

## Synergistic Influence in Social Media Marketing: Integrating Interactivity and Personalization to Build Consumer Trust and Brand Engagement

Akhmad Zulkifli <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Information System, Study Program, Universitas Hang Tuah Pekanbaru, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

Email Correspondent  
zulkifli.akhmad@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper introduces Synergistic Influence as a new theoretical construct that explains how interactivity and personalization jointly enhance consumer trust and brand engagement in social media marketing. Drawing upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm (*Sultan, Wong, & Azam, 2021; originally conceptualized by Mehrabian & Russell, 1974*) and *Trust Transfer Theory* (*Stewart, 2003; Hsu, Hung, & Chiu, 2022*), this study synthesizes insights from 58 peer-reviewed articles to develop a refined conceptual framework. While interactivity and personalization have been examined as distinct constructs (*Kim & Ko, 2012; Soares et al., 2019; Hirna et al., 2022*), their convergence forms a more powerful psychological stimulus that evokes perceived authenticity and digital trust (*Rossanty et al., 2024; Rico et al., 2024*). This synergy, termed Synergistic Influence, represents consumers' holistic perception of responsive and relevant brand interactions. The model conceptualizes interactivity and personalization as dual digital stimuli forming a higher-order construct influencing trust, which subsequently drives brand engagement and loyalty. Theoretically, this paper extends Kim and Ko's (2012) classical SMM model by reframing digital dimensions as co-active rather than additive factors. Managerially, it suggests that brands should design integrated experiences combining responsiveness and personalization to build long-term trust and relationship quality in digital environments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the pioneering framework of Kim and Ko (2012), social media marketing (SMM) has evolved from promotional activity into an interactive and relational system emphasizing dialogue between brands and consumers. Initially, SMM centered on entertainment, informativeness, and promotion, but it has since transformed into an ecosystem where interactivity and personalization are the main drivers of value creation (Soares et al., 2019; Hirna et al., 2022; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Recent studies confirm that these dimensions shape consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity, trust, and engagement (Rossanty et al., 2024; Rico et al., 2024). This evolution signals a paradigmatic shift from communication efficiency toward experiential relevance and emotional connection in digital marketing.

Despite the growing body of research, the literature remains fragmented. Most studies continue to examine interactivity and personalization as separate predictors of trust, satisfaction, or engagement. Interactivity research highlights how two-way communication enhances responsiveness and immediacy (Soares et al., 2019; Althuwaini, 2022), while personalization studies emphasize that customized and relevant content strengthens trust and relational quality (Hirna et al., 2022; Gaber et al., 2019). However, few studies have explored how these two elements interact dynamically to shape consumers' holistic perceptions of brand experience.

Recent evidence reinforces this notion. When brands integrate responsive communication with personalized content, consumers experience higher emotional authenticity, trust, and engagement intensity (Andrade & Oliveira, 2025; Rossanty et al., 2024). These findings suggest that digital marketing effectiveness depends not merely on each dimension's strength but on their synergistic interplay, where interactivity and personalization jointly stimulate trust and engagement.

To address this gap, this study introduces "Synergistic Influence" — a conceptual construct describing the co-active effect of interactivity and personalization within the SMM framework. Drawing upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and Trust Transfer Theory (Stewart, 2003), interactivity and personalization are conceptualized as joint digital stimuli shaping consumers' cognitive (trust) and affective (authenticity) states, which subsequently drive behavioral responses such as engagement and loyalty. This framework reflects how consumers interpret social media experiences holistically, responding to the coherence between responsiveness and relevance as a signal of brand sincerity.

The theoretical contribution of this paper lies in extending the classical SMM model by reframing interactivity and personalization as mutually reinforcing constructs rather than parallel dimensions. It integrates the relational insights of Kim and Ko (2012) with the engagement-oriented perspective of Barger et al. (2016), which conceptualizes social media engagement as a two-way co-creation process. By conceptualizing Synergistic Influence as a higher-order stimulus, the paper advances understanding of digital trust formation, suggesting that consumer–brand relationships in social media are not built through frequency of interaction but through the perceived harmony between interaction and personalization.

