AI Strategic Orientation and the B2B Social Media Brand Meaning Process: Antecedents, Consequences, and Outcomes

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) and social media continue to transform how brand meaning is co-created in business-to-business (B2B) contexts. Yet limited research explores brand meaning in the B2B context and research is specifically lacking that examines how firms' AI strategic orientation influences the brand meaning journey and subsequent co-creation outcomes. Drawing on service-dominant logic, this study develops and tests a model positioning AI strategic vision as a key antecedent to brand partnerships, storytelling-driven brand passion, and co-created brand meaning, which in turn shape social media brand value co-creation and AI value-in-use. Using a sample of 197 B2B marketing professionals, the PLS-SEM results indicate that AI strategic vision significantly influences all three elements of the brand meaning journey and, indirectly, AI value-in-use. Although storytelling emerged as the strongest predictor of co-created brand meaning, it only influenced AI value-in-use through mediated pathways. Combined, these findings position a firm's strategic vision for AI in a social media marketing context as a strategic enabler of narrative, relational, and symbolic brand-building processes in B2B marketing environments. The current study advances theoretical understanding of AI-enabled co-creation and provides actionable guidance for B2B marketers seeking to align brand meaning strategies with AI and social media capabilities.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Brand meaning; Social media; Storytelling; Value co-creation

1. Introduction

Social media (SM) communication technologies, along with emergent artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, are exerting a profound influence on how brand meaning is constructed in the minds of consumers and how its conveyance shapes value co-creation and firm profitability (Anderski et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2024). Brand meaning reflects the totality of subjective perceptions and psychological associations that consumers form through their experiences with a brand and its communications (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Within a few short years, SM content creation

transitioned from primarily person-generated content to rapidly expanding AI-generated branding content (Peltier et al., 2024). Specific to the intersection of AI, SM, and branding, firms and customers co-create brand meaning through communication interactions over time (Deryl et al., 2023, 2025). Recent research has underscored the strategic and tactical relevance of brand meaning in shaping the customer journey, as it conveys a shared understanding of relational expectations and co-created value propositions between firms and their customers (Baker et al., 2022; Cui et al., 2024; He & Zhang, 2022).

The brand meaning journey may be influenced by varied SM messaging cues, including storytelling, collaborative content exchange, verbal and visual cues (e.g., SM advertising), sensory elements (e.g., music, images), and human cues (e.g., SM influencers)—all of which converge in the cognitive processing of consumers (Batra, 2019; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Shen et al., 2024). These informational cues matter, as empirical evidence has suggested that SM messaging from both brands and users can positively or negatively influence brand meaning, subsequently driving consumer engagement or disengagement (Dretsch et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2024; Vander Schee et al., 2020, 2025). Despite the critical nature of this process, the literature remains underdeveloped in exploring the antecedents of brand meaning and how various stages influence firm performance (Du Plessis et al., 2024; Fuller et al., 2023; Hao & Liu, 2024; Quest, 2023; Reitsamer et al., 2024).

Although the SM literature has begun examining brand meaning within business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts (Anderski et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2025), research focused on the formation and strategic role of branding in business-to-business (B2B) relationships remains limited (Barney-McNamara et al., 2021; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Marvi et al., 2024; Salonen et al., 2024). Notably, this is a critical gap, as brand meaning is particularly salient in B2B environments, where customer journeys are longer, involve more stakeholders, incur higher switching costs, and exert a more significant influence on firm performance than in B2C settings (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022; Cao & Weerawardena, 2023). Limited, though growing, research has indicated that the messaging strategies used within B2B digital communities influence how firms and customers co-create relational value and brand equity (Baker et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2020). Prior studies have emphasized linguistic cues (Deng et al., 2021), brand narratives (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021), brand personality (Cortez & Dastidar, 2022; Kovalchuk et al., 2023), and source or message effects (Balaji et al., 2023). Nonetheless, a significant research gap remains in investigating the antecedents and consequences of the brand meaning journey in B2B relationships (Cortez et al., 2023; Krishen et al., 2024; Kovalchuk et al., 2023).

The integration of AI with SM marketing represents a transformative force in how brand meaning is created, delivered, and measured (Bergner et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2025; Wang, 2024). As a catalyst of digital disruption, Peltier, Dahl, and Schibrowsky (2024) defined AI in the interactive marketing domain as "real-time and personalized adaptive learning and decision-making systems that mimic human intelligence through the autonomous processing, analysis, and interpretation of data for problem-solving and goal attainment purposes from both a buyer and seller perspective." Emerging research has indicated that AI-enhanced SM platforms enable buyers and sellers to co-create brand meaning through dynamic, targeted messaging strategies (Gao & Liu, 2023). Accordingly, AI-driven branding and value co-creation processes hold the potential to elevate SM performance through real-time, responsive, and relationship-centered engagement (Hao & Liu, 2024; Peltier et al., 2025). Counter to this view, research has shown that negative perceptual and behavioral responses occur when AI-driven SM content is seen as being algorithm-based and lacking brand authenticity (Brüns & Meißne, 2024). Despite this, research examining the strategic role of AI in shaping B2B

brand meaning and its impact on the customer journey and co-created value remains nascent (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Hao & Liu, 2024; Mogaji et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2024).

To address these gaps, we drew from a sample of 197 B2B marketing managers to conceptualize and empirically test a model of AI-based SM brand meaning and value co-creation. Our model includes three sequential constructs: (1) firm strategic AI vision for SM, (2) the brand meaning journey (including brand partnerships via content sharing, storytelling-driven brand passion, and creating brand meaning), and (3) SM brand value co-creation and SM AI value-in-use. Guided by service-dominant (SD) logic, this study extends SM literature by responding to calls for deeper exploration of the brand meaning value creation process in B2B settings (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Cortez et al., 2023; Kovalchuk et al., 2023; Krishen et al., 2024; Peltier & Dahl, 2024). We further contribute to this emergent stream by examining how AI strategic orientation drives the brand meaning journey, an area that has received scant attention in the literature (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Gao & Liu, 2023; Mogaji et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2024). Notably, our findings revealed that a B2B firm's AI strategic orientation influences AI performance indirectly through its effects on brand meaning and SM value co-creation. Focusing on brand authenticity, our findings showed that AI SM value-in-use is enhanced when firms and B2B managers co-create AI SM messaging value. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical study to conceptualize and assess the integrative role of AI strategic orientation and brand meaning value co-creation in enhancing AI-based SM messaging effectiveness in B2B markets.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Brand Meaning: Definitions and Dimensions

