

**The current state of integrating equity, diversity and inclusion into knowledge mobilization:  
a systematic literature review**

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# The current state of integrating equity, diversity and inclusion into knowledge mobilization: a systematic literature review

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to systematically review and analyze the academic literature on integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into knowledge mobilization (KMb).

**Design/methodology/approach** – This systematic literature review of the body of scholarly literature published on integrating EDI with KMb follows established methods and protocols proposed by Popay et al. (2006) and Page et al. (2021). Using a relevant keyword string, a search was conducted in ProQuest and SCOPUS to find peer-reviewed articles, which were then screened using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, inductive and deductive analyses were conducted on the selected articles.

**Findings** – The findings suggest that most of the authors are based in the Global North, the majority of literature was published in the last two years, and that it is conceptual. This synthesis highlights five solution-oriented themes: acknowledging inherent bias, centering marginalized groups, promoting responsible knowledge mobilization, establishing partnerships, and advocating for transformational and systemic change. This study also identifies four broad barriers: inherent, unconscious, and implicit biases, a lack of evidence-based best practices, siloing of research and information, and a lack of institutional support and resources. Findings also highlight the value of further research into barriers, gaps and opportunities.

**Originality/value** – By studying the intersection of EDI and KMb, this contemporary synthesis of the state of the field presents opportunities for future research into gaps, barriers and potential solutions.

**Keywords** - EDI, DEI, Knowledge dissemination, Knowledge sharing, Inclusive engagement, Co-production, Co-creation, Science communication, Citizen science, Participatory action research (PAR)

**Paper type** - Literature review

## 1. Introduction

Knowledge can be a tool of empowerment or oppression (Collins et al., 2021). Based on this premise, knowledge mobilization (KMb), which in its broadest sense refers to the two-way transfer of information between researchers and practitioners (Phipps et al., 2016), is inextricably linked to the concept of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). While academic discourses on EDI and KMb have proliferated over the years as separate constructs, nuanced discussions of this intersection have only recently emerged in academia, and have received little attention in the scientific literature within the social sciences (Canfield et al., 2020; Dewidar et al., 2022). The present state of academia is also at a pivotal moment, as it grapples with the imperative to comprehend and tackle issues related to EDI, commonly known as DEI in certain North American contexts (Nkomo et al., 2019). Therefore, examining the distinctive definitions that make up the concept of EDI and understanding their interconnections holds immense significance.

Equity refers to the fair and just treatment of individuals, ensuring that everyone has

access to opportunities, resources, and outcomes, regardless of their background or *circumstance* (Amdur and Yeung, 2021; Tamtik and Guenter, 2020). While historically, diversity was used when referring to issues concerning racial diversity, over time, the term has evolved to incorporate other characteristics, including biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, abilities and more (Healey and Stepnick, 2019; Rosenkranz et al., 2021). Inclusion embraces all individuals regardless of their background or identity, thereby creating an environment, culture, or society in which all individuals are valued, respected, and fully integrated to ensure that everyone can participate and contribute as they wish (Ferdman, 2013). As a broad definition, EDI represents the principles, policies, programs, and practices that enable representation and engagement from individuals of different races, ethnicities and cultures, varying physical, functional and learning disabilities and different genders, sexual orientations, religions, ages and social classes (Cornelius-Hernandez and Taylor, 2023; Fuentes et al., 2021). EDI is often applied in organizational settings to create a work environment that values and respects differences (Kiradoo, 2022).

Recently, there has been a growing interest among academics to integrate (EDI) into strategies aimed at tackling current and future challenges (Dewidar et al., 2022). KMb supports producing and disseminating scientific research to inform, guide, and transform policy and practice, leading scholars to increasingly concentrate on the discipline as a method to tackle global challenges (Durst, 2021; Judd and McKinnon, 2021; Phipps et al., 2016). KMb not only “ensures that the results of what is learned from the research are turned into practice or action,” but also develops and strengthens sustainable “connections between research, policy, and practice” (McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020, p. 34). KMb recognizes that knowledge is not a one-way transfer from academia to the community, but is reciprocal, focusing on both participants and researchers contributing to the research design, dissemination and implementation in a dynamic exchange, where both researchers and participants benefit (MacGregor and Phipps, 2020; Moliner et al., 2021; Salmon et al., 2021). Expanding on this definition, KMb represents the evolution of knowledge dissemination, progressing from information sharing to co-production supporting pluralistic, context-based, goal-oriented, and interactive collaborative projects (Heinisch, 2020; MacGregor and Phipps, 2020). The discipline, thus, involves various actors with diverse backgrounds, interests, and expectations, which can create complexity and challenge in achieving effective collaboration and communication (Bailey et al., 2019; Phipps et al., 2016). It fosters active engagement with end-users of research while facilitating the application of research findings to real-world problems and solutions to address research-to-practice gaps (Langley et al., 2018). This vast range of human diversity involved in KMb (as it expedites connecting producers and users of knowledge to co-create new knowledge) can only be successful with a comprehensive understanding of how KMb and EDI intersect (Hewitt, 2021).

Emerging discourses at the intersection of EDI and KMb transcends conventional frameworks to address systemic inequities, marked by a departure from traditional hierarchical structures, and a deliberate inclusion of diverse voices, particularly those belonging to marginalized or excluded groups (Kelly et al., 2022; Lorenz, 2020). These paradigms also border on intersectionality, a key theoretical underpinning, which acknowledges the interconnected nature of various social identities and underscores the need to consider the unique experiences of individuals at the crossroads of multiple axes of marginalization (Collins et al., 2021) making evident the transformative potential of EDI and KMb as catalysts for dismantling barriers to knowledge access and fostering more equitable distribution of research outcomes (Collins, 2022; MacGregor and Phipps, 2020).

Also entangled in the multi-layered nuances at the intersection of EDI and KMb are the

dynamics of power distribution and representation (Gaventa, 2019; Polk and Diver, 2020). Integrating KMBand EDI attempts to dismantle longstanding power imbalances that tip in favor of dominant groups that control how knowledge is used by creating mutually beneficial relationships between research and community groups. Applying an EDI lens to KMB goes beyond theoretical abstraction; it is a practical necessity grounded in principles of justice, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility (Dewidar et al., 2022; Judd and McKinnon, 2021; Kelly et al., 2022). Consequently, contributing to the scholarly dialogue on the complexities of transforming knowledge into actionable outcomes, bridging the gap between academia and broader societal applications contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue, necessitates a nuanced understanding of the interplay between theoretical frameworks and practical implementations in both EDI and KMB (Polk and Diver, 2020). Exploring KMB through an EDI lens is, therefore, an integral contribution to future theoretical and empirical research agendas. We, therefore, conducted a systematic review and analysis of the academic literature to determine the current state of integrating EDI into KMB.

