

# Crowdfunding and the Matthew Effect: Examining Structural Inequalities through a Systematic Review

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## Abstract

Crowdfunding is presented as a democratizing financial tool that enhances access to capital. However, rather than eliminating financial barriers, it frequently reinforces structural inequalities. This study examines these disparities to understand how crowdfunding perpetuates funding inequities and explores potential avenues for more inclusive mechanisms using a systematic approach. By analysing 33 papers on crowdfunding inequalities through the PRISMA methodology, the study focuses on five key dimensions: geographic location, race and gender, institutional hierarchies, health-related fundraising, and reputation-based advantages. The results indicate persistent funding inequalities across multiple dimensions. Geographic location impacts crowdfunding success, with urban and developed regions benefiting more than rural or developing areas. Racial and gender biases disadvantage women and racial minorities, limiting their access to financial support. Institutional hierarchies and reputation-based advantages further exacerbate funding gaps. The study underscores the need for more inclusive crowdfunding frameworks that actively address funding disparities. Policy interventions, platform design, improvements, and regulators measures, such as algorithmic transparency, targeted support for underrepresented groups, and equitable platform policies can enhance accessibility for marginalized communities. By categorizing crowdfunding inequalities, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how digital financial ecosystems amplify disparities. Unlike previous fragmented analyses, it integrates multiple inequality dimensions, offering a holistic perspective on the systemic challenges with crowdfunding.

## Keywords

Crowdfunding, Financial Inclusion, Matthew Effect, Funding Disparities, PRISMA Methodology, Structural Barriers

## 1. Introduction

Crowdfunding has evolved from traditional forms to more diverse and specialized platforms. Kim & Hann (2013) note that crowdfunding platforms facilitate fundraising by enabling individuals to solicit financial contributions from a large and dispersed group of online users, democratizing access to capital. This democratization argument positions crowdfunding as an inclusive financial tool that empowers individuals, particularly those with socially beneficial initiatives (Pak & Wash, 2017).

Alegre & Moleskis (2016) identify five main types of crowdfunding: donation-based; reward based; crowdlending; crowdequity and mixed models. Haas et al. (2019) introduce a novel categorization based on motivations: philanthropic, hedonistic, and profit-oriented crowdfunding, highlighting the importance of understanding backer motivations.

This categorization aligns with Alhammad et al. (2021) and Camilleri & Bresciani (2022), who refine the categories to include donation, reward, loan (or debt) and shares, reflecting the market's growing sophistication and ability to meet diversified financing needs.

However, individuals with financial resources and fundraising expertise are more likely to succeed, aligning with the "rich get richer" argument (Swart, 2014). This phenomenon, known as the Matthew Effect (Perc, 2014), describes the tendency for wealth and power to accumulate disproportionately among those already advantaged. In network science, this principle aligns with preferential attachment, where highly connected nodes attract more connections over time, reinforcing their centrality (Li et al., 2025).

Crowdfunding is hailed as a democratizing force in finance, but it doesn't escape this, Matthew Effect. While it enables entrepreneurs to access capital without traditional intermediaries (Mollick & Robb, 2016), its democratizing influence is limited by promotional challenges (Galuszka & Brzozowska, 2017). The rich get richer phenomenon persists, with successful crowdfunders learning more while those who fail often give up (Pak & Wash, 2017).

Crowdfunding is increasing in areas with falling housing prices, particularly in low socio-economic status areas, but these projects are often unsuccessful (Kim & Hann, 2018). Efforts to level the playing field can paradoxically result in a less equitable distribution of funds (Geva et al., 2024). While crowdfunding expands access to financing for small businesses generally not served by institutional investors, it faces serious adverse selection issues (Dolatabadi et al., 2021).

Unlike previous fragmentary analyses, this paper integrates multiple dimensions of inequality, offering a holistic perspective on the systemic challenges of crowdfunding. It provides a comprehensive perspective on how crowdfunding, as alternative financing mechanism, is analysed and what future research directions could deepen our understanding of its structural inequalities.

Using PRISMA, this paper sheds light on the extent to which crowdfunding reinforces financial disparities. The research question addressed is: How do struc-

tural inequalities related to geography, race, gender, and institutional hierarchies shape crowdfunding outcomes, and to what extent do regulatory and technological frameworks mitigate or exacerbate these disparities?

With the crowdfunding market's growing sophistication, our main research objective is to examine disparities in crowdfunding success based on geography, race, gender and institutional hierarchies; assess the impact of regulatory frameworks on campaign performance and evaluate the role of technology in reducing funding disparities.

The rapid technological evolution of crowdfunding platforms, including the potential of blockchain technology to improve transparency and security, reduce transaction fees, and increase trust, is noted by Prathyusha et al. (2024). Katsamakas & Sun (2020) investigate using machine learning algorithms to predict crowdfunding success, potentially improving decision-making for both platforms and investors.

This study explores how advanced technologies integrated into crowdfunding platforms influence governance and reinforce structural inequalities. It begins by tracing the evolution of crowdfunding models and highlighting disparities related to geography, race, and institutions. Using the PRISMA method, the literature review systematically identifies studies on funding inequalities. The findings reveal key trends, including the Matthew effect, and discuss financial inclusion, platform governance, and policy implications. The paper concludes with a summary of insights, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Methodology

This paper follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology (Moher et al., 2009) to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the review process. This approach is widely used in finance, economics, and social science research. We describe the search strategy to identify relevant studies on crowdfunding disparities, define the eligibility criteria for inclusion, outline the methods for data extraction and analysis, and provide an overview of the literature reviewed.