With its historical roots in constructs such as brand positioning, brand identity, and brand personality (He & Zhang, 2022), early consumer psychology literature conceptualized brand meaning as the network of thoughts and feelings associated with a brand (Keller, 2003). Positioning it as a foundational marketing concept, Feldwick (2002) defined brand meaning as "the collective associations and beliefs that a consumer has about a brand." Franzen and Bouwman (2001) described brand meaning as mental connections among brand names, images, and cognitions in a consumer's memory that give a brand its meaning. Theoretically, meaning-making has been conceptualized through three paradigms: the independence view suggests meaning exists apart from context, the contextual view implies it is contextually determined, and the intentional view posits that people interpret meaning based on perceived intentions (Berthon et al., 2009). Escalas and Bettman (2005) expanded brand meaning's scope to include the psychological associations, emotional responses, and symbolic interpretations stakeholders attach to a brand. More recently, scholars increasingly have viewed brand meaning as multidimensional, combining functional, symbolic, emotional, and cultural elements that vary across stakeholders, contexts, relationships, and time (Batra, 2019; Rossolatos, 2019). Beyond tangible attributes, brand meaning reflects what a brand stands for, including its role in cultural narratives and ability to express personal or organizational identity (Keller, 2013). Accordingly, brands function not only as identifiers but as evolving meaning systems shaped by ongoing stakeholder interactions and embedded in broader cultural narratives (He & Zhang, 2022). Importantly, brand meaning influences key perceptions such as trust, quality, and differentiation, which are especially critical in commoditized markets where symbolic value often outweighs functional parity (Aaker, 1991; Baker et al., 2022; Keller, 2003).

2.2 Brand meaning formation B2B vs. B2C

Although research is scant on how B2B brand meaning formation differs from B2C, recent studies suggest that B2B branding requires greater stakeholder involvement embedded in longer-term, less transactional, and multi-level relationships (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Kovalchuk et al., 2023; Iglesias et al., 2020). In addition, B2B branding may place greater emphasis on authentic firm-buyer relationships and less on brand image (Shankar et al., 2024; Iglesias et al., 2020). Branding in B2B aims to reduce uncertainty, making trust and authenticity central to brand building (Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Shankar et al., 2024). Lastly, B2B branding redefines brand meaning as a network-embedded concept built on brand and value co-creation, rather than merely as a communication tool (Kovalchuk et al., 2023). A key element of the brand meaning journey is this increased involvement, which may include an organization's commitment to using social media, where a firm's brand meaning activities require top management support due to the nature of buyer-seller relationship formation (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022; Cao & Weerawardena, 2023).

2.3 Brand Meaning and Value Co-creation

The concept of brand meaning has evolved significantly over time, specifically in the context of internal and external stakeholder groups (He & Zhang, 2022). Early perspectives viewed brands as tools for product differentiation and market signaling (Aaker, 1991; Levy & Burleigh, 1955). However, McCracken's (1986) culturally driven perspective framed brands as symbolic bridges between cultural meaning and consumer identity, highlighting the interpretive and socially constructed nature of branding, where consumers actively use brands to express and shape personal and social realities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Vander Schee et al., 2025), and emphasizing the brand meaning process as socially negotiated and experientially grounded. Accordingly, brand meaning is seen as situated within cultural, emotional, and symbolic systems that evolve alongside stakeholder relationships, technological tools, and societal narratives (Hardcastle et al., 2025; Keller, 2013). While early brand meaning research centered on consumer goods, interest in B2B branding has grown considerably. These B2B contexts often involve longer customer journeys, multiple decision-makers, and higher perceived risk, making brand meaning a crucial relational aspect that must extend beyond emotional resonance to include trust, strategic alignment, and organizational fit (Kittur et al., 2023). B2B branding research is thus advancing to consider the role of value co-creation in the brand meaning journey (Kovalchuk et al., 2023). Firms must build narratives that resonate across functional, reputational, and cultural touchpoints, especially as digital platforms become primary arenas for engagement (Marvi et al., 2024). Contemporary frameworks such as SD logic (Vargo et al., 2023) advance the idea of brand meaning as a co-created, dynamic process (Brand et al., 2025). Rather than being solely firm generated, meaning emerges through continuous, multi-actor interactions involving both formal communications and informal stakeholder contributions (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Digital and SM platforms intensify this complexity by enabling participatory storytelling, dialogic engagement, and user-generated content (Anderski et al., 2023; Dretsch et al., 2024). Within these spaces, meaning is shaped collaboratively, often in real time, and amplified further by AI-enhanced personalization and strategic partnerships (Mangiò et al., 2023). Accordingly, managing brand meaning today requires intentional strategies that balance narrative control with openness to stakeholder influence, as well as an understanding that meaning is both shaped and tested through lived experiences, public discourse, and relational credibility across digital channels (Peltier et al., 2024). In a B2B context, brand meaning serves not only as a critical marketing asset but also as a cultural and relational

resource signaling value, enhancing engagement, and shaping perceptions across firms and stakeholders (Brand et al., 2025; Kovalchuk et al., 2023).

2.4 Brand Meaning, Social Media, and Artificial Intelligence

The use of SM has revolutionized branding by shifting control from firms to consumers, encouraging brand meaning co-creation where meaning emerges through ongoing interactions (Anderski et al., 2023; He & Zhang, 2022; Vander Schee et al., 2025). For example, the growing importance of SM brand communities demonstrates how meaning is co-constructed via rituals, storytelling, and user interaction (Brand et al., 2025). Notably, these environments empower users to contribute content, influence perceptions, and reshape brand identities, often beyond marketer control (Le et al., 2022; Peltier et al., 2024). In a B2B context, brand meaning creation as it relates to SM value co-creation thus represents both the perceived brand personality and identity of a firm and specific marketers or salespeople within that firm (Barney-McNamara et al., 2021; Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Marvi et al., 2024). Similarly, the emergence and use of AI is greatly impacting how SM algorithms and machine learning alter the brand meaning formation process (Peltier et al., 2024). Perhaps AI's greatest influence on brand meaning is how SM content is acquired, generated, and distributed to consumers (Peltier et al., 2024). Although AI-driven SM interactions may positively increase efficiency and convey a consistent brand voice, there is a danger of negatively impacting consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (Cui et al., 2024). Specifically, the transition from human-created to AI-generated content may produce the feeling that brands are not personally speaking to consumers and instead are merely automating the brand meaning process (Brüns & Meißner, 2024). Ultimately, while AI may offer the ability to leverage presence and personalize brand meaning, the use of machine learning and algorithm-based content may instead damage perceptions of the brand as being fake, automated, untrustworthy, or unethical (Dong, 2025; Peltier et al., 2025; Wang & Zhou, 2025).

