotlight the Global South, I began with COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in Africa: *Diversifying speakers and thought leadership in sport*. Women in each country were listed in alphabetical order based on their first name. Africa, published first, featured 92 women, followed by Asia’s 104, 68 in South America, 112 in Oceania, 386 in North America and last – and biggest – was Europe: 558 women. The discrepancy is a compelling area for further research.

Empathy was omnipresent in this continental series, and the reason why I expressed concern for women representing COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY presently in, or from, countries at war: We shared their fear, grief and pain. In the role of founder, I made a donation to Save the Children using my own money and communicated my action on LinkedIn without disclosing the amount. While the personal and founder roles and responsibilities were respectively crystalizing, lacking project funding, the “personal me” helped “founder me” to make a stand for a cause affecting some of the women I tried to uplift.

As a writer building a platform tackling narratives by “*creating counter-narratives*”, I saw myself shifting from “just me” to a “curator/voice/activist” when Luis Rubiales kissed Jennifer Hermoso without consent at the 2023 World Cup. A self-imposed pressure called for me to have – and voice – an opinion, now that I had a voice! The sense of ownership and accountability that had taken hold was channeled into 50+ *women in sports organizations*, built on user-generated content (UGC) collected through a “joyful co-creation” mechanism by featuring sports organizations alongside the individuals who had brought them to my attention.

I described the thinking behind the logo used as our LinkedIn icon. “Intent to diversify and include”, it is bold and brave while making a statement: C is elevating V – lifting it up. Like two letters linked in arms, shaping our collective visibility, our curriculum vitae and future (see Figure 2 below).

The “*power of collective voice*” reverberated when journalists got a whiff of my actions. Celebrating our one-year anniversary, Swedish daily financial newspaper *Dagens Industri* ran an op-ed on Nov 10, 2023. The picture at the top featured fans in blue and yellow at a stadium.



**Figure 2.** The collective visibility logo. Source(s): Authors' own work

Cutouts of three Swedish women completed the collage: Åsa Edlund Jönsson, Secretary General of the Swedish Olympic Committee; Andrea Möllerberg, Secretary General of the Swedish Football Association [2], and me, founder of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*. The paper version headline read *Uppror väckte kvinnorna*, freely translated as *Uproar awoke the women*. The journalist summarized purpose and reasoning perfectly: The initiative proved that expertise existed, and representation was possible, offering a powerful tool to challenge the male-dominated status quo in sport.

*Stockholms kvinnohistoriska (Stockholm Museum of Women's History)* featured five women who paved the way in their *Spring Före (Forerunners)* exhibition in partnership with the women-only Tjejmilen 10 K race. Launched during race week in September 2024, they named me "THE NETWORKER" (yes, in capitals!) and fortified our objective to diversify speakers and thought leaders in sport for women's perspectives to be seen, heard and taken into account in the otherwise male-dominated world of sport. Running the race, I passed a portrait of myself at Grand Hôtel in Stockholm: *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* had cemented itself on premium real estate.

The impact of the "*power of collective voice*" had transported us to a point where the single platform approach was outdated. In early January 2024, I had my first meeting with a student at the Stockholm School of Economics who became my partner in creating an accessible speaker directory on the Web. The digital experience of women entering their details into the speaker directory, as well as the reputation of our academic partner, had to be 100% waterproof. A whirlwind of decisions rooted in trust lay ahead: Personal data processing was based on strict General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance, consent, and privacy policy. I learned from a GDPR consultant that consent must be informed, freely given and with the possibility to be withdrawn at any time as easily as the consent was given. Trust, pragmatism and an evergreen approach colored our decisions with transparency as the key.

In parallel, I was preparing my International Women's Day keynote at Stockholm School of Economics to announce that our speaker directory was open for women to fill in their details. The status quo in sport speakership – often popping up in my LinkedIn feed as all-male panels – was a juicy carrot. "I'm doing a speaker analysis on sports conferences, and I feel like I'm on

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Tinder” – got captured in my notebook. We picked up the pace and published the Microsoft Form on the Center for Sports and Business website.

