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A Relationship Marketing Model Based on National Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to develop a relationship marketing model based on national social media. In terms of purpose, this study was applied, and in terms of the data collection process, it was a descriptive and field study employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The participants in the qualitative phase consisted of experts familiar with the research topic. A minimum of 10 participants was initially considered for structured interviews, with sampling continuing until theoretical saturation was reached; ultimately, 25 participants were included in this phase. The statistical population of the quantitative phase consisted of marketing experts and managers working in food manufacturing companies. Using simple random sampling and Cochran’s formula, the sample size was determined to be 384 participants. The qualitative data were analyzed using MAXQDA 24 software, while the quantitative data were analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM). Based on the analyses, five main dimensions were identified. Branding comprised brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, brand development, brand experience creation, and brand identity. Content marketing comprised education, content production, guidelines and instructions, differentiation, appropriate content, mental engagement, and audience building. Information technology comprised software and hardware, human resources, support networks, deployment, effective utilization, and technology localization. Advertising comprised search engines, value creation, support, information dissemination, and innovation. Interaction comprised public relations, criticisms and suggestions, feedback acquisition, motivation, sharing, membership, and loyalty. The overall fit of the research model was highly satisfactory and was therefore confirmed.

Keywords: Relationship Marketing, National Social Media, Structural Equation Modeling, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the architecture of marketing relationships, shifting the locus of value creation from predominantly firm-controlled communication toward continuous, interactive, and networked exchanges among organizations, consumers, communities, and other stakeholders. In contemporary markets, consumers no longer function merely as passive recipients of promotional messages; rather, they participate in creating, interpreting, disseminating, and evaluating brand-related information. Social media have been central to this transformation because they enable firms to engage customers directly, receive immediate feedback, personalize interactions, stimulate electronic word-of-mouth, and maintain relationships beyond individual transactions. Accordingly, marketing effectiveness increasingly depends on the capacity of

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organizations to integrate technological resources, communication capabilities, customer knowledge, and organizational processes into coherent relationship-oriented strategies. From a broader management perspective, the development of organizational infrastructures that support knowledge acquisition, adaptability, and the simultaneous exploitation of existing competencies and exploration of new opportunities has also become important for sustainable performance in dynamic environments (1). Within this context, relationship marketing through social media represents not simply a communication tactic but an organizational capability through which firms can create, develop, and maintain enduring customer relationships.

Relationship marketing is based on the recognition that long-term exchanges, mutual value creation, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty can generate more sustainable outcomes than a narrow emphasis on isolated sales. Social media extend this logic by providing an environment in which relationship-building activities can occur continuously and at scale. Through interactive communication, organizations can respond to customers, resolve concerns, provide information, encourage participation, personalize content, and reinforce favorable brand associations. Research on social media marketing communication has consequently emphasized that the quality and continuity of communication can influence consumer loyalty, suggesting that relationship outcomes are closely associated with how consumers experience firms across digital touchpoints (2). Similarly, studies examining dynamic brand experiences have highlighted the roles of co-creation and electronic word-of-mouth in enhancing consumer equity, demonstrating that social media relationships are increasingly formed through participatory processes rather than unilateral organizational communication (3). Therefore, the relationship marketing potential of social media depends on more than presence on digital platforms; it requires systematic management of interaction, content, value creation, brand experience, and customer participation.

One of the most significant contributions of social media to contemporary marketing is its capacity to integrate consumer experience with purchase-related behavior. Digital platforms allow consumers to encounter brands repeatedly through advertisements, reviews, educational content, influencer communication, customer service interactions, and peer-generated information. These cumulative encounters create customer experiences that can affect purchase decisions and subsequent relationship outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that social media marketing can influence purchase decisions through customer experience, reinforcing the importance of experiential mechanisms in explaining how digital communication is translated into consumer behavior (4). Likewise, social media marketing has been found to affect purchase decision-making through brand-related cognitive mechanisms such as brand awareness (5). Such findings imply that the effectiveness of relationship marketing on social media cannot be evaluated solely through short-term metrics such as views, impressions, or clicks. Rather, attention should be directed toward the interconnected processes through which digital communications create awareness, shape experience, strengthen perceived value, and eventually contribute to favorable behavioral and relational outcomes.

Branding is therefore a central component of social media-based relationship marketing. In digital environments, brand awareness, brand image, brand identity, brand equity, brand development, and brand experience are continually reconstructed through interactions between firms and audiences. Social media provide organizations with opportunities to present their identity consistently while also allowing customers to interpret and reproduce brand meanings. Research among Iranian users has shown that social media marketing activities can influence customers' brand experience, emphasizing the experiential consequences of digital brand communication (6). Related evidence suggests that social media marketing activities may enhance brand loyalty and willingness to pay higher prices through the mediating role of brand equity, illustrating how relationship-building activities can generate economically meaningful outcomes when they strengthen brand value (7). In addition, social media marketing has been associated with brand loyalty through brand consciousness in online retail settings, further demonstrating that consumers' brand-related perceptions constitute an important mechanism linking digital marketing activities to sustained customer relationships (8). Consequently, branding should be considered an integral dimension of any comprehensive relationship marketing model developed for social media environments.