From a managerial standpoint, this study offers a timely perspective for brands seeking sustainable engagement. It implies that effective digital strategy is not defined by “more interaction” or “more targeting,” but by the integration of responsive dialogue and personal relevance. When interactivity and personalization converge coherently, they create a digital environment that feels both human and meaningful—evoking trust and emotional closeness. This insight has practical implications for content design, social media responsiveness, and customer relationship management.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews and synthesizes six clusters of literature encompassing the foundations of social media marketing, interactivity, personalization, and trust-based relationships. Section 3 presents the proposed conceptual framework grounded in the S-O-R and Trust Transfer theories. Section 4 discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the proposed model, while Section 5 concludes by outlining directions for future empirical validation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media Marketing : Theoretical Background

The conceptual foundation of social media marketing (SMM) originates from the seminal framework of Kim and Ko (2012), who identified five core dimensions of SMM—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth—as antecedents of brand equity and relationship quality in luxury fashion brands. This multidimensional model redefined SMM from one-way promotion into a relational system built on interactivity and personalization, and later extended through the engagement-based interaction framework proposed by Barger et al. (2016).

Subsequent studies refined these dimensions across digital platforms. Soares et al. (2019) confirmed interactivity as a dynamic driver of user engagement and satisfaction, while Gaber et al. (2019) and Hirna et al. (2022) demonstrated that personalization (or customization) strengthens perceived authenticity and trust. Likewise, Gupta et al. (2022) and Rossanty et al. (2024) highlighted that integrated digital experiences enhance consumer loyalty and emotional connection. Together, these works reveal that interactivity and personalization operate as complementary forces shaping brand experience quality.

Recent syntheses of SMM research (e.g., Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Khoa, 2023) indicate an evolution from multidimensional to interactional perspectives, emphasizing synergy among SMM elements. While interactivity supports responsiveness, personalization ensures relevance, yet few studies examine their combined psychological impact. This gap motivates the introduction of “Synergistic Influence”, a construct extending Kim and Ko’s (2012) model by positioning interactivity and personalization as mutually reinforcing stimuli that co-create trust and brand engagement.

To further clarify how this study builds upon and extends prior research, Table 1 provides a comparative synthesis of key studies on social media marketing (SMM). It highlights how interactivity and personalization have been treated across seminal and recent works, identifying the conceptual gaps that motivate the present framework and supporting the need for integrative constructs such as Synergistic Influence (Rawangngam et al., 2025; Rehman et al., 2025; Bashir et al., 2024).

**Table 1. Comparative Synthesis of SMM Dimensions and the Proposed Synergistic Influence Construct**

Reference Study	Core Focus	Interactivity	Personalization	Outcome Variable	Limitation / Gap	Contribution to Current Framework
<b>Kim &amp; Ko (2012)</b>	Luxury brand SMM model	✓	✓ (Customization)	Brand Equity	Dimensions treated separately	Foundation for integrated SMM logic
<b>Barger et al. (2016)</b>	Social media and consumer engagement	✓	–	Engagement	Focused on engagement mechanisms without synergy analysis	Provides empirical grounding for interactive engagement process
<b>Gaber et al. (2019)</b>	Instagram personalization	–	✓	Trust / Attitude	No interactivity link	Supports personalization–trust path
<b>Bozkurt (2020)</b>	Firm social media interactivity	✓	–	Customer Engagement	Examines interactivity–trust link only	Reinforces interactivity as driver of trust and engagement
<b>Islam et al. (2019)</b>	Customer engagement in service context	✓	✓	Loyalty / Satisfaction	Limited integration between dual stimuli	Confirms joint effects of interactivity and personalization on engagement
<b>Sultan et al. (2021)</b>	Communication source and value in food marketing	✓	✓	Purchase Intention	Applied S-O-R but outside SMM context	Strengthens S-O-R foundation for stimulus–response integration
<b>This Study (2025)</b>	Conceptual synthesis	✓✓	✓✓	Trust → Engagement	–	Introduces Synergistic Influence construct integrating interactivity and personalization

As summarized in Table 1, prior research has predominantly examined interactivity and personalization as independent antecedents of trust and engagement. The present study moves beyond this additive view by conceptualizing their combined and co-active effect, which is further elaborated in the next section on interactivity.

### Interactivity and Its Impact on Engagement

Interactivity remains one of the most defining dimensions of SMM, serving as the mechanism that distinguishes digital from traditional marketing. In Kim and Ko's (2012) model, interaction was viewed as a key driver of customer equity through two-way communication. Later studies positioned interactivity as a psychological stimulus enhancing engagement via responsiveness, participation, and immediacy (Soares et al., 2019; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021).