The “*power of collective voice*” inspired us to use our LinkedIn page strategically with a cyclical CTA. A student at Stockholm School of Economics requested a picture from every woman who had input speaker details, created a social media creative called a “frame”, had it approved and posted it on our LinkedIn page with a CTA for other women to join the directory. We posted monthly reports on growth while exploring options for building a website with a searchable directory that updated itself with new entries. Shopping around for a domain, I learned that [collectivevisibility.com](http://collectivevisibility.com) was already taken. A hyphen cutting it up – collective-visibility.com – risked typos. While the available domain extension.se favorably symbolized my home country and base of our academic partner, I was worried that *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* could be perceived as a national Swedish – rather than international – movement. With its global recognition signaling nonprofit actions for good, .org was our best option.

After exploring digital tools offering a user experience that included speaker directory filtering on mobile, we chose a provider and built a basic website that met our core needs. A scooter, not a sports car. Due to GDPR and consent requirements, we could not simply migrate the list of 1,300 women. Community management was key to explain that we had moved beyond LinkedIn to a web-based speaker directory, and in parallel, we planned the website and speaker directory launch with the Content and Media Relations Manager at Stockholm School of Economics.

The last week of November 2024 was crunch time. We set up routines based on due diligence and bandwidth: Checking the list of incoming women and regular updates at a frequency we could cope with. We contacted a journalist at Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. Her article was published on Dec 3, 2024, perfectly timed with press releases in Swedish and English on the Stockholm School of Economics website: *Global directory to highlight female experts in sports*. The “*power of collective voice*”, elevated.

Headlined *Making more voices heard – Running shoes are not feminine because they are pink* (translated from Swedish), the journalist explained that *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* connected event organizers with qualified women in sport – from executives and academics to athletes and students. Our platform aimed to shift who got heard and hired, ensuring that women’s perspectives shaped products, panels and public discourse in sport. She quoted me: “I want to hear a girl talk about handball – not her dad talking about her.”

### *Phase 2: Presenting the “present”*

The launch of the website created “The networked commons: Building community through digital connection”. We were “*bridging boundaries*” by inviting women to contribute to our “*shared resources – shared power*” dynamic, where our speaker directory served as a backbone for self-promotion through “*digital solidarity*”.

We “*bridged boundaries*” by prioritizing compliance, trust and lowering barriers to speaker directory entry. Our website enabled search: Filtered results based on specific requirements, such as an English-speaking sports law expert in Spain. Women submitted their profile by completing a Microsoft Form with 19 questions, and to update an entry, they re-entered their details, while removal required an email. “About us” told our story, and “Create Your Own Frame” advised users in step-by-step instructions on how to build a personalized *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* branded graphic. This DIY self-marketing option freed up our time and moved the onus to women in a spirit of “*shared resources – shared power*”. Speaking of power: to clarify Intellectual Property (IP) ownership and to register a trademark with the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY AB* (limited company) was set up in Sweden.

To expand our “*digital solidarity*”, I announced an all-woman advisory board in February 2025 consisting of five women. I joined a closed session, *Empowering the next generation: A woman’s perspective* fireside chat, with the Director of Daily Content at [Olympics.com](http://Olympics.com).

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Madrid and Lausanne based Olympic Channel Services and Olympic Broadcasting Services teams tuned in online. I delivered a keynote at an online webinar co-organized by the Swedish Sports Confederation and our academic partner, hosted by the Center for Sports and Business Executive Director. *Vem leder idrotten? (Who leads elite sport?)* centered on gender equality and the importance of female representation at all levels.

In an email subject lined *Let's create buzz for COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*, I sent the following CTA to 600 women in our directory:

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This year for International Women's Day, let's create **sustainable buzz!** Job updates on LinkedIn get massive engagement, so let's use it to our collective benefit!

Before we get started: Please note that I'm not offering you a paid job. I am offering a way to profile yourself as a speaker, thought leader, and expert in sport. I hope the visibility will help generate the ROI you have in mind.

So here's the buzz idea, for International Women's Day:

If you feel comfortable doing so, please add **Speaker** at COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY in your LinkedIn profile. You and your profile will benefit, as will the entire COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY movement.

Starting today, update your Professional profile!

Step by step instructions followed. I signed off with a CTA:

LinkedIn will prompt you to share it in your network. You may use this copy:

I'M SPEAKING! I am one of 600 global women in sport in the COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY speaker directory!