## 2. Materials and methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a well-known academic approach for assessing the conceptual and empirical data surrounding the understanding of prevailing research in a particular field (Siemieniako et al., 2021; Thome et al., 2016; Xiao and Watson, 2019). Following established narrative synthesis methods and PRISMA protocols proposed by Popay et al. (2006) and Page et al. (2021), we conducted an SLR of the body of scholarly literature published on integrating EDI within the context of knowledge mobilization.

### 2.1 Information sources

ProQuest and SCOPUS are considered to be leading academic bibliographic databases which provide multidisciplinary academic information (Gusenbauer, 2019). Other researchers successfully utilized both databases to conduct SLRs (Clarke and Crane, 2018; Samuel and Clarke, 2022). Based on these factors, both databases, which contain millions of scholarly sources, were chosen to conduct the SLR.

### 2.2 Keywords

In an attempt to execute an efficient search and retrieve the most relevant results, we searched for synonyms for equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as for knowledge mobilization, within humanities and social sciences disciplines. The following keyword string, which we determined to be relevant to the SLR, was utilized in conducting the search. We used the following search query in both ProQuest and Scopus, which were accessed on June 25, 2022:

Ti (“DEI” OR “EDI” OR “Equity” OR “Diversity” OR “Inclusion” OR “Inclusiv\*” OR “Multiculturalism” OR “Pluralism” OR “Cultural Intelligence” OR “Anti-racism” OR “Antiracism” OR “Anti-Racism” OR “Responsible”) AND NOFT (“Knowledge Mobilization” OR “KMB” OR “Knowledge Sharing” OR “Science Communication” OR “rKm”) NOT (“inves\*” OR “finance”\*)

In the search string above, (Ti) refers to a Title Only search, while (NOFT) refers to a search of the full bibliographic record, excluding a search of the full text. To avoid retrieving articles referring to equity in investment and finance and asset, we included a NOT operator for the terms “finan\*” and “invest\*” to exclude these articles. The asterisk (\*) results in a search where all possible word variations are included.

### 2.3 Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria increases the likelihood of producing reliable and replicable results, while minimizing instances of researcher bias (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). Listed in the table below, the inclusion criteria represent characteristics that articles must have if they were included in the study. In contrast, the exclusion criteria are those characteristics that disqualified articles from inclusion in the study (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

| Inclusion Criteria  | Exclusion Criteria  |
|---|---|
| Scholarly and peer-reviewed journal article   | Any other type of document  |
| Full text available   | Only abstract or partial text available   |
| Published between June 2012 to June 2022  | Published outside of the specified date range   |
| Relates to the humanities, social sciences, and other related disciplines.                            | Focus on medicine or finance.   |
| Text is in the English language   | Text is in a language other than the English language                                 |
| KMb and related synonyms refer to the dissemination of knowledge from the researcher to the community | KMb and related synonyms refer to sharing collective knowledge within an organization |
| EDI refers to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as defined in this study                               | EDI refers to anything else outside of the given definition                           |

**Source(s):** Table by authors

### 2.4 Screening

ProQuest (which, in this case, is a collection of 42 databases) and Scopus were the electronic databases used for conducting the search. The ProQuest search produced 267 results from the search criteria, while the Scopus search produced 231, for a total of 498 articles retrieved. Covidence, a web-based software tool used for screening and data extraction, was utilized for the screening process (Kellermeyer et al., 2018). The articles were imported into Covidence, where the software automatically identified and removed duplicates, leaving 435 studies.

Each title and abstract were manually screened against the specified inclusion and exclusion criteria to remove irrelevant articles. Any ambiguities regarding the application of the selection criteria were resolved through discussions between the researchers involved. Based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria, 375 documents were deemed as irrelevant, with 60 documents selected for full-text review, as outlined in Figure 1. As a result of this later process, a further 29 articles were excluded for failing to meet the inclusion criteria to finalize our data set of 31 articles.

### 2.5 Literature coding

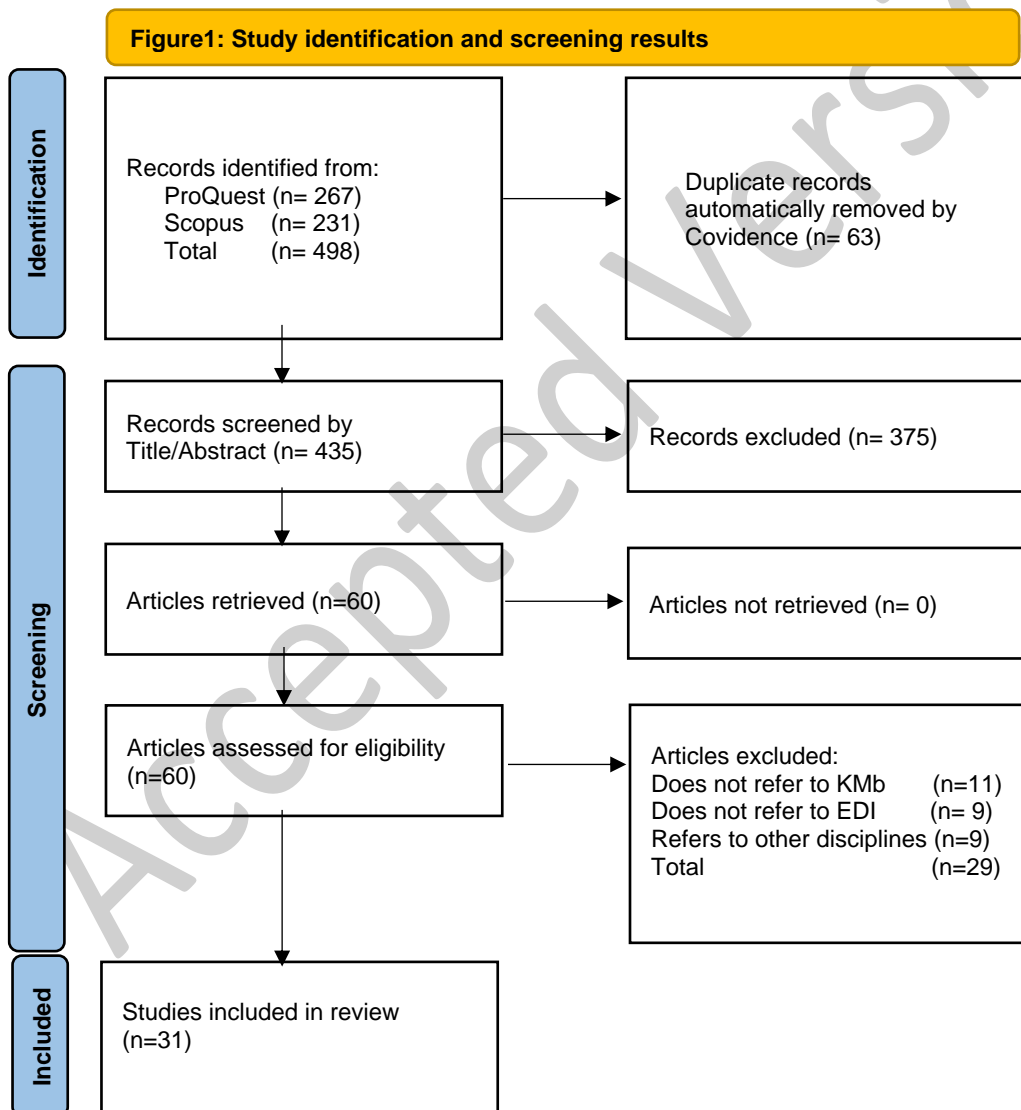
A narrative synthesis, a textual approach to the synthesis process, which aims to narrate and articulate the findings from the included studies, and is a synthesis method applicable in systematic reviews that address a spectrum of questions, as was utilized within this study (Popay et al., 2006). A hybrid deductive and inductive coding approach was employed to analyze the 31 articles chosen for the full-text review (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data analysis software NVivo was used to organize and manually analyze the data (Maher et al., 2018).