The relational power of social media also stems from the interactive structure of digital platforms. Interaction enables firms to move beyond one-way advertising by facilitating dialogue, feedback, participation, customer support, complaint management, sharing, and community membership. Such interactive mechanisms are particularly important because relationship marketing fundamentally depends on reciprocal rather than unilateral exchange. Research on heritage brands has shown that interaction through social media can contribute to the revitalization and restoration of brand relationships, illustrating the strategic importance of interactive communication even for brands with established historical identities (9). Moreover, electronic word-of-mouth and brand reputation can jointly influence consumer purchase decision-making in social media settings, emphasizing that consumer-to-consumer communication has become an essential part of the relationship-building process (10). These findings suggest that public relations, feedback acquisition, encouragement of participation, sharing mechanisms, membership, and loyalty-building activities should be treated as interconnected aspects of social media relationship management rather than as isolated communication practices.

Content marketing constitutes another major mechanism through which relational value is created on social media. Consumers are increasingly exposed to large volumes of competing information, making it difficult for brands to attract attention through conventional promotional messages alone. Effective social media content must therefore provide informational, educational, experiential, or entertainment value and should be sufficiently relevant to stimulate cognitive engagement and continued interaction. Content production, audience development, differentiation, guidance, and educational communication can strengthen the usefulness of a firm's digital presence and encourage customers to remain connected to the brand. The growing prominence of influencers further demonstrates the importance of both message characteristics and communication sources. A comprehensive meta-analysis of social media influencer marketing has identified multiple predictors of effectiveness, indicating that successful influence depends on a complex combination of source, audience, communication, and contextual characteristics (11). Similarly, configurational research has shown that the effectiveness of influencer marketing emerges from different combinations of influencer characteristics and content features rather than from a single universally dominant factor (12). These findings support a multidimensional understanding of content marketing as a relational resource.

The strategic role of social media content is particularly visible in influencer and viral marketing. Influencers can function as intermediaries between brands and customers by translating commercial messages into socially embedded forms of communication that may appear more personal and engaging than conventional advertising. Research has highlighted the effectiveness of influencer marketing within social media networks, indicating its growing importance in shaping consumer responses (13). Furthermore, viral marketing strategies increasingly employ influencer networks to improve message diffusion, reach, and engagement, thereby extending brand communication through socially connected audiences (14). Consumer engagement with influencers is also influenced by patterns of social media appropriation and individual involvement with product categories, as demonstrated in research examining fashion attentiveness and influencer engagement (15). These developments reinforce the importance of audience-building, mental engagement, sharing, and differentiated content within relationship marketing because the strength of digital relationships is increasingly shaped by how effectively content becomes embedded within customers' social and informational environments.

Advertising remains essential within social media marketing, but its function has expanded beyond the direct promotion of products. Contemporary digital advertising can contribute to information dissemination, value communication, customer support, innovation awareness, search visibility, and the development of interactive brand experiences. In this environment, organizations must coordinate advertising with broader relationship objectives to prevent communication from becoming excessively transactional. Consumer behavior research in digitally intensive markets demonstrates that social media marketing models must account for multiple psychological and behavioral mechanisms through which online communication affects evaluation and consumption decisions (16). Social media communication strategies also need to be tailored to the specific organizational and industry context. For example, research on the adoption of social media as a marketing communication tool by non-professional sports clubs demonstrates that organizations differ considerably in their resources, motivations, capabilities, and patterns of adoption (17). These findings imply that successful advertising within a relationship marketing framework requires organizational alignment rather than merely increased promotional activity.

Information technology constitutes the infrastructure that enables these activities to function effectively. Social media-based relationship marketing relies on appropriate software, hardware, human resources, support networks, implementation capabilities, and organizational competence in using technology. The increasing integration of artificial intelligence and social media analytics has further expanded the analytical capacities available to marketing managers. Machine-learning algorithms can facilitate segmentation, campaign optimization, behavioral prediction, content targeting, and the interpretation of large-scale social media data, allowing firms to make communication decisions with greater speed and precision (18, 19). Artificial intelligence may also enhance the flexibility of digital marketing during periods of crisis by enabling organizations to adapt communication and resource allocation more rapidly in response to changing environmental conditions (20). Thus, information technology should not be viewed solely as a technical support function. Rather, it constitutes a strategic foundation through which firms can monitor relationships, manage content, coordinate interactions, respond to environmental change, and convert consumer data into relationship-building knowledge.