Empirical evidence from Nguyen et al. (2024) and Khoa (2023) further shows that interactivity builds brand trust by signaling openness and real-time transparency, especially within TikTok and e-commerce environments. However, interactivity alone may not guarantee sustainable engagement; excessive or irrelevant engagement can lead to fatigue or reduced informativeness (Althuwaini, 2022). Therefore, consumers increasingly expect interactions that are both responsive and personally meaningful.

This progression reflects a theoretical transition—from quantity of interaction toward quality of personalized interaction. Interactivity now functions as a relational construct, where perceived fit and relevance determine impact. Conceptually, interactivity provides energy to engagement, while personalization provides

direction. Their coherent combination fosters authenticity and trust, forming the psychological foundation of Synergistic Influence.

### Personalization As a Driver of Trust and Brand Authenticity

If interactivity draws consumers into dialogue, personalization ensures that the interaction remains meaningful. Within SMM, personalization reflects the brand's ability to tailor messages and experiences to individual preferences—signaling attention and care. Kim and Ko (2012) conceptualized this as *customization*, a precursor to perceived exclusivity and value. Later, Gaber et al. (2019) showed that personalized advertising on Instagram fosters favorable attitudes toward both ads and brands. Likewise, Hirna et al. (2022) and Althuwaini (2022) found that personalization enhances trust and relational quality in digital service environments.

More recent work by Rico et al. (2024) and Rossanty et al. (2024) links personalization with authenticity and emotional resonance, transforming brand relationships from transactional to affective. However, personalization without responsiveness can appear mechanical. Studies such as Andrade & Oliveira (2025) suggest that personalization achieves its greatest effect when combined with interactivity, forming a seamless cycle of recognition and response. Together, these dynamics form the essence of Synergistic Influence, the co-creation of relevance and responsiveness that builds digital trust.

### Beyond Additivity : Toward a Synergistic Perspective

Although research on social media marketing (SMM) has become increasingly mature, many studies still view its dimensions as additive antecedents—each acting independently on trust, engagement, or loyalty. This additive logic, rooted in Kim and Ko (2012), assumes that effects from interactivity, personalization, and other digital features simply accumulate. Yet, contemporary evidence suggests that consumer responses are shaped by the integration of these factors rather than their separate impact.

Empirical findings from Bozkurt (2020) and Islam et al. (2019) show that when interactive communication is combined with personalized content, it significantly enhances eWOM, trust, and engagement outcomes. Similarly, Rossanty et al. (2024) and Omeish et al. (2024) confirm that emotional connection and authenticity strengthen when responsiveness and relevance coexist. These results reveal a co-creative effect in which consumers perceive digital experiences as both personally meaningful and socially participative.

Theoretically, this aligns with recent insights from Vinerean & Opreana (2021), who argued that SMM engagement arises from the coherence among multiple dimensions. When interactivity (responsiveness) and personalization (relevance) converge, consumers perceive authenticity, trust, and human warmth. This synergy evokes both cognitive assurance (“the brand understands me”) and affective attachment (“the brand engages with me”). Hence, the present paper introduces Synergistic Influence as a latent construct capturing this holistic digital

empathy—where interaction and personalization form a unified stimulus that drives trust and engagement, consistent with findings from Haudi et al. (2022) and Rehman et al. (2025) who emphasize that customer engagement is the outcome of synchronized relational stimuli.

### Theoretical Underpinning : S-O-R and Trust Transfer

To build a coherent foundation for the proposed model, this study adopts two theoretical perspectives: the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm and the Trust Transfer perspective. Together, these explain how digital marketing stimuli evoke internal psychological states that lead to trust-based behavior (Khoa & Huynh, 2023; Tam & Lee, 2024; Stewart, 2003).

The S-O-R paradigm, originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and widely adapted in digital marketing (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2012; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021), posits that external stimuli (S) evoke internal cognitive or affective reactions (O), which then shape behavioral responses (R). Within the SMM context, interactivity and personalization serve as dual stimuli shaping consumers' trust and perceived authenticity, which later manifest as engagement and loyalty. Unlike traditional S-O-R applications that treat stimuli as separate cues, this paper introduces a synergistic stimulus, the co-active combination of interactivity and personalization, representing the construct Synergistic Influence.