A predefined list of descriptive codes was generated directly for the examination of the literature for the deductive approach. These themes included the year of publication, journal of publication, geographical location of the lead author, field of research, and the type

of study.

To answer the research question about the current state of integrating EDI into KMb, we also developed a set of sub-questions to guide the inductive coding:

- (1) Sub-question 1: Who is the target audience (the group the paper was designed for)?
- (2) Sub question 2: How do EDI and KMb intersect?
- (3) Sub-question 3: What is the value of integrating EDI into KMb?
- (4) Sub-question 4: What are the recommended opportunities for integrating EDI into KMb?
- (5) Sub question 5: What are the barriers to integrating EDI into KMb?
- (6) Sub question 6: What are the gaps and future research directions for integrating EDI into KMb?



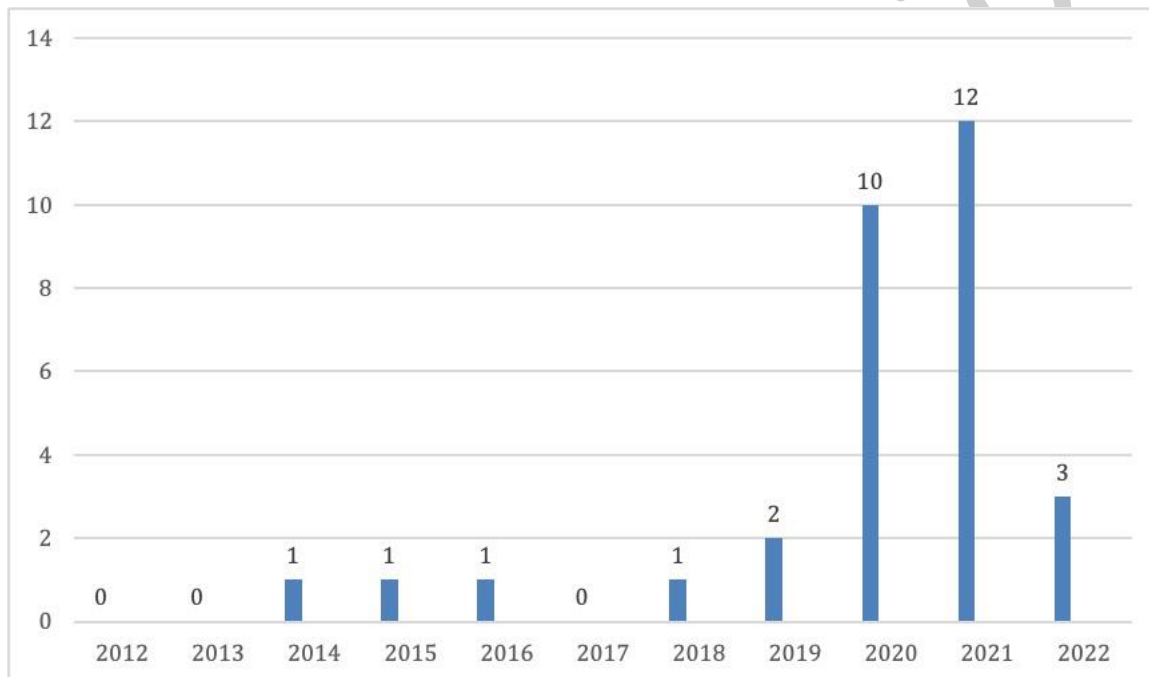
Source(s): Adapted from: (Page et al., 2021)