3. Brand Meaning Journey Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Despite the importance of branding, research has indicated B2B firms frequently lack robust AI and SM strategies for developing brand meaning compared to consumer-focused brands (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Marvi et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2024; Salonen et al., 2024). Drawing on SD logic, our AI Strategic Orientation and the B2B SM Brand Meaning Process conceptual framework (see Figure 1) illustrates how a firm's AI strategic vision supports a co-created brand meaning journey, ultimately leading to SM value co-creation and AI value-in-use outcomes. Aligned with SD logic and literature on SM and branding (Anderski et al., 2023; Baker et al., 2022), we define brand meaning as a co-created process wherein firms and stakeholders collaboratively build meaning through interactive brand partnerships and storytelling-driven brand passion in an SM–AI context. We conceptualize the brand meaning journey as an interactive, multi-stage process through which B2B firms and customers collaboratively develop, refine, and legitimize brand meaning. Consistent with SD logic, the brand meaning journey is not statically defined by the firm but rather emerges dynamically through buyer–seller engagement that co-creates brand associations, cultural narratives, and ultimately the brand's symbolic value (Batra, 2019; Rossolatos, 2019).
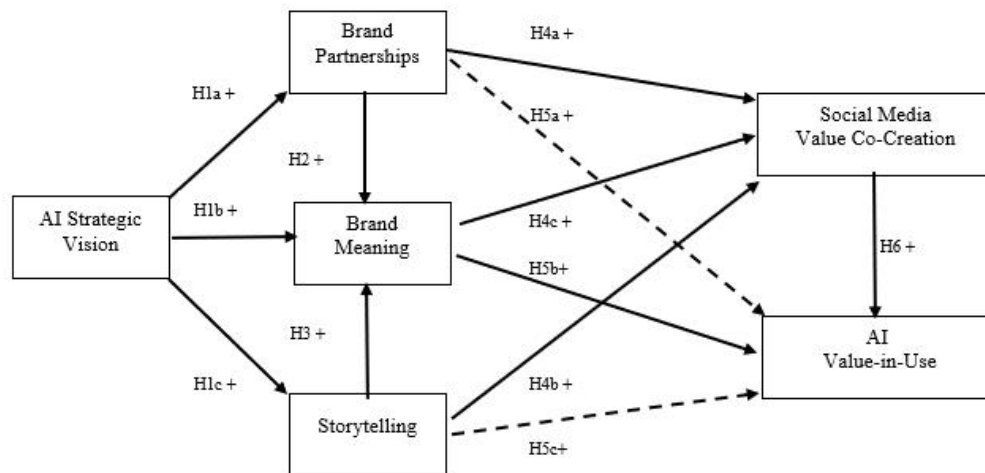
Note. Dashed lines indicate non-significant paths.

Figure 1. AI Strategic Orientation & B2B Brand Meaning Process Conceptual Framework

In an SM–AI context, the journey includes efforts to build collaborative brand partnerships that facilitate knowledge and SM content sharing (Mangiò et al., 2023), creating a foundation for mutual exploration and alignment of brand meaning (Essamri et al., 2019). Meaning is also co-created via SM storytelling that nurtures brand passion by evoking emotional resonance, reinforcing shared values, and differentiating the brand (Dretsch et al., 2024). When stories are emotionally salient and relevant, research has indicated B2B customers will be more likely to internalize and contribute to the brand's meaning (Essamri et al., 2019). Combined, the strategic partnerships and storytelling help bridge brand meaning wherein firms engage external stakeholders in interactions to negotiate brand meaning, align perceptions, and legitimize the brand identity (He & Zhang, 2022). When contextualized in the SM–AI marketing environment, the brand meaning journey is thus a fluid, negotiated process shaped by a participatory culture, AI-enhanced partnership content sharing, and narrative-based storytelling (Anderski et al., 2023). Importantly, as marketing technology evolves and firms leverage AI in SM strategies, the brand meaning journey further shifts from firm-controlled toward community-based narratives and algorithmic-driven content sharing that can strengthen brand relationships and shape brand meaning (Peltier et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2025). Accordingly, our model outlines three progressive stages: (1) the firm's AI strategic vision for SM, (2) the co-created brand meaning journey (brand partnerships, storytelling, co-created brand meaning), and (3) SM brand value co-creation and AI value-in-use.

3.1 Artificial Intelligence Strategic Vision and the Brand Meaning Journey

A firm's strategic vision for SM and AI reflects an organizational readiness and strategic orientation to integrate AI into brand building and other sales and marketing activities (Peltier et al., 2024). Various SM platforms enable customers to share user-generated content and engage in storytelling, collaboratively shaping brand meaning (Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Marvi et al., 2024). Utilizing AI-enabled strategies can help personalize engagement, optimize message delivery, and enhance interactivity across these platforms (Mangiò et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2025). Successfully leveraging AI in an SM context to co-create brand meaning not only depends on the organization's ability to leverage SM but also requires a supportive organizational culture for utilizing AI in the marketing function given concerns about brand co-destruction (Dong, 2025; Dretsch et al., 2024). When

strategically aligned, SM–AI can empower firms to develop strategic content sharing partnerships and collaborative exchanges to engage customers in brand storytelling, enhancing brand legitimacy and trust (Barney-McNamara et al., 2021; Peltier et al., 2024).

3.1.1 Artificial Intelligence Strategic Vision and Brand Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships involve feedback loops and SM content sharing that help co-create shared brand associations and signaling (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Essamri et al., 2019). The development of B2B brand partnerships is especially important for creating relational capital and shared symbolic value through network-based collaboration (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Mahdiraji et al., 2024) and helping integrate emotional, reputational, and functional dimensions into the co-created brand meaning journey (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025). As such, while brand partnerships are relevant in B2C relationships, the scope of the relationship and revenue place significant effort on how B2B stakeholders undertake collaboratives brand-building efforts (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Iglesias et al., 2020; Kovalchuk et al., 2023; Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Iglesias et al., 2020; Peltier et al., 2024; Shankar et al., 2024). Articulating a clear AI strategic vision can signal not only technological competence but also forward-thinking orientation and digital partnership readiness that are critical in the B2B SM environment (Balaji et al., 2023; Peltier et al., 2024). These SM-based brand partnerships thrive on collaborative content creation and responsiveness (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Essamri et al., 2019), and firms with a visible commitment to AI are often perceived as more agile, adaptable, and capable of delivering value across shared digital touchpoints (Mahdiraji et al., 2024). As SM–AI tools become embedded into branding efforts, strategic partners are more likely to see AI-aligned firms as valuable collaborators in creating mutually beneficial brand associations (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025). Therefore, a firm's AI strategic vision will function as both a strategic intent signal and an enabler of stronger, more dynamic SM brand partnerships.