Complementarily, the Trust Transfer mechanism explains how trust moves from the digital interaction experience to the brand relationship itself. As shown in Althuwaini (2022) and Rico et al. (2024), when consumers perceive digital engagement as reliable, relevant, and transparent, trust initially placed in online interactions transfers toward overall brand trust. In this study, that process represents how perceived synergy between responsiveness and relevance strengthens long-term engagement and loyalty.

## METHODOLOGY

### Conceptual Synthesis Approach

This study employed a conceptual synthesis approach to develop a new theoretical framework in social media marketing (SMM). Instead of relying on empirical data, it integrated findings from 59 peer-reviewed journal articles to construct a coherent conceptual model. This approach follows the conceptual synthesis tradition used in digital marketing research to identify theoretical convergence across prior frameworks (Rawangngam et al., 2025; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Khoa, 2023). These studies were organized into six thematic clusters: (1) foundations of SMM, (2) interactivity, (3) personalization, (4) integration between interactivity and personalization, (5) trust and brand relationship, and (6) theoretical frameworks encompassing the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm and trust-based relationship theories.

This methodological orientation aligns with prior conceptual syntheses in SMM research (e.g., Barger et al., 2016; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Khoa, 2023), which emphasize logical reasoning and theoretical integration to extend existing models. The procedure followed three main stages:

- a. Literature Consolidation, mapping foundational SMM frameworks such as Kim & Ko (2012) and extracting recurring constructs connecting interactivity, personalization, and trust;
- b. Theoretical Alignment, linking the S-O-R paradigm to cognitive-affective mechanisms and the trust-based logic reflected in Stewart (2003), Althuwaini (2022), and Rico et al. (2024);
- c. Model Construction, developing the *Synergistic Influence* framework as a higher-order construct representing the co-active integration of interactivity and personalization.

This process ensures conceptual rigor and theoretical transparency, enabling replication and future empirical validation (Barger et al., 2016; Bozkurt, 2020). The goal is to establish logically consistent propositions explaining how integrated digital stimuli foster trust and brand engagement in online environments (Haudi et al., 2022; Bashir et al., 2024).

### Foundations of the Proposed Framework

The proposed framework integrates the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm and contemporary trust-based relationship models to explain how digital stimuli evolve into trust-driven outcomes. According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and subsequent marketing applications by Kim & Ko (2012) and Vinerean & Opreana (2021), environmental or digital stimuli influence consumers' internal cognitive-affective states, which then shape behavioral responses.

Within this logic, interactivity reflects a brand's responsiveness and two-way communication, while personalization represents the brand's ability to tailor experiences to user preferences. Together, they form a unified stimulus, the Synergistic Influence, that triggers psychological states of trust and perceived authenticity (the "Organism" stage), leading to brand engagement and loyalty (the "Response" stage) (Soares et al., 2019; Hirna et al., 2022; Rossanty et al., 2024).

As demonstrated in Althuwaini (2022) and Rico et al. (2024), trust generated through digital interaction can transfer to the broader brand relationship. Thus, Synergistic Influence acts as a bridge connecting interactive personalization to long-term relationship outcomes. This refined integration strengthens the S-O-R framework by accounting for the co-active rather than additive nature of digital experiences.

### Conceptual Model Overview

The resulting conceptual model positions Interactivity and Personalization as dual digital stimuli within the Stimulus stage of the S-O-R framework. Their combined impact, termed Synergistic Influence, is conceptualized as a latent higher-order construct representing consumers' integrated perception of responsiveness and relevance. At the Organism level, this synergy triggers Consumer Trust and Perceived Authenticity, which in turn generate Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty at the Response level.

The framework is grounded in the combined logic of the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and supported by trust-based relationship models found in Althuwaini (2022) and Rico et al. (2024), which together explain how interactive and personalized experiences cultivate relational trust in digital environments.

Figure 1 below presents the proposed conceptual framework. The diagram illustrates the hierarchical relationships across theoretical levels: beginning with the dual stimuli of Interactivity and Personalization that converge into Synergistic

Influence as a latent construct, moving through Consumer Trust and Perceived Authenticity at the organism level, and culminating in Brand Engagement and Loyalty at the response level (Haudi et al., 2022; Rehman et al., 2025; Omeish et al., 2024).