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Year of publication

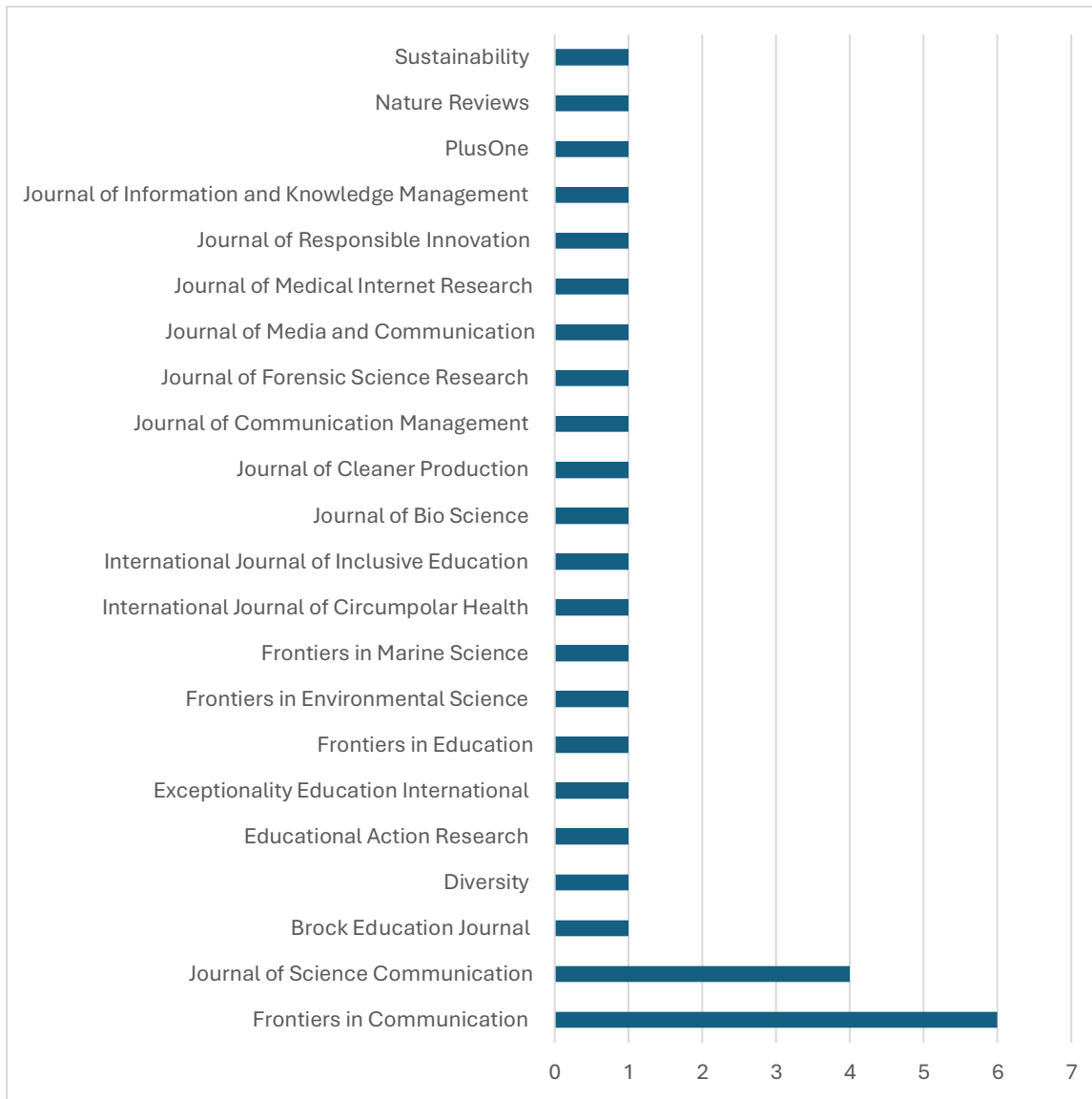
Although the collection period for the 31 scholarly journals selected was from 2012 to 2022, the first included article was published in 2014. As shown in Figure 2, only four articles that met the selection criteria were published during the first five years of the publication sample (2012–2016). Between 2017 and 2022, the number of publications meeting the selection criteria increased significantly, with 27 articles published. The majority (n = 27), representing 87% of the articles, were published between 2020 and 2022. What stands out in this analysis, is the rapid increase of publications, addressing the intersection of EDI and KMB over the last few years.

**Figure 2. Number of articles published between the 2012 -2022 sample period**



Source (s): Figure by authors

**Figure 3. Journal of publication and number of articles published**



**Source (s):** Figure by authors

### 3.2 Journal of publication

Next, the articles were categorized according to the journal of publication. Looking at Figure 3, it is apparent that the studies in this review are associated with a wide range of journals. The 31 studies that meet the selection criteria were sourced from 22 journals. The majority of the papers (n=6) or 19.3% of the articles selected were published by Frontiers in Communication, followed by the Journal of Science Communication with (n=4) or 12.9% of the studies selected. Only one study was published by each of the remaining 20 journals. Only one study was published by each of the remaining 18 journals.



### 3.3 Geographical location

For each article, the geographical location of each lead author was identified and coded in NVivo. As can be seen from Table 2, geographical locations were categorized by region/continent and further disaggregated by country. The names of the authors of the selected articles have also been included in Table 2. The SLR found that the majority of the literature in the sample originated in the Global North. Europe dominated publications meeting the search criteria, with just over half of the sample (51.61%). The sample also included two multi-national papers written by multiple authors across several locations in Europe. North America followed closely with (38.70%) of articles used in the SLR. The number of publications from the Global South was noticeably sparse, with 6.45% of the sample or two articles derived from South Africa and India.

**Table II. Geographical location**

| Region                | Country               | Number of articles | % of sample  | Authors   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|---|
| <b>Africa</b>         | South Africa          | 1                  | 3.22         | (Weingart et al., 2021)   |
| <b>Asia</b>           | India                 | 1                  | 3.22         | (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2020)  |
| <b>Europe</b>         | Austria               | 1                  | 3.22         | (Heinisch, 2020)  |
|                       | Estonia               | 1                  | 3.22         | (Durst, 2021)   |
|                       | France                | 1                  | 3.22         | (Merzagora et al., 2022)  |
|                       | Germany               | 3                  | 9.67         | (Schwetje et al., 2020; Humm & Schrögel, 2020; Humm et al., 2020)   |
|                       | Portugal              | 1                  | 3.22         | (Matias et al., 2021)   |
|                       | The Netherlands       | 1                  | 3.22         | (Scholten et al., 2016)   |
|                       | Spain                 | 2                  | 6.45         | (Moliner et al., 2021; Sanahuja et al., 2021)   |
|                       | United Kingdom        | 1                  | 3.22         | (Contera, 2021)   |
|                       | Multi-national        | 3                  | 9.67         | (Durall et al., 2021; Owen et al., 2021; Tokalić et al., 2021)  |
|                       | <b>Regional total</b> | <b>16</b>          | <b>51.61</b> |   |
|                       | <b>North America</b>  | United States      | 7            | 23.33   |
| Canada                |                       | 5                  | 16.12        | (Armitage et al., 2012; Cantalini-Williams et al., 2015; Ferrazzi et al., 2018; MacKinnon et al., 2021; McGhie-Richmond & Haider, 2020) |
| <b>Regional total</b> |                       | <b>12</b>          | <b>38.70</b> |   |
| <b>Oceania</b>        | Australia             | 2                  | 6.45         | (Judd & MacKinnon, 2021; Pecl et al., 2019)   |
|                       | New Zealand           | 1                  | 3.22         | (Salmon et al., 2021)   |
|                       | <b>Regional Total</b> | <b>3</b>           | <b>9.67</b>  |   |
| <b>Overall total</b>  |                       | <b>31</b>          | <b>100</b>   |   |

Source(s): **Table by authors**

### *3.4 Field of research*

The final sample of articles was also coded to determine the various fields of research represented among the articles. These codes were extracted from the abstracts. Several categories were identified, namely: citizen science, inclusive innovation, knowledge mobilization, research partnerships, responsible research, and science communication. The largest category represented was science communication, with more than half (n 5 16) or 51.61% of the sample. The field of knowledge mobilization was the next highest segment, with (n 5 6) or 19.35% of the articles attributed to this field, followed closely by citizen science with (n 5 3) or 9.67%. Only a small percentage of articles (two or fewer) fell into the other categories.