According to the PRISMA framework, the article selection process includes identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Deepika et al., 2023). We conducted a systematic search of peer-reviewed English-language articles indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science up to January 31, 2025, in the fields of Social Sciences, Economics Business, and Finance. These databases were selected due to their comprehensive coverage of interdisciplinary research and their established use in systematic reviews.

The search strategy employed a combination of Boolean operators (AND, OR) and targeted keyword clusters directly related to the research topic. Boolean logic enabled us to build comprehensive search strings that captured the complexity of crowdfunding disparities.

Sample search queries included:

- Crowdfunding AND inequality OR disparity OR bias.
- Gender OR race OR geography AND crowdfunding performance.
- Matthew effect AND platform governance.

To structure the search process, we categorized our keywords into three thematic groups: 1. Crowdfunding mechanisms (equity crowdfunding, reward-based crowdfunding, donation-based crowdfunding, peer-to-peer lending).

2. Disparities and structural inequalities (inequality, disparity, bias, discrimination).

3. Key players and influences (investor behavior, donor motivation, platform regulation, algorithmic bias, financial inclusion).

These combinations were systematically applied across the selected databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) to ensure both breadth and specificity in the retrieval of relevant studies. The structured approach aimed to maximize coverage while maintaining a focus on empirical and theoretical contributions related to inequalities in crowdfunding ecosystem.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the studies included in this systematic review, we established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they met the following conditions: published in peer-reviewed academic journals; explicitly focused on disparities or inequalities in crowdfunding outcomes; presented either empirical findings or a substantial theoretical discussion; and fell within the disciplinary boundaries of the social sciences, finance, or economics.

Conversely, studies were excluded based on the following criteria: the article was not written in English; constituted non-peer-reviewed literature, such as conference abstracts, unpublished theses; and it did not address structural inequalities or systemic disparities in the crowdfunding ecosystem.

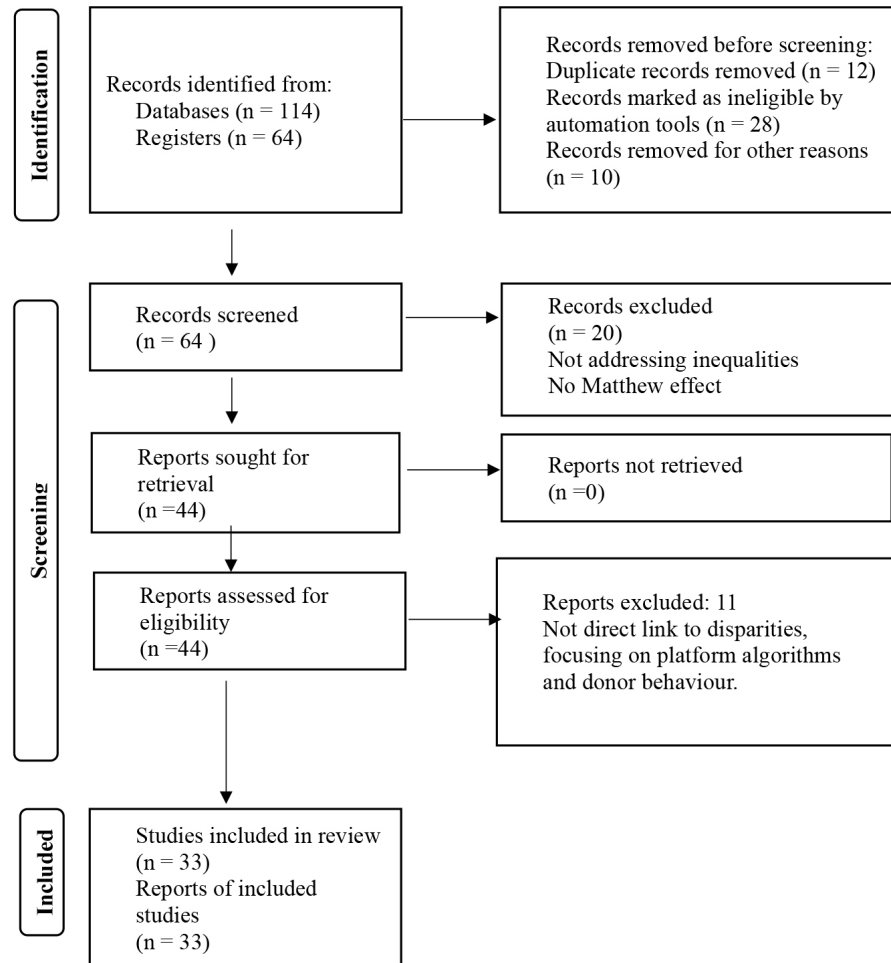
A total of 114 papers were identified through systematic database searches, before the screening phase, 50 records were excluded for the following reasons: duplicate records ( $n = 12$ ), automatically ineligible records identified by screening tools ( $n = 28$ ), other reasons, such as incomplete metadata or inaccessible full texts ( $n = 10$ ), and 64 were registered, as shown in **Figure 1**, encompassing a wide range of research on crowdfunding mechanisms, disparities in fund distribution, and the Matthew Effect in alternative finance.

Following identification, the 64 papers were reviewed based on their titles and abstracts to determine relevance. During this phase, 20 papers were excluded for not explicitly addressing crowdfunding inequalities or the Matthew Effect. Studies focusing primarily on crowdfunding as a marketing tool or innovation promotion mechanism were deemed irrelevant.