Search & Join our Speaker Directory now!

[www.collectivevisibility.org/](http://www.collectivevisibility.org/)

When we all engage with each other—likes, comments, reposts—we're up for a massive visibility campaign!

Purposeful "*digital solidarity*" – digging where you stand – from the inside out.

*Phase 3: Envisioning the "future"*

"Purpose-driven entrepreneurship: Scaling impact through collective action", takes time, patience and effort. "*Values-based growth*" resulted from consistent daily community management uniting a critical mass behind a purpose and clearing hurdles as they appeared. The "*double bottom line*" – delivering on both profit and purpose – remains a challenge as commercial KPIs were not the primary goal at the outset. COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY kept generating "*collective impact*" in other ways.

Breaking through the social media clutter to get the attention of 770 women who invested time to join our speaker directory is proof of "*values-based growth*". While 1,000 women in 2025 remains a numeric goal, we are up against the challenge of tracking how COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY is impacting speakership. I envision an "I have spoken" ticker on our website, counting collective speaking engagements and analyzing how they affected professional trajectories.

I discussed the future of COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY recently with a professor from the Center for Sports and Business at Stockholm School of Economics. We decided to keep going. Not to give up. Slow down at times yes, because I have other commitments such as my full-time job, but never give up. Even as the following steps and future remain open, we concluded that serving and representing COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY was also about making a stand what

we stand for. However, one pillar we agreed upon was to do more academic writing to contribute our lived experience and data to the current body of research.

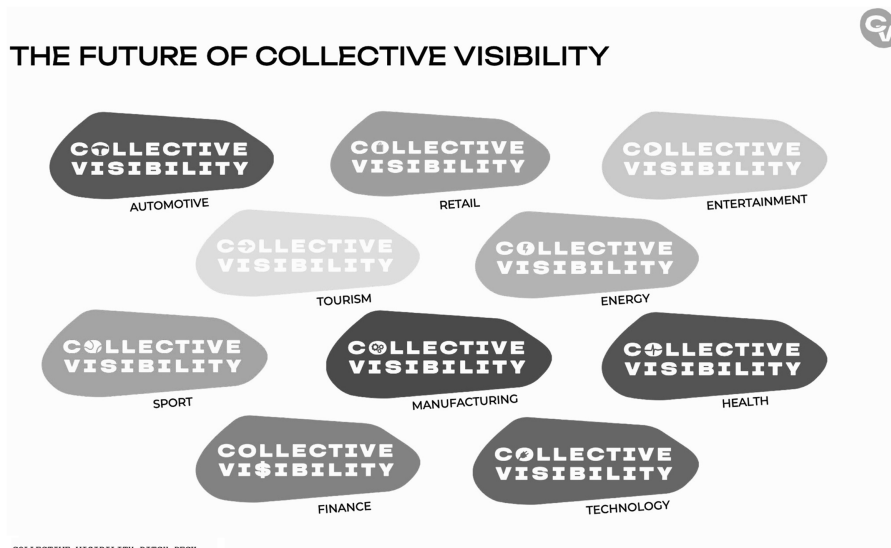
The “double bottom line” becomes more potent when we position *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* beyond diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) for a commercial opportunity for the sports sector. The talent pool we are curating can solve today’s complexities. Funding would help build an accessible *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* content hub where women’s accomplishments become legacy. There are countless stories to tell through text, video, photography and audio, creating the “collective impact” sports business and academia need to both attract and retain women – plugging the leaky pipeline for the long run. This article you are now reading is our first academic contribution, springboarding us into a new context.

And when we have the necessary financial support in place, we’ll move *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* into other sectors one by one (see [Figure 3](#) below). We already have a scalable brand identity in place. “Collective impact”, born in sport.

### Conclusion

*COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* represents more than a speaker directory; it is a sustained act of social entrepreneurship grounded in purpose, persistence and shared identity. By documenting its growth through the first author’s personal reflections, online content and penciled notebooks, this initiative offers a potentially replicable model for others seeking to disrupt with community-driven change. Representation expands when platforms are built to welcome, not filter.