### *3.5 Type of study*

Articles included in the SLR were also coded to determine the type of study. Based on the scientific method utilized in the selected articles, two categories were developed; conceptual research, which involves abstract ideas and concepts (Jaakkola, 2020), and empirical research, which involves research based on observation, experiments, and verifiable evidence (Powner, 2015). More than half of the articles (n 5 17), or 54.83%, were found to be conceptual, while (n 5 14) or 45.16% of the articles, were empirical studies.

### *3.6 Target audience*

The target audience (the group the paper was designed for) was another code included in the SLR. For some papers, the target audience was mentioned in the abstract or the introduction. Categories for the target audience were also created based on the stated aim and goals of the paper. The different categories of target audiences were coded and refined as they were identified, resulting in the following list: communities, the general public, policymakers, and KMb practitioners. Because all of the articles were retrieved from scholarly journals, academia, as a target audience category, is inherent (meaning that all of the articles targeted academics as an audience). Academics were, therefore, excluded as a target. It is also important to note that some studies had more than one target audience and were coded into multiple categories. Of all the target audience categories, communities appeared most frequently with (n 5 15) or 48.3% of the articles. KMb practitioners were the second most frequent target audience with (n 5 11) or 35.48% of the selected papers. Only a small percentage of papers targeted governments and the general public, with each accounting for (n 5 2) or less than seven percent of the sample.

### *3.7 Major themes*

Guided by the sub-questions outlined earlier, several overarching themes emerged from the literature through the inductive coding process. A narrative synthesis (Popay et al., 2006) was used to categorize our findings into four distinct topics, namely (1) the intersections of EDI and KMb, (2) the value of integrating EDI into KMb, (3) recommendations for embedding EDI into KMb, and (4) barriers to integration.

#### *3.7.1 Intersections*

##### *(1) Researcher positionality*

An analysis of the literature to determine what lies at the intersection of KMb and EDI revealed an interesting pattern. The terrain at the intersections of EDI and KMb is nuanced; consisting of complex layers that necessitate a substantive focus on methodologies that are intentional, reciprocal, and reflexive (Judd and McKinnon, 2021). Several scholars acknowledge the importance of contextual positioning and the recognition of intersecting identities, disparities, and the specific needs and priorities of engaged communities (Heinisch, 2020; Polk and Diver, 2020). Despite this, merely acknowledging historically

underrepresented and marginalized groups in research is insufficient. Instead, scholars support the view that an awareness of the complexities surrounding EDI and deep engagement with the nuanced dynamics that influence the experiences and outcomes of these groups. Consequently, researcher positioning must be underpinned by a robust theoretical understanding of intersectionality, power structures, and systemic inequities (Durall et al., 2021; Kimbrell et al., 2022). Expanding upon this premise, scholars argue that the assimilation of academic knowledge, which constitutes the ultimate objective of KMb, is inseparable from recognizing the enduring inequalities among the engaged groups. Such recognition establishes EDI as an intrinsic element within the framework of co-production (Smith et al., 2020).

## (2) Equity framing

Academics also concur that augmenting the accessibility of scholarly research to nonacademic audiences and fostering collaborative endeavors between scholars and nonacademic stakeholders represent pivotal components of KMb (Armitage et al., 2012). This finding underscores the significance of exploring innovative methodologies to effectively incorporate EDI into KMb, requiring a fundamental paradigmatic shift towards prioritizing equity framing, which involves consciously centering EDI in the planning, execution, and dissemination of research and knowledge-sharing activities (Polk and Diver, 2020). Equity framing creates conditions proliferating innovative and impactful research, providing essential connection points for researchers to engage and increase accountability to historically marginalized and otherwise excluded groups (Weingart et al., 2021). Taken together, these perspectives suggest a strong association between EDI and KMb, highlighting the need for intentional processes that address historical and systemic inequalities; prioritize the needs and perspectives of marginalized communities; promote equitable access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes; support mutual and reciprocal learning, active engagement, and respect for alternative ways of knowing and doing (Armitage et al., 2012; Canfield et al., 2020; Polk and Diver, 2020).

### 3.7.2 Value of integrating

#### (1) Creating social value and positive impact

The third research sub-question in this SLR explores the value of integrating EDI into KMb. Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from this analysis is that the positive effects of inclusive approaches and practices have now influenced research to the point where funders typically require proposals that include both KMb and EDI strategies that address how research findings will be translated into action and shared with diverse audiences to create social value and positive impact (McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020; Patnaik and Bhowmick, 2020). This finding underscores the intrinsic correlation between KMb and the integration of EDI principles. Given that KMb fundamentally aims to facilitate the swift translation of research findings into actionable insights for policymaking and practical implementation through collaborative knowledge dissemination and co-production, the imperative of integrating EDI into KMb is unequivocally affirmed (McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020; Judd and McKinnon, 2021).

#### (2) Addressing present and future challenges

A common perspective emerging under this theme is that understanding the audience adeptly, involving a range of stakeholders, and addressing their requirements are firmly established as optimal methodologies when integrating EDI into KMb (Armitage et al., 2012; MacKinnon et al., 2021; Polk and Diver, 2020). However, in isolation, these strategies fail to confront the more profound issue of engaging historically excluded and marginalized audiences

(Armitage et al., 2012; Judd and McKinnon, 2021). Thus, a compelling argument emerges for leveraging the transformative capacity inherent in addressing equity considerations by exploring collaborative and inclusive methodologies for co-production with diverse audiences to address contemporary and forthcoming challenges (Durst, 2021; Merzagora et al., 2022).

### 3.7.3 Recommended opportunities

Among the more significant findings to emerge from this SLR are several procedural guidelines and recommendations for integrating EDI into KMB. These recommendations have been characterized into five distinct categories: (1) acknowledging inherent bias, (2) centering excluded groups, (3) establishing partnerships, (4) promoting responsible engagement, (5) and advocating for transformational and systemic change.

#### (1) Acknowledging inherent bias

Several academics suggest that greater efforts should be taken by researchers to acknowledge inherent biases which often influence research design and implementation (Canfield et al., 2020; Contera, 2021; Humm et al., 2020). Becoming aware of positionality and partial perspectives transcends developing a more pluralistic and multicultural perspective to address acknowledging and deconstructing “dominant narratives and personal privileges embodied in our race, class, gender, etc., that shape the ways in which we understand the world” (Polk and Diver, 2020, p. 3). It is, therefore, crucial for researchers to understand how inherent biases influence judgment and intentions in conducting research (Durall et al., 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2021). Similarly, KMB researchers and practitioners are encouraged to identify inequities that may arise from uneven power relations and develop a critical awareness of the experiences and perspectives of marginalized or otherwise excluded groups (Canfield et al., 2020).