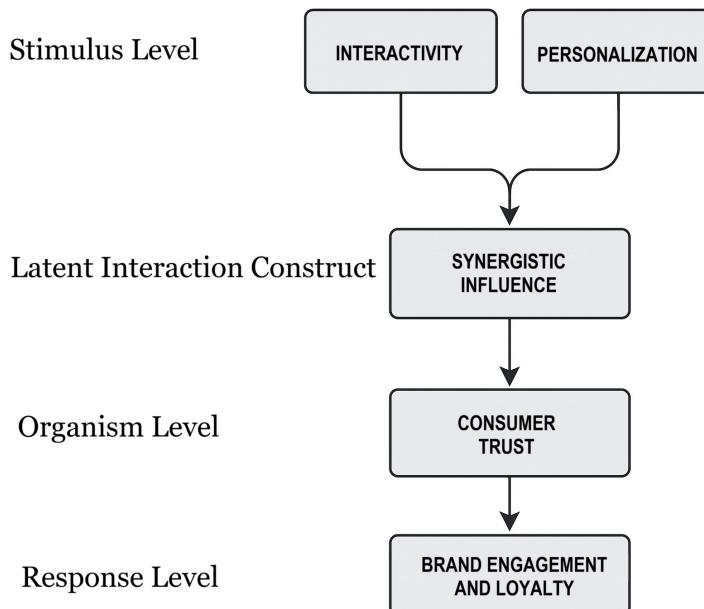


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Synergistic Influence in Social Media Marketing

This framework depicts the synergistic integration of interactivity and personalization at the stimulus stage, forming a latent construct termed Synergistic Influence. Guided by the S-O-R paradigm, the synergy enhances consumer trust and perceived authenticity, which subsequently foster brand engagement and loyalty, consistent with findings from Rossanty et al. (2024) and Omeish et al. (2024) on the interactive effects of responsiveness and relevance in social media contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conceptual Outcomes

The conceptual synthesis of 58 peer-reviewed studies led to the identification of a new theoretical construct — *Synergistic Influence* — representing the integrated co-effect of interactivity and personalization in social-media marketing (SMM). Rather than acting as isolated factors, these two digital stimuli jointly enhance perceptions of relevance, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Bozkurt, 2020; Islam et al., 2019). This result extends foundational SMM frameworks such as Kim & Ko (2012) and Vinerean & Opreana (2021), which originally treated these elements as independent drivers of engagement.

Within the integrated framework, *Synergistic Influence* operates as a psychological bridge linking digital communication with consumer trust formation (Althuwaini, 2022; Rico et al., 2024). Its emergence depends on the brand's ability to synchronize interactivity (two-way responsiveness, real-time engagement) and personalization (tailored content, contextual relevance). When perceived as coherent, consumers experience greater trust and authenticity, ultimately fostering

engagement and loyalty (Rossanty et al., 2024; Rehman et al., 2025). This finding emphasizes that “synergy quality - not activity quantity“ determines the emotional strength of consumer–brand connections, positioning *Synergistic Influence* as a key mediating mechanism in digital relationship formation.

### Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this paper offers three key contributions:

- a. Reconceptualization of SMM Mechanisms, By introducing *Synergistic Influence*, this study reframes social-media marketing (SMM) from a set of independent dimensions to an integrated system of co-active effects (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021; Khoa, 2023). It advances the S-O-R paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) by showing that stimuli can operate synergistically, producing stronger cognitive and affective responses than additive effects alone (Sultan et al., 2021).
- b. Integration of S-O-R and Trust-Based Relationship Models, The framework bridges the psychological and relational perspectives of digital marketing. While the S-O-R paradigm explains how digital stimuli trigger organismic responses, empirical findings from Althuwaini (2022) and Rico et al. (2024) clarify how trust cultivated in digital interactions transfers to brand-level engagement and loyalty. This integration strengthens theoretical understanding of digital trust formation.
- c. Introduction of a Testable Construct, *Synergistic Influence* is presented as a measurable higher-order construct for future quantitative studies. It can be operationalized using interaction terms in SEM or synergy indices derived from consumer-perception scales (Lin et al., 2024; Requez-Cipriano & Mauricio-Andía, 2025). This offers a clear pathway for translating conceptual theory into empirical validation.