The importance of technologically supported relationship marketing becomes even more apparent under conditions of economic uncertainty and market disruption. Organizations operating in volatile environments must develop communication structures that are flexible enough to preserve relationships even when consumers' expectations, purchasing power, media behavior, and competitive conditions change rapidly. A social media-based framework developed for architectural design firms during global economic downturns demonstrates how digital communication can provide organizations with adaptive mechanisms for maintaining visibility and market connections under difficult conditions (21). More broadly, the increasing reliance on digital platforms means that social media capabilities are becoming part of organizational resilience. The ability to localize technologies, deploy them effectively, maintain support systems, and adapt digital communication to local market characteristics can therefore determine whether social media merely functions as an additional advertising channel or develops into an integrated relationship management system.

This issue is particularly important when the focus shifts from globally dominant platforms to national social media. National social media platforms can operate within distinctive technological, regulatory, linguistic, cultural, and market environments. Consequently, the mechanisms that determine relationship marketing effectiveness may differ from those identified primarily in studies of international platforms. Organizations using national platforms must understand not only consumers' general digital behavior but also the specific infrastructural capabilities, communication norms, audience characteristics, and trust conditions associated with those platforms. The strategic value of social media depends on organizational ability to match communication practices with the environment in which interaction occurs. The literature demonstrates that social media marketing effectiveness is influenced by content features, user engagement, customer experience, brand awareness, brand equity, electronic word-of-mouth, communication quality, and organizational capabilities (4, 10, 12). Nevertheless, these variables have often been examined separately or within specific industries, leaving a need for integrated frameworks capable of explaining how they operate collectively within national social media ecosystems.

Another important gap concerns the fragmentation of existing social media marketing research. Some studies have concentrated on purchase decisions and customer experience (4), whereas others have emphasized brand awareness (5), brand experience (6), brand equity and loyalty (7), influencer effectiveness (11, 13), viral communication (14), consumer engagement (15), or marketing analytics and artificial intelligence (18, 20). Although these studies collectively demonstrate the multidimensional character of social media marketing, their fragmentation creates managerial difficulties because firms require an integrated understanding of how branding, content, technology, advertising, and interaction operate together. A relationship marketing model should therefore identify not only individual determinants but also their structural organization within a coherent framework capable of supporting strategic decision-making.

For food manufacturing companies, this need is particularly consequential because relationships with customers are influenced by repeated purchase behavior, perceptions of product quality and value, brand familiarity, trust, responsiveness, promotional communication, and the availability of timely and relevant information. Social media can provide these firms with a direct interface for explaining products, presenting brand values, responding to consumers, collecting feedback, supporting customer communities, stimulating word-of-mouth, and communicating innovations. However, the effectiveness of such activities depends on whether they are managed as isolated digital tactics or integrated within a systematic relationship marketing architecture. Existing research confirms that the benefits of social media emerge through interacting brand, communication, experiential, technological, and behavioral mechanisms (2, 3, 8). Developing a context-sensitive model can therefore provide both theoretical value, by clarifying the dimensions of social media-based relationship marketing, and practical value, by identifying the components that managers should prioritize when designing and evaluating their digital relationship strategies.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to develop and validate a relationship marketing model based on national social media.

Methods and Materials

Considering its objectives, the present study is classified as applied research. In terms of the data collection process, it is a descriptive and field study employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Participants in the qualitative phase consisted of experts familiar with the research topic. A minimum of 10 participants was initially considered for structured interviews, with sampling continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved; ultimately, 25 participants were included in this phase. The statistical population in the quantitative phase consisted of marketing experts and managers working in food manufacturing companies. Using simple random sampling and Cochran's formula, the quantitative sample size was determined to be 384 participants.

The present study can also be classified as correlational research employing causal modeling methods. In the second phase of the study, following the completion of the qualitative research and development of the questionnaire, a quantitative approach was used to test the proposed model. The purpose of this phase was to determine complex relational models, examine the magnitude of relationships among the categories, and achieve a level of generalizability within a larger sample. At this stage, a descriptive-analytical research approach and structural equation modeling (SEM) were employed.

To enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings, participant review, or member checking, was employed. To achieve this objective, in addition to reflecting participants' statements and perceptions during the interviews and summarizing each interviewee's statements at the end of the interviews for confirmation or correction, the researchers returned the complete typed and handwritten transcripts of several initial interviews, together with the first-level codes, to the respective interviewees for verification or revision. Their suggested modifications were subsequently taken into account until final confirmation was obtained.

To establish the face validity of the questionnaire, the wording and structure of the questions were required to be logical and appropriate to the characteristics of the respondents. Accordingly, the finalized questionnaire was provided to a group of experts to assess its face validity. The validity of the research questionnaire was also evaluated through content validity, and the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI) were calculated for the questionnaire items.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. Initially, 30 questionnaires were distributed among and collected from members of the target population. After the data were entered into the dataset, the reliability coefficient, namely Cronbach's alpha, was calculated using SPSS software.

The qualitative phase was analyzed using MAXQDA 24 software, whereas the quantitative phase was analyzed through structural equation modeling.