The remaining 44 papers were subjected to a full-text assessment to determine whether they could be included. This rigorous review excluded 11 more papers, as they did not sufficiently address crowdfunding inequalities or the Matthew effect. For example, some studies focused on platform algorithms and donor behaviour but had no direct link to wider financial disparities, did not meet the inclu-

sion criteria.

As shown in **Table 1**, 33 studies were selected explicitly studying crowdfunding inequalities or the Matthew effect, aligning with the central research themes of financial inclusion, resource distribution, and structural disparities in alternative finance.



Source: Authors.

**Figure 1.** Identification of studies via databases and registers.

Finally, the classification was based on recurring themes and keywords extracted during the data coding process, with each study assigned to one or more categories depending on its primary analytical focus. The criteria for categorization were guided by the type of inequality addressed (structural, racial, geographic, etc.), the scope of the study, and the population or mechanism under examination. This process followed an inductive approach informed by existing literature.

To ensure systematic and reproducible categorization, we developed keyword dictionaries for each thematic group. During coding, studies were assigned to categories based on the presence of these keywords in their abstracts, titles, or main

texts. This keyword-based approach allowed for the identification of overlapping themes and facilitated the multi-classification of studies that addressed intersecting forms of inequality, as summarized in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Thematic groups and key categorization keywords.

Thematic Group	Description	Example Keywords
Structural Inequalities	Systemic and platform-based disparities	Matthew effect, systemic, platform, structural, inequality, unequal, asymmetry, democracy, democratization, long tail
Racial and Gender Disparities	Inequalities related to race, ethnicity, and gender	Racial, race, gender, women, minority, African American, bias, marginalized, identity, underrepresented, colorblind
Geographic Inequalities	Disparities based on location or spatial factors	Urban, rural, geographic, geography, spatial, region, area, digital infrastructure, location, housing
Health Inequities	Health-related disparities	Health, healthcare, medical, covid, pandemic, disease, illness, care, treatment
Institutional/Reputation-Based	Inequalities tied to institutions, reputation, or networks	Institution, reputation, prestige, signal, credibility, expert, established, affiliation, organization, hierarchy, network

**Source:** Authors.

This structured, keyword-driven approach allowed for consistent and transparent assignment of studies to thematic groups, reflecting the interdisciplinary and intersecting nature of inequality research in crowdfunding.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and analyses the results, focusing on descriptive analysis and literature classification. The descriptive analysis summarizes the dataset, while the literature classification organizes studies into thematic categories, providing a foundation for understanding the research landscape.

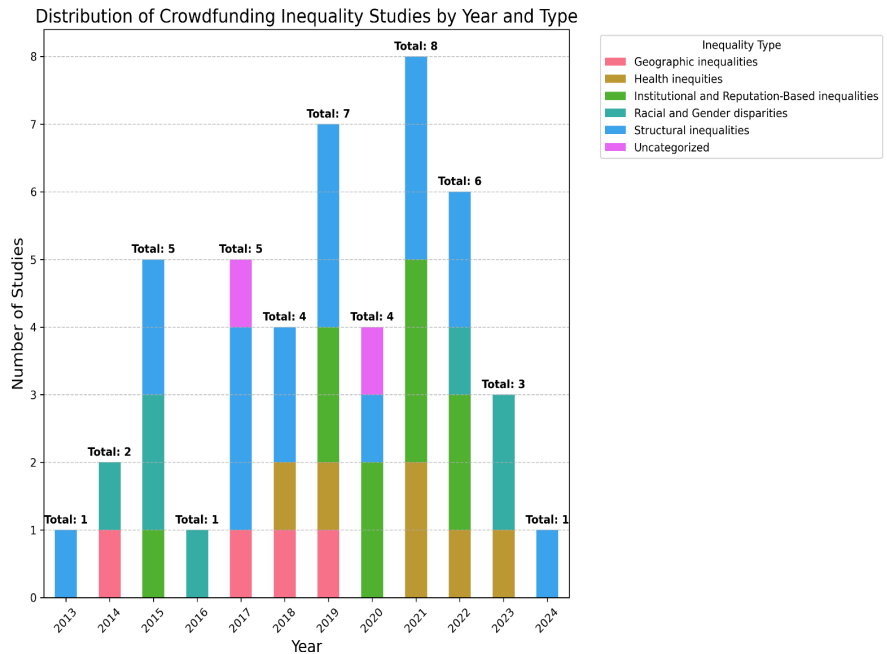
**Table 2** provides an overview of 33 academic studies that examine various dimensions of inequality in crowdfunding. Each study identifies specific mechanisms through which inequality manifests, focusing on different aspects such as institutional hierarchies, socio-economic disparities, racial and gender biases, and geographic imbalances, as demonstrated in **Table 3** based on thematic groups and key categorization keywords.

As shown in **Figure 2**, the sum of studies across the various inequality categories (47) exceeds the total number of unique studies included in the analysis ( $n = 33$ ). This apparent discrepancy arises because numerous studies address multiple forms of inequality and are therefore classified into more than one thematic category.

The classification system employed in this review permits each study to be assigned to multiple thematic groups if it addresses more than one type of inequality. For example, a paper examining racial disparities and health inequities in crowdfunding would be counted once in each relevant category.