Collectively, these contributions deepen theoretical comprehension of how consumers interpret integrated digital experiences, aligning communication theory with relationship marketing logic.

### Managerial Implications

The proposed model also provides practical insights for marketing practitioners aiming to optimize social media strategies. First, managers should move beyond treating interactivity and personalization as separate goals. The real leverage arises when responsiveness feels personal and personalization feels interactive, a synthesis that creates emotionally resonant digital experiences (Rossanty et al., 2024; Omeish et al., 2024). For example, customer service chatbots can combine real-time interaction with personalized tone, producing both immediacy and empathy.

Second, firms must balance automation and humanization. Over-automation may appear mechanical, while excessive interactivity without personalization risks superficiality (Andrade & Oliveira, 2025; Rico et al., 2024). The *Synergistic Influence* approach helps calibrate this equilibrium, ensuring both operational efficiency and perceived authenticity.

Third, focusing on trust-based engagement builds long-term relationship capital rather than transient metrics such as likes or clicks (Haudi et al., 2022; Bashir et al., 2024). In an era of AI-driven marketing, success depends not on volume of interaction but on the strategic integration of interactive and personalized communication to sustain meaningful relationships (Acatrinei et al., 2025).

### Conceptual Discussion Summary

The conceptual outcomes presented here reflect theoretical synthesis rather than empirical testing. Nonetheless, they provide a structured explanation of how interactivity and personalization interact to build trust and engagement (Bozkurt, 2020; Islam et al., 2019). The framework identifies *Synergistic Influence* as the psychological catalyst that transforms marketing stimuli into relational outcomes (Rossanty et al., 2024; Rico et al., 2024).

By articulating this mechanism, the paper bridges two dominant schools in digital marketing, technological interactivity and relational personalization. The unified model offers scholars a conceptual basis for testing the synergistic process in contexts such as AI-based personalization, virtual influencers, or metaverse branding (Rico et al., 2024; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Conceptual Findings

This conceptual paper introduced Synergistic Influence as a novel theoretical construct in social media marketing. Drawing upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response(S-O-R) paradigm and trust-based relationship perspectives (e.g., Althuwaini, 2022; Rico et al., 2024), the study proposes that Interactivity and Personalization jointly create a synergistic perception that enhances Consumer Trust and Perceived Authenticity. These psychological outcomes subsequently drive Brand Engagement and Loyalty, representing behavioral manifestations of digital trust.

By synthesizing insights from 58 peer-reviewed studies, this framework establishes Synergistic Influence as the conceptual bridge linking interactivity and personalization, demonstrating that trust in digital contexts stems from coherence between responsiveness and relevance—not their independent intensity.

### Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretically, this paper contributes in three ways. First, it reframes social media marketing as an interactional system rather than a dual-construct model, enriching the S-O-R paradigm with a synergistic interpretation of digital stimuli (Kim & Ko, 2012; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021).

Second, it integrates the trust-based relationship model into digital engagement frameworks, explaining how trust generated during personalized interactions extends to brand-level relationships (Althuwaini, 2022; Rico et al., 2024).

Third, it formalizes Synergistic Influence as a testable construct, establishing a conceptual foundation for empirical validation in future research.

Practically, this framework offers a strategic guide for brand managers: rather than optimizing interactivity and personalization separately, firms should synchronize both dimensions to evoke authenticity, strengthen trust, and foster sustained brand engagement—a prerequisite for long-term loyalty in data-driven markets.

## Directions for Future Research

As a conceptual contribution, this framework invites empirical validation to examine the theoretical propositions. Future studies can operationalize Synergistic Influence through interaction terms in structural equation modeling (SEM) or perceived synergy scales adapted from consumer perception measures (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Researchers may explore moderating factors such as cultural context, platform interactivity, or brand category to identify boundary conditions.

Additionally, cross-disciplinary extensions—such as AI-driven personalization, virtual influencers, and immersive metaverse branding—may further refine the construct's relevance in emerging digital environments (Rico et al., 2024; Rossanty et al., 2024). Qualitative inquiries could also capture consumers' lived experiences of digital synergy, complementing quantitative findings with richer emotional insights.

Ultimately, the Synergistic Influence framework lays a foundation for next-generation digital relationship marketing theory, emphasizing trust, authenticity, and interactive personalization as the cornerstones of consumer–brand relationships.

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