Findings and Results

According to the results of the qualitative phase, 7 participants were women and 18 were men, accounting for proportions of 0.28 and 0.72, respectively. Two participants held master's degrees and 23 held doctoral degrees, corresponding to proportions of 0.08 and 0.92, respectively. Eleven participants were aged 30–40 years, 9 were aged 40–50 years, and 5 were older than 50 years, accounting for proportions of 0.44, 0.36, and 0.20, respectively. Four participants had 6–10 years of work experience, 6 had 11–15 years, and 15 had more than 16 years of work experience, corresponding to proportions of 0.16, 0.24, and 0.60, respectively.

In the quantitative phase, 89 participants were women and 295 were men, accounting for proportions of 0.24 and 0.76, respectively. A total of 109 participants held high school diplomas, 79 held associate degrees, 102 held bachelor's degrees, and 94 held master's degrees or higher, corresponding to proportions of 0.29, 0.21, 0.27, and 0.23, respectively. Eighty-seven participants were aged 20–30 years, 151 were aged 30–40 years, 63 were aged 40–50 years, and 83 were older than 50 years, accounting for proportions of 0.22, 0.40, 0.17, and 0.21, respectively. Fifty-five participants had 1–5 years of purchasing experience, 175 had 6–10 years, 90 had 11–15 years, and 64 had more than 16 years of purchasing experience; the reported corresponding proportions were 0.55, 0.175, 0.90, and 0.64, respectively.

To identify the dimensions of the initial model, a thematic analysis approach was employed. Based on the interviews conducted with the experts (15 participants in the qualitative sample), the subcategories associated with five dimensions—branding, content marketing, technology, advertising, and interaction—were identified, as presented in Table 1. In this regard, the open concepts were initially formulated and, based on the principal meaning of each statement, the axial codes were subsequently identified. These axial codes represented the subcategories of each predefined category and were assigned to their corresponding main categories.

Table 1. Examples of Interview Transcripts

Interviewee Code	Interview Text
E1	One of the challenges facing organizations is the absence of an organizational-level communication strategy. Managing relationships with other firms, given the multiplicity of relationships and environmental actors, is no longer a simple task. It requires an understanding of the environment, analysis of the characteristics of each firm, determination of the type of relationships, and establishment of communications based on this initial understanding. Today, these relationships are embedded within complex networks in each business context.
E2	The theoretical foundations of interorganizational relationship marketing, influenced by resource dependence theory, social interaction theory, transaction cost theory, and political knowledge, have developed around interfirm buyer–seller relationships, marketing channels, relationship marketing, and business networks. Through customer relationships, they are also informed by service marketing and database marketing, drawing on concepts from consumer behavior, operations research, and database-based tools.
E3	The components of a business network are generally connected around a specific activity to obtain mutual benefits. Variables affecting relationship governance include the level of transactions, investment in transaction-specific assets, network intensity, and trust-related concepts. These variables influence collaborative planning and ultimately affect performance through growth and perceived satisfaction with the collaboration.
E4	“The discrepancy between expectations regarding the services and products of Parsian Hotels and their actual performance affects perceptions of transaction quality; a high-quality transaction is valuable.” “When there is a discrepancy between expected commitments and actual performance, negative feelings resulting from the collaboration affect relationship satisfaction; a relationship with which we are dissatisfied is unlikely to be repeated in the future unless circumstances compel us to do so.” “Reliable and credible communication affects transaction quality.” “A high-quality transaction is valuable and attractive.”
E5	“Positive feelings toward a business contact create a form of trust.” “A willingness to establish long-term and loyal relationships creates trust and friendship between the parties.” “Friendship and emotional attachment to their representative mean that even when better economic offers are available, the relationship with them is not terminated.” “A relationship in which individuals cannot be trusted is unattractive.”

Following the identification of significant statements obtained from the interviews and the research literature, axial coding was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2. At this stage, all the identified statements presented in the previous table, several examples of which were provided above, were transformed into code clusters representing the central meaning of each statement. The codes identified by each expert were treated as axial codes, and the interviewee codes associated with the respective codes were specified alongside them.

Table 2. Axial Codes

Interviewee/Source Code	Axial Codes
E1, E5, E7, E9	Brand experience creation; Brand identity; Education; Content production
E2, E4, E9, E18	Guidelines and instructions; Differentiation; Appropriate content; Mental engagement; Audience building
E3, E8, E9, E10; Recha et al. (2020)	Software and hardware; Human resources; Support network; Deployment
E4, E11, E12, E13	Effective utilization; Technology localization; Search engines; Value creation
E5, E14, E15, E16; Ahmad et al. (2022)	Support; Information dissemination; Innovation; Public relations
E6, E17, E18, E19, E20; Berger et al. (2024)	Criticisms and suggestions; Feedback acquisition; Motivation; Sharing; Membership; Loyalty
E7, E21, E22, E23, E24, E25; Paul (2015)	Brand awareness; Brand image; Brand equity; Brand development

Subsequently, based on the codes identified in the previous stage, the selective codes were categorized into five groups, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Findings of the Qualitative Content Analysis