#### (2) Centering marginalized or otherwise excluded groups

A reasonable approach to integrating EDI into KMB involves centering marginalized or otherwise excluded groups by adopting democratic processes, where diverse and non-traditional ideas, perspectives, values, and worldviews are respected and integrated and where no single individual or group exerts a dominant influence (Salmon et al., 2021). This approach calls for challenging dominant mainstream worldviews that have historically excluded these groups from scholarship (Polk and Diver, 2020). Acknowledging and confronting privilege, dominance, uneven power structures, inherent bias, and discriminatory practices calls for creating discursive spaces for complex and difficult discussions, which may not always result in consensus and agreement (Armitage et al., 2012; Owen et al., 2021). There is a tendency for these types of discussions to elicit dissensus, particularly in the early stages of dialogue and especially when engagement is framed around dominant policies (Durall et al., 2021; Schwetje et al., 2020). Such issues may be reconciled through clear, directed and meaningful prompts that are framed to center equity (Polk and Diver, 2020; Judd and McKinnon, 2021). Among KMB scholars, there is now widespread recognition that incorporating stakeholders into the early stages of the research design process may assist with centering equity and inclusion (Kueffer and Larson, 2014; Lorenz, 2020; Salmon et al., 2021; Scholten et al., 2016). Since KMB involves translating research design and implementation into cultural contexts, these scientists also suggest seeking out the assistance of partners when attempting to use frames that speak to diverse stakeholders and when attempting to engage difficult-to-reach audiences (Armitage et al., 2012; Durall et al., 2021; Humm and Schrögel, 2020).

### (3) Promoting responsible knowledge mobilization

Subscribing to a model that identifies and engages stakeholders during the earliest stages of the research process also facilitates the widely acknowledged KMb perspectives of “construction of knowledge, an emancipatory approach, and impact in academic and policy contexts” (Sanahuja et al., 2021, p. 16). This process of working collaboratively to co-create knowledge from inception to conclusion also facilitates the adoption of participatory action research processes that lead to a pluralistic transformation of knowledge production (Heinisch, 2020). Introducing a broader perspective that supports this recommendation, Durst (2021, p. 6) focuses on responsible knowledge mobilization, which maintains that only equitable and inclusive approaches to research “involving diverse partners of equal standing is capable of addressing present and future challenges.”

Scholars also call for a paradigm shift from positioning scientists as the lofty purveyors of research findings and underrepresented groups as the reactive beneficiaries (Heinisch, 2020). A co-production process centers transdisciplinary research and involves investigators from multiple distinctive disciplines collaborating to create new innovations that integrate discipline-specific methodologies to redress inequities (Durst, 2021; Merzagora et al., 2022).

### (4) Establishing partnerships

Research also suggests that establishing partnerships through strategies, such as creating communities of practice “formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour” (Wenger, 2011, p. 1) could be integral to collaboration and augmenting inclusive practices (King-Kostelac et al., 2022; MacKinnon et al., 2021; Pecl et al., 2019). Communities of practice provide opportunities for those stakeholders committed to developing collaborative inquiry and multidirectional, mutual knowledge sharing that actively engages the broader dialogue (Moliner et al., 2021).

Collaborative partnerships between scientists and stakeholders, where research is codesigned, not only assist in ensuring that research goals support and respect mutual perspectives, but also work to kindle and sustain interest from diverse participants (Patnaik and Bhowmick, 2020; Salmon et al., 2021). Engaging key stakeholders collaboratively in defining goals creates a democratic and distributed decision-making process that leads to meaningful conceptualization in research, which, in turn, results in stakeholders who are invested and committed (King-Kostelac et al., 2022; McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020). Another extensively recognized course of action for building and strengthening inclusive research partnerships is facilitating employment opportunities for researchers and research assistants in the populations being engaged. Harnessing local talent brings “considerable value to research projects given locals’ competencies and mastery of their own social, geographic and cultural environment” (Ferrazzi et al., 2018, p. 2), which can lead to equally beneficial and reciprocal relationships between academic researchers and stakeholders. Canfield et al. (2020), however, warn against tokenized involvement of underrepresented or marginalized groups, citing that participation should be intentional and meaningful.

### (5) Advocating for transformational and systemic change

Another important theme that emerged from the analysis of recommendations indicates a link between divergence from established research structures to more inclusive and integrated knowledge co-production (Heinisch, 2020). A similar point suggests the necessity for policy interventions grounded in inclusivity to accelerate the transformational paradigm shift needed to successfully confront and dismantle the structural inequities surrounding how knowledge is mobilized (Polk and Diver, 2020). Systemic change requires a shift in institutional directions based on equitable and inclusive priorities (Canfield et al., 2020). Consequently, fundamental transformation will require identifying needs and opportunities for more inclusive and intersectional approaches (Smith et al., 2020), coupled with

investments of “time, resources and collective will” (Judd and McKinnon, 2021, p. 4).

#### 3.7.4 Barriers

The analysis of barriers to integrating EDI into KMB involved an introspection of the factors that hinder success. There are a wide range of potential barriers, which we categorized into four broad but distinct barriers, namely (1) inherent, unconscious, and implicit biases, (2) a lack of evidence-based best practices, (3) siloing of research and information, and (4) a lack of institutional support and resources.

##### (1) Inherent, unconscious, and implicit biases

Researchers and practitioners bring inherent, unconscious, and implicit biases to research and practice, often resulting in KMB activities that perpetuate rather than address inequities. When social scientists fail to acknowledge how their cultural perspectives shape KMB, they often create culturally unwelcoming experiences that deter inclusive engagement (Contera, 2021; Judd and McKinnon, 2021). Similarly, when researchers fail to acknowledge individual intersectional identities, as well as those of knowledge users and participants, they are more likely to produce systems that lead to inequitable public engagement (Canfield et al., 2020). Several researchers have acknowledged that traditional approaches to KMB that utilize Eurocentric constructs continue to be practised (Judd and McKinnon, 2021; Ferrazzi et al., 2018). Such approaches are rarely attractive to audiences from marginalized groups and inherently exclude many members of these communities (Humm and Schrögel, 2020). Notwithstanding how well-intentioned the objectives are, “historically marginalized and minoritized individuals and communities are largely overlooked and undervalued” (Canfield et al., 2020, p. 1). The lack of understanding the diversity of audiences and their needs generally leads to a lack of participation or meaningful engagement thus reinforcing feelings of exclusion among participants (MacKinnon et al., 2021; Weingart et al., 2021).