H1a: A firm's AI strategic vision will positively influence SM brand partnerships.

3.1.2 Artificial Intelligence Strategic Vision and Storytelling

Storytelling-driven brand passion reflects the extent that organizations use emotionally engaging narratives via SM and other digital communities to co-create brand meaning. The storytelling process helps reinforce the brand's identity, purpose, values, and cultural alignment across B2B stakeholders (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). Firms with a clear vision for how to leverage AI in the SM context are better positioned to integrate personalization, cultural relevance, and narrative continuity into storytelling efforts (Anderski et al., 2023; Dretsch et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2024). For example, AI can help synthesize customer insights to personalize messages that strengthen symbolic and emotional ties (Peltier et al., 2024). Additionally, strategically leveraging AI for SM and other interactive marketing efforts can enhance narrative continuity across platforms, resulting in consistent, culturally relevant brand storytelling that strengthens brand connections (Song et al., 2025; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Peltier et al., 2025). Thus, a firm's strategic AI vision can enhance both the strategic intent and emotional depth of its SM and lays the foundation for more compelling, story-driven interactions that build passion for the brand.

H1b: A firm's AI strategic vision will positively influence storytelling-driven brand passion.

3.1.3 Artificial Intelligence Strategic Vision and Brand Meaning

Brand meaning captures the sum of emotional, symbolic, and functional associations stakeholders form in response to a brand's marketing efforts (Mogaji et al., 2023; Quest, 2023). In B2B contexts,

this meaning is increasingly co-created across digital ecosystems, where trust-based engagement and co-created narratives play central roles (Marvi et al., 2024). A firm's AI strategic vision offers an interpretive lens that helps marketing managers and other stakeholders assess the firm's strategic orientation, identity, and future value proposition (Hao & Liu, 2024; Peltier et al., 2024). When firms position AI not only as a marketing tool but as part of a broader organizational strategy, it signals agility, innovation, customer-centricity, and relevance (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023; Dong, 2025). As AI tools become more embedded in a firm's branding efforts via content generation and interactive personalization, the firm's strategic framing of AI becomes integral to co-creating brand meaning (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Bergner et al., 2023). Moreover, when the AI vision helps create SM content that is aligned with customer preferences and cultural relevance, it helps reinforce symbolic meaning (Song et al., 2025). Additionally, the firm's strategic vision can also help guide external interpretations of brand meaning along the B2B customer journey (Mogaji et al., 2023; Salonen et al., 2024).

H1c: A firm's AI strategic vision will positively influence brand meaning.

3.2 Brand Partnerships, Storytelling, and the Brand Meaning Journey

In B2B contexts, utilizing SM to strengthen collaborative brand partnerships involves engaging customers in SM-based alliances and brand communities to facilitate knowledge sharing and feedback that supports the firm's brand development. Importantly, brand collaborations and content partnerships help build legitimacy by establishing shared associations, co-branding synergies, and relational signaling (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2025; Essamri et al., 2019). These B2B brand partnerships play an important role in building relational capital and integrating emotional and reputational value into the brand meaning journey (Mahdiraji et al., 2024). Similarly, storytelling is a mechanism that helps convey a firm's identity, values, and purpose (Batra, 2019). In our framework, storytelling-driven brand passion refers to the extent to which organizations use emotionally engaging narratives via SM and other digital communities to co-create brand meaning. This SM-based storytelling serves as a critical mechanism in the brand meaning journey by helping express a firm's values, purpose, and identity to create emotional and symbolic resonance with stakeholders (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). In an SM–AI enabled context, storytelling supports brand meaning co-creation by allowing customers and firms to collaboratively construct brand narratives reflecting shared beliefs and cultural relevance (Marvi et al., 2024; Quest, 2023). The resulting emotional and symbolic layers of SM-based storytelling can help differentiate B2B brands in a competitive marketplace when the co-created brand meaning journey is facilitated via ongoing interactions on SM and other digital platforms (Anderski et al., 2023). Combined, we hypothesize that brand partnerships and storytelling will help support the brand meaning journey by constructing symbolic, reputational, and emotional brand associations that resonate across B2B stakeholders.

H2: SM brand partnerships will positively influence brand meaning.

H3: Storytelling-driven brand passion will positively influence brand meaning.

3.3 Brand Meaning Journey and Social Media – Artificial Intelligence Co-Creation Outcomes

Consistent with SD logic, SM–AI value emerges through ongoing interaction and co-creation with stakeholders (Gibson et al., 2024; Vargo et al., 2023). In our framework, co-created brand meaning serves as a critical operant resource integrated into downstream engagement processes, shaping the nature and impact of value co-creation and the strategic use of SM–AI (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; Kovalchuk et al., 2023). While the brand meaning journey reflects the shared symbolic, emotional, and functional associations stakeholders attribute to the brand, SM brand value co-creation focuses on the

interactive processes that translate the shared meaning into customized solutions and experiences (Hardcastle et al., 2025). When brand meaning is co-created, it increases the likelihood that firms can more effectively engage customers in value co-creation by inviting stakeholders to collaboratively shape mutually valuable brand experiences and solutions (Anderski et al., 2023; Brand et al., 2025; Mangiò et al., 2023). Shared brand meaning also can improve AI-powered personalization, strengthening customer–brand relationships (Peltier et al., 2024; Salonen et al., 2024). Thus, each element of the brand meaning journey facilitates SM brand value co-creation.

H4a: Brand partnerships will positively influence SM brand value co-creation.

H4b: Storytelling will positively influence SM brand value co-creation.

H4c: Brand meaning will positively influence SM brand value co-creation.