Dimensions	Subcomponents
Branding	Brand awareness
	Brand image
	Brand equity
	Brand development
	Brand experience creation
	Brand identity
Content Marketing	Education
	Content production
	Guidelines and instructions
	Differentiation
	Appropriate content
	Mental engagement
	Audience building
Information Technology	Software and hardware
	Human resources
	Support network
	Deployment
	Effective utilization
	Technology localization
Advertising	Search engines
	Value creation
	Support
	Information dissemination
	Innovation
Interaction	Public relations
	Criticisms and suggestions
	Feedback acquisition
	Motivation
	Sharing
	Membership
	Loyalty

Table 4. Results of Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Advertising	0.965	0.834
Content Marketing	0.960	0.885
Branding	0.925	0.907
Information Technology	0.862	0.896
Interaction	0.963	0.845

According to the results presented in Table 4, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the research variables were greater than 0.70. Therefore, the reliability of the constructs was confirmed based on this criterion. Moreover, all composite reliability (CR) coefficients exceeded 0.70. Thus, the internal reliability of the measurement items within the model, reflecting the consistency of the explained constructs, was also confirmed.

Table 5. Results of the Average Variance Extracted and rho_A Tests

Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	rho_A
Advertising	0.568	0.785
Content Marketing	0.578	0.736

Branding	0.684	0.854
Information Technology	0.696	0.796
Interaction	0.545	0.745

According to the findings, all rho_A coefficients were greater than 0.70; therefore, reliability was also confirmed based on this criterion. Furthermore, all reported convergent validity coefficients in this section of the study were greater than 0.50. Accordingly, the convergent validity of the research measurement model was also confirmed.

Table 6. Results of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Assessment

Dimensions	1	2	3	4
Advertising	—	—	—	—
Content Marketing	0.885	—	—	—
Branding	0.569	0.662	—	—
Information Technology	0.501	0.371	0.335	—
Interaction	0.805	0.795	0.618	0.539

All HTMT coefficients were below 1. Therefore, considering the preceding validity assessments, it can be concluded that discriminant validity was established. Furthermore, given the establishment of convergent validity, it can be argued that the constructs assessed using the questionnaire data demonstrated construct validity. In other words, the measurement instrument assessed the constructs it was intended to measure.