The three phases of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* provide a framework for understanding how systemic challenges in sport can be battled out. Phase 1, “amplification as disruption”, reflects male-dominated discourse and the exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making arenas (e.g. [Burton, 2015](#)). Phase 2, emphasizing the “networked commons”, voices the need for access to networks and community in overcoming organizational cultures that sustain gender inequities (e.g. [LaVoi et al., 2019](#)). Phase 3, “purpose-driven entrepreneurship”, echoes calls for structural rather than symbolic change (e.g. [Shaw, 2007, 2024](#)). By integrating collective action theory and social entrepreneurship, we provide a new facet on gender equity



**Figure 3.** The collective visibility logos (as per the different sectors). Source(s): Authors’ own work

in sport: Shared pain points can be transformed into collective action and sustained mobilization when purpose, digital amplification and an entrepreneurial mindset align – even in an industry resistant to structural change.

For anyone embarking on a CAT-based social entrepreneurship journey, several key “HOWs” can complement the “WHY” that fuels their passion. First, “dig where you stand” and adopt an “inside out” approach. Rooting oneself in the identity of the group, one aims to connect with provides credibility and fosters reciprocal joy and pride. For example, *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*'s success stemmed from the first author's deep understanding of the challenges faced by women in sports, which resonated with the community and fueled their engagement. Second, think “evergreen”, prioritizing long-term sustainable solutions over quick wins. While the benefits may take time to materialize, they are more enduring. This was evident in *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*'s decision to focus on building a comprehensive and diverse directory, rather than pursuing short-term publicity stunts. Third, leverage “peer/self-nomination” to build a strong foundation where the community itself uplifts others or themselves. Re-grouping individuals into new constellations increases engagement while maintaining a unified purpose. This approach ensured that the directory was representative and inclusive, reflecting the diverse talents within the women's sports community. Fourth, embrace “joyful co-creation” by using calls to action that make individuals feel proud to contribute. Acknowledge those who support the initiative by giving them visibility, too. *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* fostered this by actively showcasing the contributions of its members and partners. Finally, diversify and include by repeating your “WHY” several times. Break through the clutter by simplifying it with a human voice, storytelling and a “collective narrative”. Use “empathy”, recognizing that everyone is working toward the collective good, thereby creating a safer and more joyful journey.

The implications of this research extend beyond the specific context of women's speakership in sports. This case highlights the potential of social media-driven initiatives to address systemic inequalities and promote inclusivity across various sectors. Future research could explore the applicability of the aforementioned five “HOWs” in other contexts, such as promoting diversity in STEM fields, advocating for environmental sustainability or supporting marginalized communities. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term impact of such initiatives on individual empowerment and social change. The study could be refined by not being so rooted in autoethnography and could be replicated by quantitative researchers in the field. Finally, as *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY* continues to evolve, further research could examine the challenges and opportunities associated with scaling up such initiatives and sustaining their impact over time.

We resisted the urge to offer a simplistic, personal narrative of *COLLECTIVE VISIBILITY*'s evolution, opting instead to embed theoretical depth within the first author's personal journey. Nevertheless, this case remains “personal” as it draws on an insider's perspective, with the first author serving as both the idea originator and chief implementer. This approach reflects [Shotter's \(2006\)](#) concept of “witness-thinking” as opposed to “aboutness-thinking” (p. 585), enriching our understanding of collective action not merely as observers but through immersive experiences. We hope this case enhances our ability to capture the nuanced process of fostering collective action on a widely acknowledged issue, particularly within the sports sector.

#### **About the authors**

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Dr Christos Anagnostopoulos is the founder, director and chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on Governance and Social Responsibility in Sport and a core member of UNESCO's Fit for Life's Knowledge and Innovation Network (KIN). He is within the College of Science and Engineering at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, where he teaches the MSc in Sport and Entertainment Management, a joint program with the University of South Carolina (USA). He is also a Professor II at Molde University College in Norway. He is an elected executive board member (Treasurer) of the World Association for Sport Management.

### Disclaimer

An AI tool (Wordtune) has been employed by the first author strictly for language editing to enhance the clarity of the sentences.

### Notes

1. Both authors serve on this Advisory Committee.
2. Andrea Möllerberg no longer holds this post. (First author's comment)

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