From a strategic marketing perspective, SM–AI value-in-use reflects the anticipatory value marketers believe will arise from leveraging SM–AI capabilities to enhance marketing effectiveness through personalization, predictive insights, and data-informed decision-making (Manser-Payne et al., 2018; Dahl et al., 2023; Swan et al., 2024). In B2B, the perceived benefits of using SM–AI are not solely derived from using AI-related technologies but are shaped through the co-created context in which marketers deploy AI and related marketing technologies across the customer journey (Gibson et al., 2024). The SM–AI systems can help lay the foundation for synergistic brand partnerships and storytelling-driven content sharing to more effectively personalize interactions, facilitating a shared understanding of brand meaning that enables further SM-based value co-creation (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024; He & Zhang, 2022), enhancing customer engagement and brand equity (Dretsch et al., 2024; Marvi et al., 2024; Vander Schee et al., 2025), and ultimately increasing perceived marketing effectiveness (Dong, 2025; McKee et al., 2024). The co-created brand meaning journey helps define the symbolic and emotional boundaries within which SM–AI can operate authentically and effectively and enhance how marketers perceive the usefulness of AI systems (Gibson et al., 2024; Manser Payne et al., 2018). Finally, SM brand value co-creation itself plays a direct role in shaping AI value-in-use, as marketers can anticipate how deploying AI will enhance real-time responsiveness, personalize content, and ultimately increase digital engagement (Peltier et al., 2024). Hence, the co-created brand meaning journey and SM co-creation outcomes jointly shape marketers' anticipated effectiveness and value of SM–AI capabilities.

H5a: Brand partnerships will positively influence AI value-in-use.

H5b: Storytelling-driven brand passion will positively influence AI value-in-use.

H5c: Brand meaning will positively influence AI value-in-use.

H6: SM brand value co-creation will positively influence AI value-in-use.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection and Sample

Respondents included individuals with mid-level or higher marketing responsibilities in B2B firms in the United States. Respondents were obtained through via Cloud Research's panel of B2B firms, and were screened to assure that they were in B2B firms and held at least a mid-management marketing position. Our survey returned 215 completed responses. Demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	50.2%
Female	49.8%
Age	
18–24	8.0%
25–34	28.8%
35–54	51.6%
55–64	7.4%
65+	4.2%
Total Years in Marketing	
1–5 years	18.1%
6–10 years	32.6%
11–15 years	22.8%
16–20 years	16.7%
21–25 years	3.3%
26+ years	6.5%
Industry Type	
Services	51.6%
Manufacturing	15.3%
Retail/Wholesale	25.1%
Other	8.0%

4.2 Measures

Firm strategic AI vision for SM. Adapted from Peltier et al. (2013), a six-item scale for measuring cross-organizational support for AI-driven SM (The use of AI in B2B SM/digital marketing is supported by…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Developing brand partnerships via content sharing. Adapted from Essamri et al. (2019), a six-item scale reflecting SM's value for creating marketing collaborations, strengthening relationships, forming alliances, and creating brand communities (Social media is valuable for…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Storytelling-driven brand passion. Adapted from Essamri et al. (2019), six-item scale measuring SM's value for sharing stories, captivating customers through brand stories, and building brand passion through online communities (Social media is valuable for…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Brand meaning. Adapted from Essamri et al. (2019), six-item scale assessing SM's value in shaping brand legitimacy and what the brand stands for and mobilizing emotional and social support (Social media is valuable for…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Social media brand value co-creation. Adapted from Barney-McNamara et al. (2021), an eight-item scale reflecting SM's value for collaborating with customers to jointly create brand value, co-creating content through online branding communities, and implementing mutually beneficial, value creating solutions (Social media is valuable for…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Social AI value-in-use. An eleven-item scale assessing the value of using AI-driven social media marketing related to varied firm and customer activities and metrics (Dahl et al., 2023; Swan et al. 2024; The use of AI in B2B SM/digital marketing is valuable for…; 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

5. Analysis and Results

5.1 Measurement Model Results

Goodness of fit using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was assessed through individual metrics, specifically internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, as outlined by Hair et al. (2020). As shown in Table 2, all item coefficients exceeded 0.7 and were significant at $p < .001$, satisfying the threshold for adequate indicator loadings. Internal consistency criteria were met, with both coefficient alpha and composite reliability values surpassing 0.7. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct and model exceeded the 0.5 benchmark, thereby establishing convergent validity. Specific to discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE exceeded all corresponding paired correlations shown on the diagonal of the correlation matrix (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Table 3), while the heterotrait-monotrait ratio correlations were all below 0.85, (Hair et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2015; Table 4), confirming discriminant validity. Additionally, the R^2 values (Figure 1) for partnerships (0.21), storytelling (0.26), brand meaning (0.60), SM value co-creation (0.63), and AI value-in-use (0.53) indicate adequate predictive validity (Hair et al., 2020). Following Podsakoff et al. (2003), common method bias was addressed through both survey design and post-hoc analysis. Regarding survey design, the instrument was developed in collaboration with an advisory committee and based on a comprehensive literature review. Question order counterbalancing was achieved by organizing the survey into distinct thematic sections. Two post-hoc methods were used to assess common method variance. First, Harman's (1967) single-factor test revealed that a single factor accounted for only 41% of the variance. Second, the marker-variable technique for PLS-SEM showed no significant differences in structural path coefficients or R^2 values between models with and without the marker variable. Lastly, the variance inflation factors for each item were less than 3.3 (Hair et al., 2020). Combined, these results suggest that common method bias was unlikely to pose a significant issue in this study.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Item Coefficients, and Convergent Validity

Construct	Mean	SD	Coefficient	VIF
AI vision for social media (AVE = .668, α = .90, CR = .92) The use of AI in B2B SM/digital marketing is supported by…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Top management in my firm (CEO/VPs)	3.97	1.1	0.732	1.6
Director of sales or equivalent in my firm	4.05	1.0	0.802	2.1
Marketing managers or equivalent in my firm	4.19	0.9	0.839	2.5
Sales managers or equivalent in my firm	4.04	1.0	0.862	3.1
Sales employees in my firm	3.92	1.0	0.846	3.3
Marketing staff in my firm	4.14	1.0	0.818	2.9
Brand partnerships via content sharing (AVE = .603, α = .87, CR = .90) Social media is valuable for…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Marketing collaborations	4.33	0.9	0.759	1.7
Knowledge sharing with customers	4.53	0.8	0.769	2.1
Seeking customer feedback on brand	4.42	0.8	0.753	1.9
Encouraging customers to strengthen partnerships	4.34	0.8	0.805	1.9
Developing brand communities for brand development	4.34	0.8	0.78	2.0
Forming customer alliances	4.39	0.8	0.792	1.9
Storytelling-driven brand passion (AVE = .556, α = .84, CR = .88) Social media is valuable for…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Sharing stories that give customers confidence in the brand	4.42	0.8	0.736	1.7
Building brand passion through online communities	4.46	0.8	0.724	1.5
Captivating customers through brand stories	4.38	0.8	0.767	1.9
Increasing a magical relationship with the brand	4.03	1.0	0.72	1.5
Increasing brand delight	4.32	0.8	0.789	1.8
Creating brand love	4.40	0.8	0.734	1.6
Brand meaning (AVE = .568, α = .85, CR = .89) Social media is valuable for…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Establishing brand credibility	4.48	0.8	0.766	1.9
Developing brand positioning	4.38	0.7	0.711	1.5
Creating brand legitimacy	4.40	0.8	0.735	1.7
Communicating brand authenticity	4.49	0.7	0.83	2.2
Sharing brand values	4.46	0.7	0.744	1.6
Differentiating brand meaning from competition	4.37	0.8	0.732	1.7