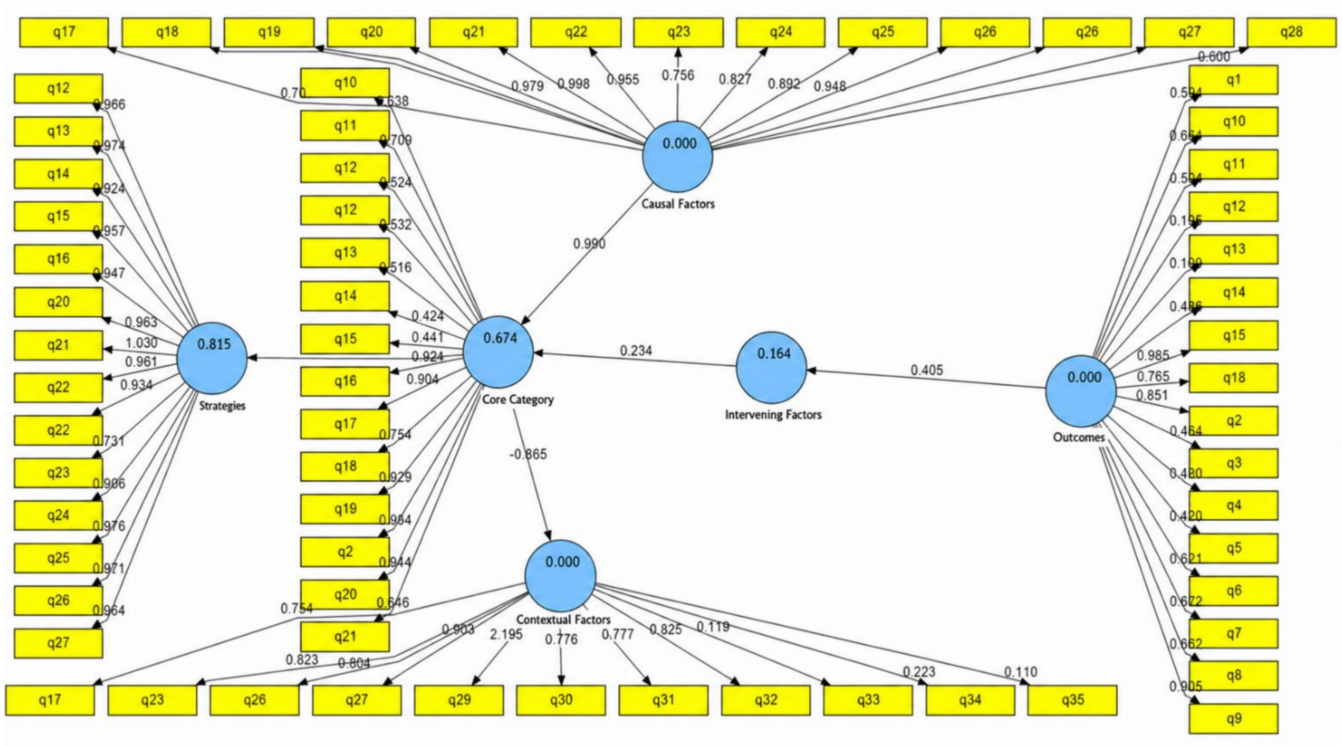

Figure 1. Model in Standardized Coefficient Mode

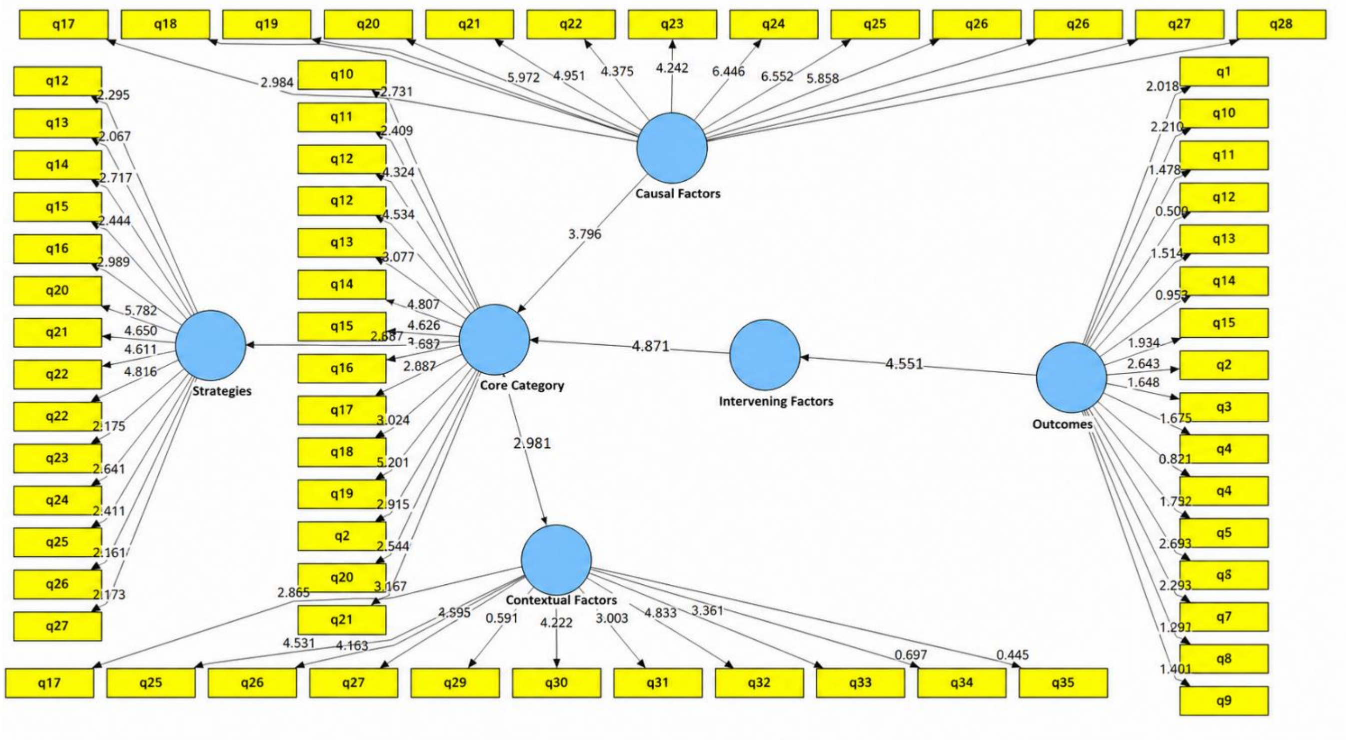

Figure 2. Model in Significance Mode

Table 7. Path Coefficients

Structural Path	Path Coefficient	*t* Value	Significance Level
Causal factors → Core category	0.405	4.051	0.000
Intervening factors → Strategies	0.233	3.789	0.000
Contextual factors → Strategies	0.085	2.298	0.000
Core category → Strategies	0.234	4.877	0.000
Strategies → Outcomes	0.449	4.877	0.000

Table 8. Q^2 and R^2 Criteria

Dimensions	Q^2 (1 − SSE/SSO)	R^2
Advertising	0.39	0.683
Content Marketing	0.41	0.511
Branding	0.44	0.701
Information Technology	0.54	0.490
Interaction	0.49	0.652

According to Table 8, the R^2 value for the technical dimension was moderate, whereas the values for the other dimensions were close to or greater than 0.67, indicating a strong model fit in terms of R^2. The Q^2 values for all dimensions were greater than 0.35, indicating strong predictive relevance and, consequently, a strong model fit.

The overall model fit was evaluated using the Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) criterion, which is an index used to assess the overall fit of the model in predicting endogenous variables.