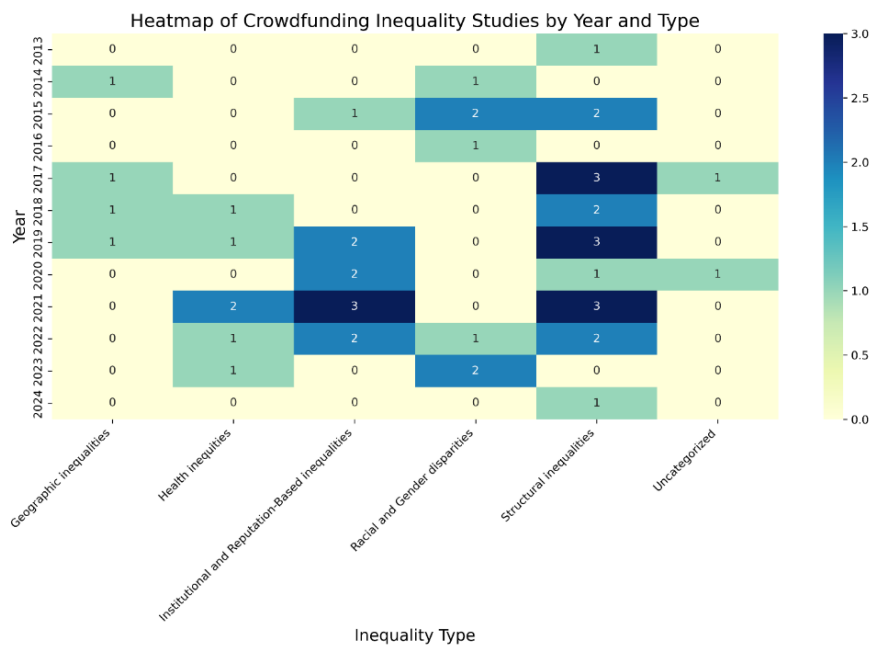
This multi-classification approach more accurately captures the interdiscipli-

nary and intersecting nature of inequality research, wherein individual studies frequently explore multiple, overlapping dimensions of disparity. For instance, a study investigating medical crowdfunding among minority populations may be classified under Health inequities and Racial and Gender disparities.



Source: Authors.

Figure 2. Distribution of crowdfunding inequality.



Source: Authors.

Figure 3. Heatmap of crowdfunding inequality.

As shown in **Figure 3** presents the distribution of studies on crowdfunding inequalities, categorized by year and type of inequality.

Each row in the graph represents a year, and columns categorize studies based on specific types of inequalities. The number in each cell indicates the count of studies addressing a particular form of inequality in that year.

- **Geographic inequalities:** Studies examining disparities based on location such as differences between urban and rural areas or developed and developing countries. The highest occurrence was in 2014, with two studies.
- **Racial and Gender disparities:** Focus on systemic biases related to race or gender, investigating whether women or racial minorities receive less funding. This category had the highest occurrences in 2014, 2015, and 2017, with two studies each.
- **Institutional Hierarchies:** Examine how power structures within crowdfunding platforms or large institutions influence funding opportunities. Studies were consistently present from 2013 to 2019 but disappeared thereafter.
- **Healthinequities:** Cover disparities related to medical expenses or healthcare-related fundraising efforts, exploring whether financial capacity affects healthcare crowdfunding success. This topic emerged in 2017 and continued annually until 2021, except in 2022 and 2023.

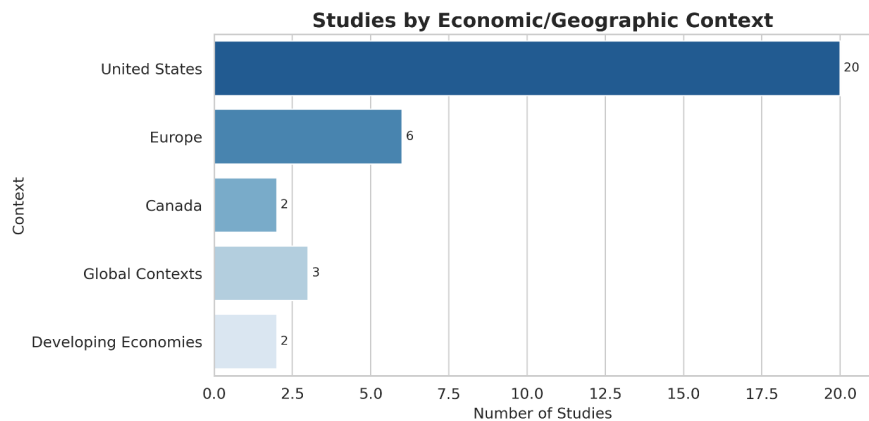
**Reputation-Based inequalities:** Investigate how an individual's previous reputation or social capital affects crowdfunding success, examining whether well-known entrepreneurs receive more funding than newcomers. These studies appeared sporadically, mainly in 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021.

Several important patterns emerge from this dataset:

- **Racial and Gender Disparities:** Most consistently studied inequality, reflecting ongoing concerns about systemic biases.
- **Health Inequalities:** Became a recurring topic after 2017, highlight the growing interest in medical crowdfunding affected by financial disparities.
- **Institutional and Reputation-Based Inequalities:** Studied less frequently and tended to appear in isolated cases.
- **Research Peak:** Crowdfunding inequalities peaked in the mid-2010s but declined after 2019, suggesting a shift in academic focus or saturation of studies.

**Figure 4** covers a broad spectrum, from individual user experiences (inequalities, inclusion barriers) to systemic influences (government policies, platform strategies), providing a global perspective while distinguishing between developed and developing economies.