(Table 2. continued)

Construct	Mean	SD	Coefficient	VIF
SM value co-creation (AVE = .588, α = .90, CR = .92) Social media is valuable for…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Collaborating with customers to jointly create brand value	4.13	0.9	0.744	1.9
Co-creating customized customer solutions	4.12	0.9	0.796	2.3
Implementing mutually beneficial, value creating solutions	4.11	0.9	0.789	2.1
Working together to find the best solutions	4.18	0.9	0.792	2.4
Working together post sales to ensure long-term collaborative value	4.18	0.9	0.737	1.9
Co-creating content through online branding communities	4.15	0.9	0.798	2.2
Exchanging ideas for new product/service development	4.28	0.8	0.733	1.8
Accelerating product/service innovation with online brand communities	4.27	0.8	0.74	1.8
SM AI value-in-use (AVE = .631, α = .94, CR = .95) The use of AI in B2B social media/digital marketing is valuable for…; 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)				
Personalizing customers' brand experience	4.16	1.0	0.826	3.1
Increasing brand loyalty	4.04	1.0	0.804	3.1
Predicting customer behavior	4.22	0.9	0.724	2.2
Identifying new revenue streams	4.14	1.0	0.709	2.0
Personalizing customer brand journeys	4.10	1.0	0.781	2.5
Developing personalized brand content	4.13	1.0	0.832	3.1
Analyzing customer brand preferences	4.27	0.9	0.811	2.9
Personalizing customer communication	4.12	1.0	0.827	3.3
Personalizing marketing offers across channels	4.17	0.9	0.793	2.5
Providing data analytics for decision making	4.36	0.9	0.738	2.2
Improving marketing ROI	4.17	0.9	0.845	3.1
Increasing marketing productivity	4.38	0.8	0.827	2.9

Note. AI = artificial intelligence, SM = social media, AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability, SD = standard deviation, VIF = variance inflation factor.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	AI Strategic Vision	Brand Meaning	Brand Partnerships	Storytelling	SM Value Co-Creation	SM AI Value-in-Use
AI Strategic Vision	0.817					
Brand Meaning	0.523	0.754				
Brand Partnerships	0.444	0.589	0.777			
Storytelling	0.502	0.729	0.601	0.745		
Value Co-Creation	0.618	0.714	0.646	0.700	0.767	
AI Value-in-Use	0.725	0.619	0.489	0.592	0.683	0.794

Note. AI = artificial intelligence, SM = social media.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Matrix

	AI Strategic Vision	Brand Meaning	Brand Partnership	Storytelling	SM Value Co-Creation	SM AI Value-in-Use
AI Strategic Vision						
Brand Meaning	.588					
Brand Partnership	.487	.681				
Storytelling	.565	.860	.704			
Value Co-Creation	.680	.809	.722	.797		
AI Value-in-Use	.784	.687	.531	.658	.734	

Note. AI = artificial intelligence, SM = social media.

5.2 Structural Model Results

5.2.1 Model Fit

Model hypotheses were evaluated using a bootstrap sample of 5,000 in SmartPLS (Hair et al., 2020), and fit indices were assessed for the saturated versus proposed model (Henseler & Schuberth, 2020). Table 5 shows the standardized root mean square residual value was 0.058, and both the unweighted least square discrepancy and geodesic discrepancy were below the 99% quantile for both the estimated and saturated model, suggesting a good fit and good adjustment when comparing the empirical data matrix and our proposed model.

5.2.2 Hypothesis Testing

As shown in Table 6, AI strategic vision had significant, positive effects on all three elements of the brand meaning journey, including brand partnerships (β =0.452, t = 5.1, p = 0.001), storytelling (β = 0.509, t = 8.6, p = 0.001), and brand meaning (β = .169, t = 2.9, p = 0.01), supporting H1a–H1c. Both brand partnerships (β = 0.199, t = 2.1, p = 0.05) and storytelling (β = 0.526, t = 5.9, p = 0.001) had a significant, positive effect on brand meaning, supporting H2 and H3. Brand meaning had a significant, positive effect on AI value-in-use (β = 0.209, t = 2.4, p = 0.02), supporting H5c. Neither brand partnership (H5a) nor storytelling (H5b) was supported. Lastly, SM value co-creation had a significant, positive effect on value-in-use (β = .451, t = 4.6, p = 0.001). As robustness checks, alternate models were tested that eliminated constructs and/or paths and reversed the hypothesized directional relationships. None of these alternate models better fit theory or had superior R^2 values.

5.2.3 Mediation Results Leading to Firm Performance

While no mediation effects were hypothesized, we conducted total indirect mediation analyses to better assess the relationships between the model constructs and value-in-use. As shown in Table 7, significant total mediated effects to AI value-in-use were found for AI strategic vision (β = 0.455, p = 0.001), brand partnerships (β = 0.20, p = 0.001), storytelling (β = 0.173, p = 0.001), and brand meaning (β = 0.4150, p = 0.001). Since neither brand partnerships nor storytelling had a significant direct effect on AI value-in-use, yet both had significant total mediation effects, we examined specific indirect mediation effects for each to better parse the relationships. As shown in Table 7, the specific indirect paths for Partnerships $\rightarrow$ SM value co-creation $\rightarrow$ AI value-in-use (β = 0.128, p = 0.02) and

Partnerships → Brand meaning → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = 0.05$) were significant; the specific indirect path from Partnerships → Brand meaning → AI value-in-use was not. All three specific indirect paths from storytelling to AI value-in-use were significant, including Storytelling → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use ($\beta = .129$, $p = 0.01$), Storytelling → Brand meaning → AI value-in-use ($\beta = .109$, $p = 0.01$), and Storytelling → Brand meaning → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use ($\beta = .078$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 5. Global Goodness of Fit Measures, Confirmatory Composite Analysis, Bootstrap Quantiles

	Estimated Model	Hi95	Hi99	Saturated Model	Hi95	Hi99
SRMR	.058	.069	.075	.050	.057	.061
d_{ULS}	3.38	4.68	5.54	2.49	3.23	3.63
d_G	1.49	1.87	2.05	1.48	1.87	2.04

Note. SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, d_{ULS} = Unweighted Least Squares Discrepancy, d_G = Geodesic Discrepancy. Hi95/99 = The upper bound of the confidence interval.