Considering the three benchmark values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36, which represent weak, moderate, and strong GOF levels, respectively, the obtained GOF value of 0.65 indicates a strong overall fit for the research model. Because the calculated GOF value was greater than 0.36, the research model demonstrated an appropriate overall fit. Therefore, it can be concluded that the overall fit of the proposed research model was highly satisfactory and confirmed.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop and validate a relationship marketing model based on national social media. The findings of the qualitative phase identified five principal dimensions of the proposed model: branding, content marketing, information technology, advertising, and interaction. Branding comprised brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, brand development, brand experience creation, and brand identity. Content marketing included education, content production, guidelines and instructions, differentiation, appropriate content, mental engagement, and audience building. Information technology consisted of software and hardware, human resources, support networks, deployment, effective utilization, and technology localization. Advertising incorporated search engines, value creation, support, information dissemination, and innovation, while interaction included public relations, criticisms and suggestions, feedback acquisition, motivation, sharing, membership, and loyalty. The quantitative findings further supported the adequacy of the proposed model. All Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, AVE values exceeded 0.50, rho_A values exceeded 0.70, and HTMT coefficients remained below 1. These findings confirmed the reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model. Moreover, the structural model indicated significant relationships among the major components, with causal factors significantly predicting the core category ($\beta = 0.405$), intervening factors predicting strategies ($\beta = 0.233$), contextual factors predicting strategies ($\beta = 0.085$), the core category predicting strategies ($\beta = 0.234$), and strategies predicting outcomes ($\beta = 0.449$). The Q^2 values were greater than 0.35 for all dimensions, and the overall GOF value of 0.65 indicated a strong overall fit. Collectively, these results suggest that relationship marketing on national social media is a multidimensional phenomenon whose effectiveness depends on the coordinated functioning of branding, content, technological infrastructure, promotional activities, and interactive relationship-building processes.

The identification of branding as a central dimension of the model is consistent with the contemporary view that social media marketing contributes to relationship development by shaping how consumers recognize, interpret, experience, and value brands. The subdimensions identified in the present study—particularly brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, brand experience, and brand identity—represent a logical progression through which repeated social media exposure may transform familiarity into stronger relational attachment. This result is aligned with findings indicating that social media marketing influences purchase decisions partly through increased brand awareness (5). It is also consistent with evidence that social media marketing activities affect customers' brand experience (6). From a relationship marketing perspective, this is important because brand experience is not merely an immediate response to communication; repeated favorable experiences can strengthen trust, perceived consistency, emotional involvement, and long-term preference. Similarly, research has shown that brand equity mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and important behavioral outcomes such as brand loyalty and willingness to pay a premium (7). Thus, the present study's placement of branding within the broader relationship marketing structure is supported by previous evidence demonstrating that digital brand-building mechanisms can translate communication activities into durable customer value.

The findings regarding branding can also be interpreted in light of studies emphasizing brand consciousness, loyalty, and dynamic co-created brand experience. Karunarathne and Wanninayake found that social media marketing influenced brand loyalty through brand consciousness, showing that consumers' attention to and involvement with brands can serve as an important mechanism through which social media activities become relational outcomes (8). Likewise, Qadri emphasized that co-creation and electronic word-of-mouth contribute to dynamic brand experience and consumer equity in social media marketing (3). These studies support the present finding that brand development cannot be separated from participation and interaction. National social media platforms provide environments in which customers continuously encounter organizational messages, other users' evaluations, shared experiences, and community discussions. Consequently, brand identity and image are partially shaped through networked interaction rather than through firm-controlled communication alone. The present model therefore appropriately captures brand-building as an interactive relational process rather than as a solely promotional activity.

Content marketing emerged as another major dimension of the model, consisting of education, content production, guidelines, differentiation, appropriate content, mental engagement, and audience building. This finding reflects the central importance of content quality and relevance in sustaining customer relationships in highly competitive digital environments. Social media users are continuously exposed to large volumes of commercial information, and therefore simple message frequency is unlikely to create sustained engagement. Instead, organizations must produce content that is informative, useful, differentiated, and capable of stimulating cognitive and emotional involvement. This interpretation is supported by research showing that influencer marketing effectiveness depends not only on characteristics of the communicator but also on combinations of content-related features (12). A comprehensive review and meta-analysis similarly demonstrated that social media influencer marketing effectiveness is determined by multiple predictors rather than by a single universal factor (11). These findings reinforce the present study's conclusion that content marketing should be conceptualized as a multidimensional managerial capability involving content design, audience understanding, engagement, and differentiation.

The importance of content marketing is further supported by studies of influencer engagement and viral marketing. Influencers can extend organizational reach by embedding brand-related communication within more socially meaningful and personally engaging forms of content. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of influencer marketing in social media networks (13), while viral marketing strategies increasingly rely on influencer networks to enhance diffusion and engagement (14). Moreover, consumers' engagement with influencers depends on their attentiveness to the focal product category and their patterns of social media use (15). These findings correspond with the present identification of mental engagement and audience building as subcomponents of content marketing. Content that generates attention without sustained involvement may have limited relational value; by contrast, content that encourages repeated exposure, sharing, learning, and participation can contribute to the development of a persistent customer–brand relationship.