As shown in **Figure 4**, the majority of studies on crowdfunding and inequality are concentrated in the United States, with 20 out of 33 studies originating from this context. This predominance reflects the high academic and societal interest in crowdfunding outcomes related to racial and gender disparities, geographic inequalities, and health inequities within the U.S., where systemic racism, healthcare access gaps, and digital divides are persistent structural issues.



Source: Authors.

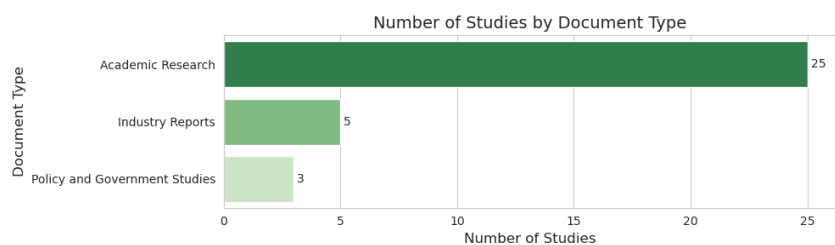
**Figure 4.** Number of studies by economic/geographic context.

In Europe, research more frequently addresses civic crowdfunding, government involvement, and urban inequalities. European studies often examine the relationship between public funding and collective action, with a focus on how crowdfunding supplements municipal resources and exposes spatial disparities within cities.

Studies categorized as Global Contexts extend the analysis across national boundaries, emphasizing digital inclusion and the role of mobile money. These works highlight the diversity of crowdfunding adoption and outcomes under varying regulatory and infrastructural conditions

Canadian research, though limited in number, centers on healthcare and education crowdfunding, likely reflecting the influence of the country's universal health system and the need to address funding gaps in education.

In Developing Economies, studies primarily investigate barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure and limited financial inclusion. These structural challenges such as poor internet access and underdeveloped payment systems significantly shape the dynamics and effectiveness of crowdfunding in these settings.



Source: Authors.

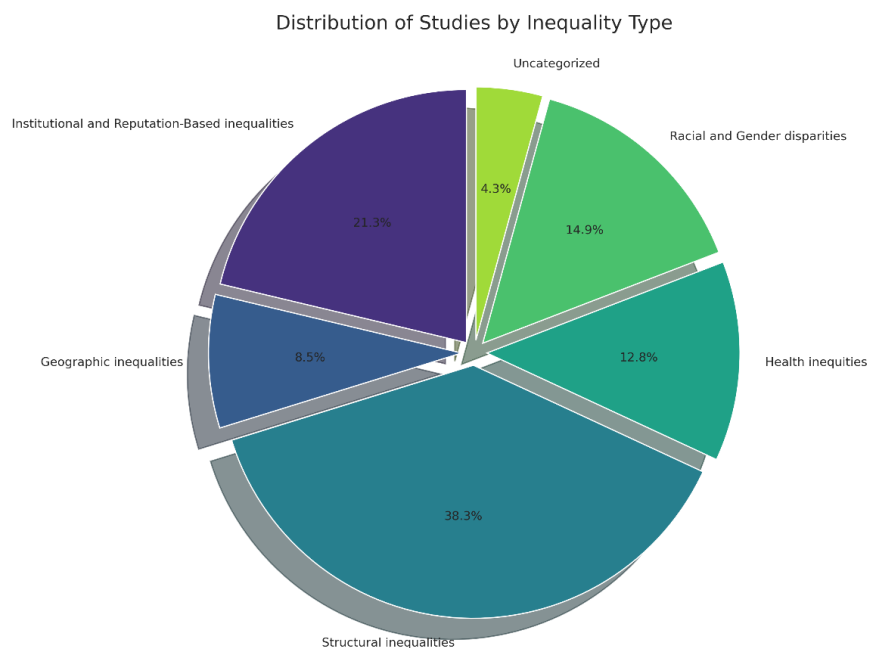
**Figure 5.** Number of studies by document type.

As shown in **Figure 5**, the types of documents reviewed also influence the thematic orientation of the research. Academic research dominates the literature (25 studies) and tends to engage deeply with systemic biases, structural inequalities,

and theoretical frameworks. These studies often use qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze disparities, develop typologies, or explore underlying sociotechnical mechanisms driving unequal outcomes in crowdfunding.

Industry reports, though fewer in number, offer valuable insights into platform-level trends and disparities. These documents are often data-rich and practical, shedding light on real-world patterns such as success rates, platform algorithms, user demographics, and campaign types. Their emphasis is usually less on causality and more on trend analysis and market behavior.

Policy and government studies focus on the regulatory environment and how public policy influences crowdfunding ecosystems. These include white papers or governmental reviews that assess the role of legal frameworks, incentives, and oversight mechanisms. Such documents are crucial for understanding how structural change or regulatory intervention might mitigate or exacerbate inequalities in access to crowdfunding opportunities.



**Source:** Authors.

**Figure 6.** Distribution of studies by inequalities type.

**Figure 6** illustrates the thematic distribution of studies examining various forms of inequality within the crowdfunding literature. The most prominent category, structural inequalities, accounts for 38.3% of the reviewed studies. This is followed by research focused on institutional and reputation-based inequalities (21.3%), racial and gender disparities (14.9%), health inequities (12.8%), and geographic inequalities (8.5%). A small proportion of studies (4.3%) did not align clearly with these categories and were thus classified as uncategorized.