Table 6. Tests of the Structural Equation Modeling Path Hypotheses

	Hypothesis and Path			Coef (β)	t value	t value
H1a	AI strategic vision	→	Brand partnerships	.452	5.1	.001
H1b	AI strategic vision	→	Storytelling	.509	8.6	.001
H1c	AI strategic vision	→	Brand meaning	.169	2.9	.01
H2	Brand partnerships	→	Brand meaning	.199	2.1	.05
H3	Storytelling	→	Brand meaning	.526	5.9	.001
H4a	Brand partnerships	→	SM value co-creation	.282	2.7	.01
H4b	Storytelling	→	SM value co-creation	.284	2.9	.01
H4c	Brand meaning	→	SM value co-creation	.333	4.0	.001
H5a	Brand partnerships	→	AI value-in-use	.003	.02	ns
H5b	Storytelling	→	AI value-in-use	.121	1.6	ns
H5c	Brand meaning	→	AI value-in-use	.209	2.4	.02
H6	SM value co-creation	→	AI value-in-use	.451	4.6	.001

Note. AI = Artificial intelligence, SM = Social media.

Table 7. Total Indirect Mediation Effects and Specific Mediation Effects Through Brand Meaning on AI Value-in-Use

Mediation Effects	Coef (β)	p-value
Total mediation effects		
AI strategic vision → AI value-in-use		
Partnerships → AI value-in-use		
Storytelling → AI value-in-use		
Brand meaning → AI value-in-use		
Specific mediation effects through brand meaning		
Partnerships → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use		
Partnerships → Brand meaning → AI value-in-use		
Partnerships → Brand meaning → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use		

(Table 7. continued)

Mediation Effects	Coef (β)	p-value
Storytelling → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use	.129	.01
Storytelling → Brand meaning → AI value-in-use	.109	.01
Storytelling → Brand meaning → SM value co-creation → AI value-in-use	.078	.001

Note. SM = Social media, AI = artificial intelligence, one-tailed

6. Discussion

The current study explored the strategic influence of SM–AI-driven communication on the brand meaning journey and subsequent value co-creation within B2B environments. Framed through an SD logic lens, our findings highlight that the brand meaning journey evolves through a value co-creation process in which a firm's AI strategic orientation indirectly drives AI value-in-use via its effects on brand partnerships, storytelling, brand meaning, and SM value co-creation. Consistent with prior research on digital transformation and brand engagement (Anderski et al., 2023; Gao & Liu, 2023), our findings underscore the central role of AI strategic vision in shaping B2B brand meaning (Peltier et al., 2024). Specifically, firms with a strong AI orientation significantly influence all three components of the brand meaning journey (brand partnerships, storytelling, and brand meaning). Our findings thus support emerging perspectives positioning AI as a strategic driver of brand-related relational and symbolic value (Hao & Liu, 2024; Swan et al., 2024).

The findings also demonstrate that AI strategic orientation, when integrated with storytelling and brand partnerships, can serve as the impetus for authentic brand meaning and SM co-creation, resulting in greater value-in-use in B2B contexts. Notably, we show the impact on AI value-in-use is fully mediated through brand meaning and SM value co-creation. Among these brand meaning journey factors, storytelling emerged as the most important driver of brand meaning and SM value co-creation, emphasizing the critical role of emotionally resonant, collaboratively constructed narratives in co-creating passion and meaning in B2B digital ecosystems. Our findings extend the B2B branding literature by illustrating how storytelling activates brand passion and authenticity in B2B decision-making contexts traditionally viewed as rational and objective (Essamri et al.,2019; Mahdiraji et al., 2024). Our mediation analysis also reveals storytelling's impact on AI value-in-use is fully mediated through a combination of brand meaning and SM value co-creation, highlighting the critical interplay between emotional engagement and strategic branding processes afforded by engaging B2B stakeholders in storytelling (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024).

Although brand partnerships did not directly impact AI value-in-use, our findings indicate this factor also has significant indirect effects through its impact on brand meaning and SM value co-creation. We thus extend emerging B2B literature emphasizing the benefits of developing co-created branding strategies (Anderski et al., 2023; Brand et al., 2025; Peltier et al., 2025) by showing that collaborative SM engagement is not an endpoint but rather a catalyst that allows firms to embed their brand within relational networks and co-created narratives. Notably, our results also reveal that brand meaning in B2B settings is a critical antecedent to perceived AI value-in-use, underscoring that AI's impact in the B2B brand journey relies on co-created meaning-making processes based on trust, credibility, and brand identity alignment (Essamri et al., 2019; Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Vander Schee et al., 2025). Further, SM value co-creation was the strongest direct predictor of AI value-in-use, underscoring the

importance of ensuring that B2B customers are actively involved in SM content co-creation, especially when AI is involved (Balaji et al., 2023; Brüns & Meißner, 2024).

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

First, this study extends SD logic and the B2B branding literature by conceptualizing and empirically investigating the extent to which a firm's AI strategic orientation serves as an antecedent in the co-creation of brand meaning within B2B digital ecosystems (Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Vargo et al., 2023). While prior research most commonly has framed AI as a tool for operational efficiency (Hao & Liu, 2024), our findings contribute to the literature by repositioning AI as a strategic, relational meaning-making force. Specifically, we demonstrate that a firm's strategic AI vision significantly influences storytelling, partnerships, and the brand meaning journey. We thus respond to emerging calls to explore how AI capabilities go beyond mere automation benefits to craft symbolic brand associations and value-laden interactions (Gao & Liu, 2023; Peltier et al., 2024). Our results add to theory by underscoring AI's function as an integrative driver of narrative SM content and relational branding processes, which is particularly critical in B2B contexts where emotionally-driven engagement remains underexplored (Mahdiraji et al., 2024; Marvi et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2025).

Second, our study advances the theoretical understanding of the brand meaning journey in B2B environments by exploring the sequential pathways in which AI strategic orientation motivates storytelling-driven passion, brand partnerships, and in turn, brand meaning. While the literature to date has mainly focused on consumer-based brand meaning formation (He & Zhang, 2022), our model emphasizes the organizational processes by which B2B brand meaning is co-created. Specifically, storytelling emerged as a core contributor to SM brand narratives, activating passion and brand authenticity among decision-makers. This narrative-based brand meaning, co-created through human–AI interaction, offers new theoretical insights into the emotional and symbolic nature of B2B branding, suggesting that emotional and rational SM content are not mutually exclusive in digitally mediated value creation (Brand et al., 2025; Essamri et al., 2019).