##### (2) Lack of evidence-based best practices

While a considerable body of research exists on EDI and KMB as individual constructs, many scholars agree that there is a recognized need for a coherent and comprehensive body of work on the practical integration of EDI into KMB (Matias et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020). As a result of this paucity of empirical data, a growing number of practitioners are experimenting with unproven strategies and approaches (Canfield et al., 2020). A lack of evidence-based best practices regarding inclusive, equity-framed KMB processes also leads to an inconsistent understanding and application of systems and structures, resulting in contradictions and dilemmas (Sanahuja et al., 2021). Some of the uncertainty and confusion among researchers stem from discrepancies in understanding the concept of EDI, which has loaded meanings and implications for practice (Judd and McKinnon, 2021). The scarcity of empirical research on procedural best practices also leads to challenges in evaluating the success of inclusive practices and policies (Weingart et al., 2021).

Problems also arise when some researchers hide failures where successful outcomes were unattainable, leading to transparency issues and a lack of lessons learned (Salmon et al., 2021). While addressing these challenges requires a thorough understanding and genuine respect for marginalized or excluded groups, little is known about why participants and users fail to engage with KMB activities and what should be done to correct them (Humm and Schrögel, 2020). Further steps are needed to develop a better understanding of what is needed to unlearn deeply entrenched research processes and develop novel approaches for effective KMB (Owen et al., 2021).

##### (3) Siloing of research and information

Another notable constraint to embedding EDI into KMB has been the siloing of research and

information. One of the most significant barriers discussed among academics is the inability or lack of accountability of researchers to mobilize findings in a meaningful way (Ferrazzi et al., 2018; McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020). KMb systems are often designed by researchers, who do not share the same background knowledge and experience as the participant group (Heinisch, 2020). Often these same researchers focus on competition and individualism rather than collaboration and respect (Owen et al., 2021).

#### (4) Lack of institutional support and resources

A lack of institutional support and resources is among the unique complexities researchers face, which creates barriers to engaging in meaningful collaboration and co-creation (Weingart et al., 2021). Several researchers also mentioned work pressure, time constraints, a lack of multi-agency collaboration and networking, a general scarcity of funding and resources for training, and the absence of inclusion assessment frameworks, as persistent barriers to integration (Kimbrell et al., 2022; McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Funding that is geared toward short-term research projects was also posited as a constraint, as researchers find it difficult to implement meaningful engagement activities and reflections (Heinisch, 2020).

### 3.8 Research gaps

Both scholars and practitioners alike continuously strive to discern areas where existing theories, methodologies, or practices fall short, and to envision pathways forward that address emerging challenges and opportunities. Consequently, this section sets the stage for discussing existing gaps in the literature that point toward crucial future research directions. The broad themes that emerged in the analysis of existing knowledge gaps are (1) understanding root causes, (2) appreciating diverse viewpoints, and (3) evidence-based frameworks for KMb (4) accessible research, (5) using technology as a catalyst for collaboration, and (6) developing strategies for continuous improvement are outlined in the table which follows (see Table 3).

#### (1) Understanding root causes

A critical gap that has emerged in the academic discourses of integrating EDI into KMb is understanding the root causes of the research-to-practice gap, particularly from an equitable standpoint (McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020). This perspective underscores the perception that merely knowing one's audience and effectively engaging with diverse stakeholders, while essential, may not sufficiently confront the deeper challenge of engaging historically excluded and marginalized communities. Understanding how intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, socioeconomic status) affect participation and access to mobilized knowledge is crucial for creating inclusive strategies. Delving into the reasons behind this gap is, therefore, essential for developing strategies to bridge it, ensuring that knowledge is translated into practice in a manner that aligns with EDI (Durall et al., 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2021; McGhie-Richmond and Haider, 2020).

#### (2) Appreciating diverse viewpoints

There is also a growing recognition among scholars of the imperative to adopt broader perspectives that encompass diverse viewpoints (Armitage et al., 2012; Heinisch, 2020). The identified research gap, therefore, lies in the insufficient integration of diverse perspectives and viewpoints. This conclusion emphasizes the importance of embracing a diversity of voices, experiences, and perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of research findings and their implications (Durall et al., 2021). Incorporating EDI into KMb allows both researchers and practitioners to not only enrich their understanding of research outcomes, but also ensure that KMb processes are inclusive and equitable (McGhie-Richmond and

Haider, 2020; Owen et al., 2021).

### (3) Evidence-based frameworks

A standard view among researchers is the pressing need for knowledge mobilization that is evidence-based, inclusive, and equitable (Judd and McKinnon, 2021). This suggests that there is an urgency to not only move knowledge from research settings into practical applications but also to ensure that the knowledge produced and disseminated reflects a broad range of experiences and needs and that individuals and groups have equal access to information and opportunities to participate in knowledge exchange processes (Patnaik and Bhowmick, 2020). To address these needs, future research should focus on developing methodologies that ensure inclusivity and equity in knowledge mobilization. This includes identifying and dismantling barriers that prevent marginalized communities from accessing *and contributing to knowledge and exploring practical strategies for incorporating diverse perspectives into research processes* (Smith et al., 2020).

### (4) Accessible research

Earlier in this paper, we posited that the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge possess the power to either oppress or empower. Another perspective that surfaced was the need for knowledge to be made accessible to all stakeholders, regardless of language, geography, or socioeconomic status, necessitating the need for using plain language in KMB and employing strategies to enhance accessibility (Canfield et al., 2020; Judd and McKinnon, 2021). In addition, it is crucial to implement strategies that enhance accessibility, such as providing translations, utilizing digital platforms to reach remote areas, and developing culturally relevant materials (Durst, 2021; Kueffer and Larson, 2014). These measures collectively ensure that knowledge is not confined to a privileged few but is available to and useable by everyone, thereby democratizing information and supporting equitable knowledge mobilization (Heinisch, 2020).

### (5) Using technology as a catalyst for collaboration

The role of utilizing technology as a catalyst for collaboration was a recurring theme in the analysis of future directions. The literature also emphasizes that technological advancements can enhance knowledge dissemination and application, thereby fostering collaborative efforts that transcend traditional boundaries and facilitate inclusive practices (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2015). By breaking down barriers of time and space, facilitating communication, and providing tools for sharing and co-creating knowledge, technology has the potential to catalyze collaboration to level the playing field to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage with and benefit from knowledge (Smith et al., 2020).

### (6) Continuous improvement

The review also highlights the necessity of recognizing that EDI is not just a peripheral concern, but a central aspect of research and practice (Smith et al., 2020). EDI, thus, requires ongoing exploration and examination of areas where it may be lacking, contributing to the continual improvement of research and practice methodologies to ensure a more equitable and comprehensive approach (Durst, 2021). This opportunity for future research suggests that EDI is not a one-time fix, but rather, an ongoing process that requires regular assessment and adjustment.

Gaps in our understanding of how EDI is integrated into KMB, not only signify opportunities for further exploration, but also underscore the imperative of acknowledging and addressing limitations to advancing knowledge.