These categories were developed through a thematic synthesis of recurring topics, reflecting the most salient disparities identified in the literature. Each thematic

group is described below:

- **Structural inequalities in Crowdfunding:** highlights how crowdfunding, despite its potential to democratize access to funding, often reinforces existing disparities (Chang, 2023). This group includes nine elements: crowdfunding, Matthew Effect, structural inequalities, racial disparities, geographic inequalities, health inequities, institutional hierarchies, reputation-based inequalities, and donor behavior. These elements collectively illustrate the systemic barriers that perpetuate unequal access to funding.
- **Racial and Gender disparities:** focus on systemic biases in donor behavior and platform algorithms. This group comprises four elements: racial disparities, gender disparities, donor behavior, and systemic bias. These elements underscore the challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as racial minorities and women (Kenworthy et al., 2020).
- **Geographic inequalities:** Examine how location and spatial capital influence funding outcomes. This group includes four elements: geographic inequalities (Greenberg, 2019), spatial capital, urban vs. rural, and digital divide. These elements highlight the disparities between urban and rural areas and the impact of digital infrastructure on crowdfunding success.
- **Health inequities:** Focus on medical crowdfunding and the COVID-19 pandemic (Igra et al., 2021). The analysis reveals that individuals with strong social networks disproportionately benefit from crowdfunding (Zhang et al., 2023), while marginalized populations face systemic disadvantages (Igra, 2022). The pandemic has exacerbated these disparities, with wealthier communities receiving a larger share of funding. The group explores four elements: health inequities, medical crowdfunding, COVID-19, and donor behavior, demonstrating how pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities are reflected and amplified in digital fundraising platforms (Silver et al., 2020).
- **Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities:** Investigates the influence of institutional hierarchies and reputation on crowdfunding outcomes. Findings indicate that well-connected creators with established reputations and institutional affiliations are more likely to secure funding, whereas lesser-known individuals encounter structural barriers (Peters & Roose, 2021). This pattern reinforces the Matthew Effect, wherein initial advantages lead to cumulative benefits, perpetuating cycles of inequality. The study examines donor behavior and systemic bias, highlighting how implicit and explicit mechanisms disproportionately favor established actors, thereby entrenching existing power imbalances.

Together, these studies highlight consistent mechanisms through which inequality is reinforced within crowdfunding ecosystems:

- The Matthew effect, where success is cumulative and often inaccessible to newcomers or underrepresented groups.
- The role of institutional and social capital advantages, scientists from prestigious institutions, well-connected creators, and individuals with strong networks tend to outperform others.

- Persistent racial, gender, and geographic disparities, particularly evident in high-stakes domains like health-related fundraising.
- Systemic disadvantages affecting women and minority entrepreneurs, who often encounter implicit bias and reduced access to support

These findings call for critical attention to platform design, algorithmic transparency, and equity-oriented interventions to address the inherent disparities within the crowdfunding landscape.

**Table 2.** Papers on crowdfunding inequalities.

Authors	Study Title	Inequality Focus	Key Findings
(Davidson & Tsfati, 2019)	The contribution of supply and demand factors...	Institutional hierarchies influence crowdfunding success.	Scientists from prestigious institutions are more successful.
(Davies, 2014)	Civic crowdfunding as a marketplace...	Crowdfunding favors wealthier areas, exacerbating urban inequalities.	Geographic and socioeconomic disparities in funding.
(Kenworthy, 2021)	Like a Grinding Stone...	Crowdfunding for healthcare favors those with better networks/resources.	Platforms amplify disparities in healthcare funding.
(Greenberg, 2019)	Inequality and Crowdfunding	Well-connected projects receive more funding.	The Matthew Effect is evident in funding distribution.
(Igra, 2022)	Donor Financial Capacity Drives Racial Inequality...	Racial disparities in medical crowdfunding.	Minority campaigns receive less funding due to donor networks.
(Gallemore et al., 2019)	The uneven geography of crowdfunding success...	Spatial inequalities in crowdfunding success.	Urban projects outperform rural ones.
(Langley & Leyshon, 2017)	Capitalizing on the crowd...	Crowdfunding replicates existing financial inequalities.	Unequal access to crowdfunding resources.
(Igra et al., 2021)	Crowdfunding as a response to COVID-19...	COVID-19 crowdfunding exacerbated social/health inequalities.	Privileged groups received more funding.
(Geva et al., 2024)	Equal Opportunity for All? The Long Tail of Crowdfunding...	Unequal distribution of funds favoring popular projects.	The “long tail” effect reinforces funding inequalities.
(Davies, 2015)	Three provocations for civic crowdfunding	Civic crowdfunding favors projects with existing support.	The Matthew Effect is evident in civic crowdfunding.
(Acar et al., 2021)	The Signal Value of Crowdfunded Products	Crowdfunding reduces marketplace inequality for low-risk products but not high-risk ones.	Consumer perceptions vary by product risk.
(Baccarne et al., 2020)	Understanding Civic Crowdfunding...	Civic crowdfunding reinforces digital inequalities.	New publics are involved, but inequalities persist.
(Bannerman, 2020)	Crowdfunding Music and the Democratization...	Inequalities in access to economic/social capital.	Well-connected artists benefit more.
(Pak & Wash, 2017)	The Rich Get Richer? Limited Learning...	Successful crowdfunders improve while others drop out.	The Matthew Effect in learning and success rates.
(Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2018)	Crowdfunding, Efficiency, and Inequality	Efficient capital allocation favors liquid investors.	Liquidity constraints lead to unequal capital distribution.
(Grüner & Siemroth, 2019)	The Matthew Effect in Science Funding	Early funding success leads to a growing funding gap.	Non-winners cease competing, exacerbating inequalities.
(Mollick & Robb, 2016)	Democratizing Innovation and Capital Access...	Crowdfunding democratizes access but favors certain groups.	Underrepresented groups face barriers.