Third, our study contributes a novel empirical model that situates brand meaning as a mediator in the relationship between AI strategy and AI value-in-use, integrating perspectives from branding, AI, and value co-creation literatures. In doing so, we establish brand meaning not only as an outcome of AI strategy and storytelling, but as a catalyst that drives deeper SM engagement and co-creation outcomes (Peltier et al., 2024). While prior literature has addressed AI capabilities in content personalization and audience targeting (Peltier et al., 2024; Salonen et al., 2024), few studies have empirically tested how strategic AI orientation fosters meaning-making that enhances the perceived utility of AI technologies (Swan et al., 2024). Our findings thus bridge a key gap by revealing brand meaning as a relational and affective conduit linking AI vision to stakeholder perceived value.

Finally, our study repositions storytelling as a central relational mechanism in digitally mediated B2B environments. Although storytelling is typically associated with emotional appeals in B2C contexts (Peltier et al., 2024), our findings demonstrate it also plays an instrumental role in legitimizing SM–AI-based communications in a B2B context by generating brand passion and facilitating value co-creation. Importantly, our results reveal that storytelling does not directly enhance AI value-in-use but instead has its influence fully mediated by brand meaning and SM value co-creation. We extend existing theory by demonstrating that emotional narrative construction is not only compatible with, but also essential to, strategic branding processes in high-stakes, multi-stakeholder B2B ecosystems (Balaji et al., 2023; Bansal & Sisodia, 2024). In contrast to traditional assumptions of B2B as purely

transactional, our findings support a more nuanced and relationally rich understanding of B2B brand building where AI, SM, and storytelling coalesce to co-create meaning, build credibility, and foster deeper engagement that enhances marketing effectiveness (Dong, 2025; Salonen et al., 2024).

6.2 Managerial Implications

Our study provides valuable insights for B2B marketers aiming to integrate AI into their digital brand strategies (Mogaji et al., 2023; Salonen et al., 2024). First, our findings highlight that firms must develop and articulate a clear AI strategic vision that supports authentic brand storytelling and cultivates stronger partner engagement and not just efficiency gains. Marketers should invest in AI systems and strategies that help promote authentic brand narratives that resonate with B2B buyers and other stakeholders across digital touchpoints. Second, storytelling emerges as a strategic asset for B2B branding. Content that is AI-enabled should prioritize emotional storytelling formats, such as case studies, co-branded success stories, and thought leadership, that build passion and authenticity around the B2B brand (Bansal & Sisodia, 2024). Importantly, this storytelling must balance human creativity with AI-enhanced personalization to avoid perceptions of algorithmic-based relationships that might destroy brand meaning (Anderski et al., 2023; Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Hardcastle et al., 2025) or lead to other interactive marketing avoidance (McKee et al., 2024). Third, our findings demonstrate brand meaning functions as a critical link between AI strategy and AI value-in-use. Thus, firms should actively monitor and manage how their SM–AI-driven communications influence stakeholder perceptions of brand authenticity, trustworthiness, and personalized brand meaning. Notably, since our measures reflect perceived value-in-use and beliefs about AI and social media's role in brand-building, our insights should be interpreted as guidance on shaping stakeholder perceptions and strategic orientation and not as direct indicators of firm execution or performance outcomes. Brand managers should ensure that AI tools enhance, not undermine, brand meaning through transparency, narrative consistency, and co-created content across all social channels and digital platforms (Mogaji et al., 2023; Salonen et al., 2024). Although brand partnerships did not directly influence AI value-in-use in our model, its significant role in shaping brand meaning and SM value co-creation and indirect effect on value-in-use suggests brand partnerships may serve as foundational elements for leveraging SM-AI communications in strategic branding initiatives. Managers should view social media content-based brand collaborations not merely as tactical campaigns, but as strategic levers that may enhance the firm's ability to generate downstream customer value, particularly by reinforcing brand legitimacy through stronger brand meaning. Finally, our study shows that value-in-use is significantly strengthened by SM co-creation. Firms should thus enable and encourage collaborative content generation and feedback loops between internal stakeholders, channel partners, and customers. For example, B2B marketers may want to explore the value of using interactive webinars, co-branded initiatives, or AI-curated community engagement to encourage co-creation that is essential for maximizing AI's strategic return in interactive marketing channels (Peltier et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2025).

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although our study contributes valuable insights into how a firm's strategic AI marketing orientation shapes the brand meaning journey within B2B digital ecosystems, a number of key limitations exist. First, our study relied on cross-sectional data from B2B marketing professionals in the United States and did not employ a multi-method or multi-study approach (Wang, 2025). Future research may benefit from longitudinal or experimental designs to explore how AI strategic vision and co-creation practices

evolve over time, across countries and different stages of the brand meaning journey. Further, given that we only collected data in the context of B2B marketers, extending our model to include B2C marketers is encouraged, and especially comparative studies. Second, our measures were skewed toward the higher end of the scale, reflecting generally favorable views among respondents. Importantly, these views represent perceived strategic value rather than measured firm performance. Future studies should aim to include firms with varying levels of social media engagement and at different stages of AI integration. Researchers may also consider surveying a more diverse set of organizational leaders, including individuals within and outside the marketing function, who may hold more critical or emergent perspectives on the role of AI and social media in B2B brand building. Third, while we captured multiple dimensions of the brand meaning journey, including partnerships, storytelling, and symbolic associations, our model did not encompass the full spectrum of potential antecedents and outcomes. Future studies should investigate other precursors to effective brand journeys. Fourth, our investigation focused on the mediating role of brand meaning and value co-creation but did not explicitly examine alternate constructs that may link AI strategic orientation to value-in-use. Future studies could explore these different dimensions and competing pathways to offer a more comprehensive understanding of AI's strategic impact on co-created SM relationships and AI usage scenarios (Peltier et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2025). Moreover, while our study positioned storytelling as a key element in narrative-based brand building, questions remain unanswered when it comes to SM–AI capabilities (Peltier & Dahl, 2024; Peltier et al., 2024). Future research could explore which types of stories (e.g., success stories, innovation journeys, motivational vs. rational vs. emotional) most impact brand meaning and SM content co-creations. Likewise, are there other forms of collaborative partnerships and alliances that differently influence the brand meaning journey and its outcomes? Collectively, these research directions offer a roadmap for advancing theoretical and practical understanding of AI-enabled brand meaning co-creation and its impact on B2B relationships.

Funding

Acknowledgments

Data Availability Statement

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Ethics statement

The study received an exemption from the institutional ethics review board at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater and otherwise adhered to established ethical research standards.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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