**Table III. Summary of research gaps**

| Research Gaps                      | Frequency | Authors  |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Understanding root causes          | 4         | (Humm et al., 2020; Humm & Schrögel, 2020; Judd & McKinnon, 2021; Polk & Diver, 2020)  |
| Appreciating diverse viewpoints    | 6         | (Armitage et al., 2012; Durall et al., 2021; Heinisch, 2020; Owen et al., 2021; McGhie-Richmond & Haider, 2020; Sanahuja et al., 2021) |
| Evidence-based frameworks          | 3         | (Judd & McKinnon, 2021; Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2020; Smith et al., 2020)  |
| Accessible research                |           | (Canfield et al., 2020; Durst, 2021; Heinisch, 2020; Judd & McKinnon, 2021; Kueffer & Larson, 2014).                                   |
| Using technology for collaboration | 2         | (Heinisch, 2020; Smith et al., 2020)   |
| Continuous improvement             | 3         | (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2015; Durst, 2021; Smith et al., 2020)   |

**Source(s):** Table by authors

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

To answer the research question of the current state of integrating EDI into KMb, we employed six sub-questions that focused on the target audience, the intersection of EDI and KMb, the value of integrating EDI into KMb, opportunities for integration, barriers to integration, gaps, and future research directions. Through an in-depth analysis of the literature, we have provided comprehensive insights into these sub-questions and assessed whether connecting this intersection could be a viable strategy for bridging conceptual and practical gaps between EDI and KMb.

Although this SLR has presented evidence of existing work on identifying barriers, gaps and opportunities, there does not appear to be a comprehensive account of how EDI has been incorporated into KMb to date. In reviewing the literature, no evidence-based frameworks were found for understanding how to effectively integrate EDI into KMb. This problem, also noted by (Judd and McKinnon, 2021), suggests a need for more structured approaches or models backed by empirical research. The disconnect between evidence-based research and suggestions made by researchers, such as Smith et al. (2020), to integrate EDI within KMb design and implementation poses a challenge, as both KMb academics and practitioners strive to adopt EDI practices without auxiliary peer-reviewed scientific validation.

Similarly, several studies have focused on reviews and recommendations, but no research was found in this SLR on developing verified metrics to measure the effectiveness of EDI and KMb integration. This finding suggests that despite being consistently raised in discussions about knowledge mobilization theory and practice, there is little peer-reviewed empirical evidence to show precisely how EDI is defined and effectively integrated into the field (Canfield et al., 2020; Judd and McKinnon, 2021). Developing accountability frameworks is essential for integrating EDI into KMb, as they provide structured mechanisms to ensure that diverse perspectives are consistently included and that the processes are transparent, equitable, and effective. We argue that failing to address the distinct implications of this research gap could perpetuate the very inequities and exclusionary practices that researchers are attempting to confront through KMb and call for more empirical research in this space.

### (1) Implications for scholars

One interesting finding with implications for academic consideration and action is that terms, such as science communication, citizen science, responsible research, and inclusive innovation, among others, are often used interchangeably with KMb. We recognize that these terms may represent different theoretical constructs that have their own unique implications. For this SLR, however, only those studies where the meanings and perspectives were aligned with definitions outlined earlier in the introduction of this study were selected. We found that the functions derived from the definitions of science communication in the subset of studies in this SLR correlate with core definitions of knowledge mobilization, as defined by (Phipps et al., 2016).

The single most striking finding to emerge from the SLR was that a large proportion of studies were published in the Global North. This finding suggests a strong presence of scholars and research institutions from developed countries in producing knowledge related to integrating EDI and KMb, which implies an under-representation in the literature coming out of the Global South. The notable disparity in research from the Global South in the literature reviewed implies that the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of scholars and institutions from less economically developed regions need to be adequately represented in the body of knowledge concerning integrating EDI and KMb. This finding raises questions about the reasons behind this apparent imbalance of power and hints at systemic issues within academic publishing, research funding, and broader socio-economic disparities that might hinder the participation and recognition of researchers from the Global South. This finding also has implications for future research, as there is value in investigating whether the dominance of the Global North in shaping the discourse around EDI and KMb. Future research should aim to understand the factors contributing to this disparity and explore strategies to promote inclusivity, collaboration, and equitable representation of diverse perspectives in knowledge production and dissemination.

Another unanticipated result was that the studies were widely scattered across a large number of journals, which varied considerably among specialties. Two journals, *Frontiers in Communication* and the *Journal of Science Communication*, published many of the 28 studies in the SLR. This finding suggests that authors addressing knowledge dissemination and cocreation (core components of knowledge mobilization) may be leaning toward communications journals as a possible home for this area of research. Also unexpected was that more than half of the articles were single publications derived from 18 journals. This finding is consistent with the work of Judd and McKinnon (2021, p. 14), who also found many “single papers appearing in a broad catalogue of journals without a strong theoretical grounding.” These findings further validate the need for a comprehensive body of work on evidence-based practices. Closing this substantial divide between research and practice also carries significance for practitioners, who rely on academics to produce reliable, accumulative scientific knowledge that shapes and directs policy and practical applications.

### (2) Implications for practitioners and others practicing KMb

While EDI initiatives can potentially increase access to knowledge and address systemic oppression, they can also create disparities. This SLR highlights important EDI considerations for practitioners designing EDI-driven knowledge mobilization initiatives, which are often overlooked or misguided due to a limited understanding of their impact. Practitioners, co-creators and other stakeholders are critical to advancing EDI within KMb by fostering inclusive environments, staying abreast of evolving best practices and furthering collaboration to contribute to more impactful knowledge mobilization outcomes. Practitioners need to recognize the potential ethical complexities involved in EDI initiatives and ensure they have a comprehensive understanding of their implications. Without a complete understanding of the ethical implications of EDI-driven

KMb, practitioners may struggle to make informed decisions about how to best improve KMb outcomes. Practitioners should prioritize ethical considerations in their KMb strategies and ensure they have the necessary knowledge and resources to navigate complex ethical dilemmas.

This systematic approach to analyzing current academic literature on integrating EDI into KMb represents a significant contribution to the field. This SLR of peer-reviewed academic literature on integrating EDI into KMb over the last decade reveals several key insights, which confirm that grappling with the complexities of integrating EDI into KMb has the potential to ensure that knowledge and research findings are accessible to a broader and more diverse audience. A research gap exists due to the exclusion of articles published in languages other than English and the omission of studies from the field of medicine, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness and applicability of the findings. Despite this, our research offers valuable guidance to academic researchers and decision-makers, highlighting the potential advantages and limitations of integrating EDI and KMb. This approach may help in preventing the marginalization of certain groups and promoting a more inclusive KMb, thereby shaping future directions of scholarship and practice.

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