## Continued

(Colombo et al., 2015)	Internal Social Capital and Attraction...	Projects with strong internal social capital attract more funding.	Early success leads to a self-reinforcing cycle.
(Agrawal et al., 2014)	The Colorblind Crowd? Founder Race...	Racial bias in crowdfunding outcomes.	African American founders receive less funding.
(Strausz, 2017)	Crowdfunding Innovative Ideas...	Favors incremental over radical innovation.	Radical innovators face greater challenges.
(Keongtae, & Visawanathan, 2019)	The Experts in the Crowd...	Expert investors disproportionately influence outcomes.	Crowdfunding markets are not fully democratic.
(Davis et al., 2023)	Racial and gender disparities...	Significant racial and gender disparities in medical crowdfunding.	Marginalized groups receive less funding.
(Kenworthy, 2019)	Crowdfunding and global health disparities...	Crowdfunding reproduces health inequalities.	Crowdfunding is a determinant of health inequities.
(Alexiou et al., 2020)	Crowdfunding as a Funding Substitute...	Different effects on young vs. established organizations.	Younger organizations face greater crowdfunding challenges.
(Chang, 2023)	Equity Crowdfunding: Game Changer...	Improves access for some but retains biases.	Crowd investors favor certain groups.
(Lukk et al., 2018)	Worthy? Crowdfunding the Canadian Health Care...	Crowdfunding reproduces inequalities in health and education.	The Matthew Effect in funding distribution.
(Wan, 2013)	The Matthew Effect in Online Review Helpfulness	Early reviews get a first-mover advantage.	The Matthew Effect influences review helpfulness.
(Hong & Ryu, 2019)	Crowdfunding public projects...	Government involvement can mitigate inequalities.	Public-private partnerships reduce information asymmetry.
(Gorbatai & Nelson, 2015)	The Narrative Advantage: Gender...	Gender disparities in crowdfunding success.	Women benefit from specific narrative strategies.
(Rhue, 2015)	Who Gets Started on Kickstarter?	Racial disparities in Kickstarter success.	Minority founders face greater challenges.
(Galuszka & Brzozowska, 2017)	Crowdfunding and the Democratization...	Crowdfunding reproduces housing market inequalities.	Socioeconomic status influences outcomes.
(Peters & Roose, 2022)	The Matthew Effect in Art Funding	Reputation and past success influence outcomes.	The Matthew Effect in art funding.
(Dalla Chiesa & Dekker, 2021)	Crowdfunding Artists: Beyond Match-Making...	Platforms do not help artists reach new audiences.	Established artists benefit more.

Source: Authors.

By analysing these systemic inequalities, **Table 1** establishes a foundational understanding of the research landscape and informs further discussions about how crowdfunding platforms may unintentionally reproduce and amplify broader societal disparities.

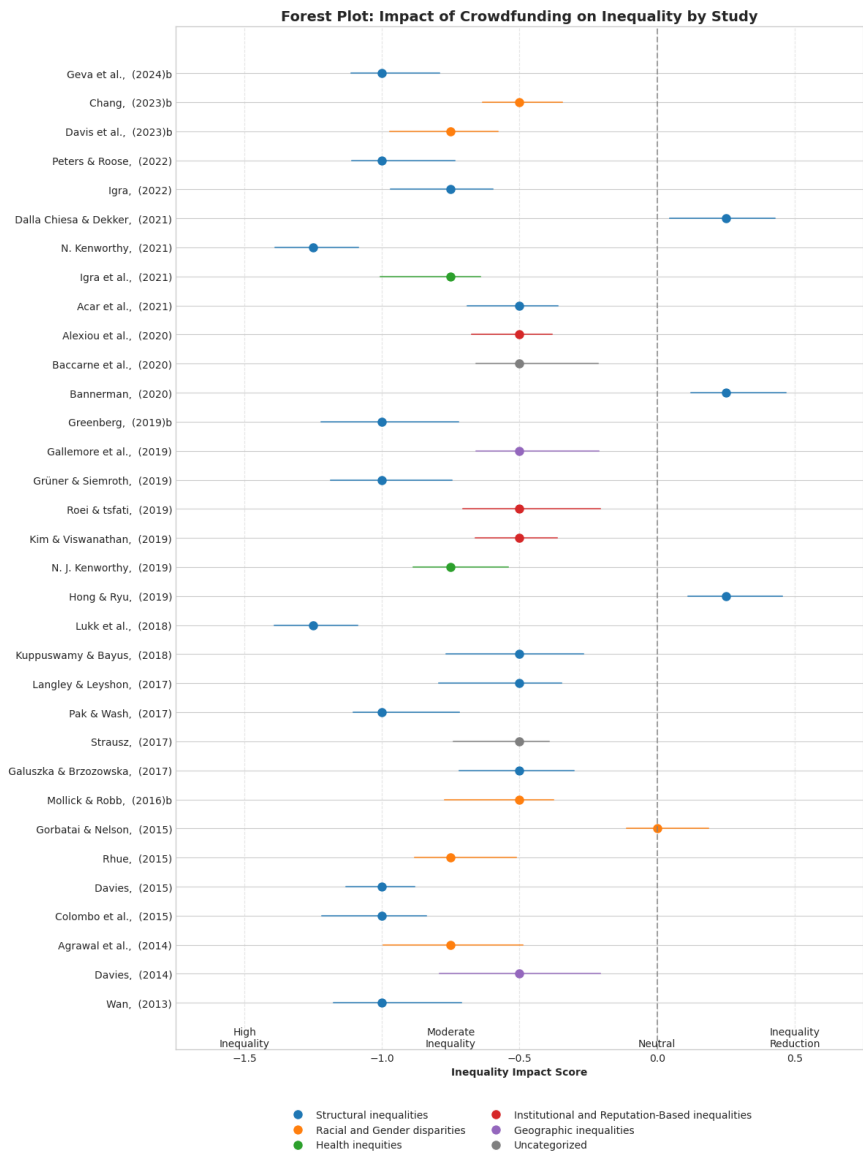
**Table 3.** Studies by category classification.

Study (Author, Year)	Number of Categories	Categories
Igra, 2022	4	Structural inequalities, Racial and Gender disparities, Health inequities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities

## Continued

Kenworthy, 2021	3	Structural inequalities, Health inequities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Acar et al., 2021	2	Structural inequalities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Bannerman, 2020	2	Structural inequalities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Colombo et al., 2015	2	Structural inequalities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Davis et al., 2023	2	Racial and Gender disparities, Health inequities
Galuszka & Brzozowska, 2017	2	Structural inequalities, Geographic inequalities
Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2018	2	Structural inequalities, Geographic inequalities
Lukk et al., 2018	2	Structural inequalities, Health inequities
Peters & Roose, 2022	2	Structural inequalities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Dalla Chiesa & Dekker, 2021	2	Structural inequalities, Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Davidson & Tsfati, 2019	1	Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Davies, 2014	1	Geographic inequalities
Greenberg, 2019	1	Structural inequalities
Gallemore et al., 2019	1	Geographic inequalities
Langley & Leyshon, 2017	1	Structural inequalities
Igra et al., 2021	1	Health inequities
Geva et al., 2024	1	Structural inequalities
Davies, 2015	1	Structural inequalities
Pak & Wash, 2017	1	Structural inequalities
Grüner & Siemroth, 2019	1	Structural inequalities
Mollick & Robb, 2016	1	Racial and Gender disparities
Agrawal et al., 2014	1	Racial and Gender disparities
Strausz, 2017	1	Uncategorized
Keongtae, & Viswanathan, 2019	1	Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Kenworthy, 2019	1	Health inequities
Alexiou et al., 2020	1	Institutional and Reputation-Based inequalities
Chang, 2023	1	Racial and Gender disparities
Wan, 2013	1	Structural inequalities
Hong & Ryu, 2019	1	Structural inequalities
Gorbatai & Nelson, 2015	1	Racial and Gender disparities
Rhue, 2015	1	Racial and Gender disparities
Baccarne et al., 2020	1	Uncategorized

Notes: The table displays each study, the number of inequality categories it covers, and the specific categories assigned. Uncategorized indicates studies not assigned to a specific thematic group.



### 4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of how crowdfunding, despite its promise as a democratized financial tool, often reinforces existing structural inequalities rather than eliminating financial barriers. By examining disparities across multiple dimensions, including geographic location, race and gender, institutional hierarchies, reputation-based advantages, and health-related fundraising, this research highlights systemic patterns that shape crowdfunding success.

Key findings indicate that geographic disparities persist, with urban and economically developed regions attracting significantly more funding than rural and underserved areas. This suggests that access to financial networks and digital infrastructure is important in crowdfunding outcomes. Racial and gender biases remain a critical barrier, as women and racial minorities consistently receive less funding, reflecting broader societal inequalities in financial access and trust. In-

stitutional hierarchies and reputation-based advantages exacerbate funding gaps, as campaigns backed by well-connected individuals or those with prior crowdfunding experience disproportionately attract investment. Furthermore, medical crowdfunding illustrates financial barriers to healthcare access, as individuals from lower-income or marginalized backgrounds struggle to secure adequate funding for critical health needs.

While technological innovations such as machine learning and blockchain have been proposed as potential solutions to enhance transparency and efficiency, this study finds that these tools have not significantly reduced funding disparities (Vana & Lambrecht, 2022). Instead, they often replicate existing biases embedded in digital platforms. Regulatory frameworks imposing high compliance costs or tax burdens disproportionately disadvantage smaller campaigns, limiting their competitiveness against well-resourced initiatives.

To foster a more inclusive crowdfunding ecosystem, targeted interventions are necessary at both the policy and platform levels. Policymakers should consider regulatory frameworks that encourage equity, such as tax incentives for underrepresented entrepreneurs or mandatory transparency in platform algorithms. Crowdfunding platforms must implement bias-mitigation strategies, including diverse representation in algorithm training data, clear anti-discrimination policies, and proactive support mechanisms for marginalized groups.

Future research should explore alternative models of crowdfunding that prioritize inclusivity, such as community-based funding networks or hybrid models integrating public and private financial support. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining how policy changes affect crowdfunding accessibility over time would provide deeper insights into effective interventions.

Ultimately, a truly democratized crowdfunding landscape requires systemic reforms that actively address inequalities rather than passively sustaining them. Without intentional corrective measures, crowdfunding risks becoming another financial mechanism that perpetuates, rather than mitigates, structural disparities in economic opportunity.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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