The identification of information technology as a major dimension indicates that successful relationship marketing through national social media requires more than appropriate marketing content. It also requires technological readiness, capable personnel, support infrastructure, implementation capacity, effective technology utilization, and localization. The significance of these components is understandable because digital relationship marketing is technologically mediated: data collection, customer segmentation, communication delivery, feedback management, personalization, and performance evaluation all depend on technological systems. Contemporary research on artificial intelligence and social media analytics supports this interpretation. Machine-learning tools can assist organizations in optimizing digital marketing campaigns, analyzing social media data, predicting consumer responses, and improving targeting efficiency (18, 19). Furthermore, artificial intelligence can enhance the flexibility of digital marketing, particularly during crises when firms must respond quickly to environmental changes (20). Accordingly, the present study's emphasis on technology localization and effective utilization is particularly relevant to national social media, where organizations may need to adapt technical processes to domestic platforms, local user behavior, and platform-specific functionalities.

This technological interpretation is also consistent with the broader managerial proposition that infrastructure and organizational capabilities influence sustainable organizational performance. Although not limited specifically to social media marketing, research has emphasized the importance of knowledge-management infrastructure and organizational adaptive capabilities in supporting sustainable performance (1). Social media-based relationship marketing similarly requires organizations to transform technological resources into usable knowledge about customers, competitors, communication effectiveness, and emerging market needs. Technology alone does not create relationships; rather, its strategic value arises when organizations possess the human expertise and processes required to translate data into appropriate actions. Therefore, the simultaneous identification of software and hardware, human resources, support networks, implementation, and effective utilization within the present model highlights an important managerial principle: technological capacity must be integrated with organizational capability.

Advertising was also identified as a major dimension, incorporating search engines, value creation, support, information dissemination, and innovation. This result indicates that advertising on social media should not be conceptualized merely as persuasive exposure but as a broader communication mechanism that contributes to customer information, value presentation, assistance, and innovation communication. This interpretation is compatible with research demonstrating that social media marketing can shape purchase decisions through customer experience (4). When advertising provides useful information and contributes positively to consumer experience, it may support both immediate decision-making and longer-term relational outcomes. Similarly, research on consumer behavior and social media marketing suggests that consumer responses in digitally intensive markets are influenced by interconnected cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms rather than by advertising exposure alone (16). Thus, advertising is most effective within relationship marketing when it contributes to perceived usefulness and value instead of functioning exclusively as short-term sales promotion.

The significance of advertising and communication capabilities is further supported by studies conducted in differing organizational contexts. Social media adoption by non-professional sports clubs has been shown to depend on organizational capacities and communication needs, indicating that the value of social media is closely associated with the way organizations incorporate it into their overall communication strategy (17). Similarly, a social media-based marketing framework developed for architectural design firms during periods of global economic downturn emphasized the adaptive role of digital communication in maintaining marketing effectiveness under challenging environmental conditions (21). These findings support the present model by suggesting that advertising through social media should be integrated with organizational strategy, technological resources, and contextual requirements. In national social media environments, this integration may be particularly important because firms must adapt their communication to platform-specific characteristics, domestic competition, and local customer expectations.

Interaction emerged as the fifth major dimension and included public relations, criticism and suggestion mechanisms, feedback acquisition, motivation, sharing, membership, and loyalty. This finding is highly compatible with the fundamental assumptions of relationship marketing, which emphasize reciprocity, communication, commitment, and continuity. Social media enable organizations to maintain ongoing dialogue with consumers and thereby shift customer relationships from episodic transactions toward continuous exchanges. Previous research has shown that social media marketing communication can influence consumer loyalty (2), supporting the present inclusion of loyalty as an outcome of interactive relationship processes. Similarly, social media interaction can contribute to brand revitalization and restoration by enabling firms to reconnect with consumers and reconstruct brand meaning through interaction (9). These findings indicate that mechanisms such as feedback, suggestions, membership, and sharing should be considered strategic relationship resources rather than secondary functions of social media management.

The role of interaction is further reinforced by evidence concerning electronic word-of-mouth and brand reputation. Consumer purchase decisions are influenced not only by company-generated messages but also by peer communication and perceived brand reputation within social networks (10). Likewise, co-creation and electronic word-of-mouth can enhance consumer equity and strengthen dynamic brand experience (3). These findings provide a strong explanation for why sharing, feedback, public relations, and membership emerged as components of the present model. When customers are encouraged to participate, communicate, and share experiences, they become active contributors to the relationship system. This participatory structure can strengthen commitment, facilitate organizational learning, increase perceived responsiveness, and potentially transform satisfied consumers into advocates.

The structural model also provides important insight into the relationships among the model components. The significant path from causal factors to the core category ($\beta = 0.405$) indicates that antecedent organizational and market-related conditions play a meaningful role in shaping the central relationship marketing phenomenon. The significant effects of intervening factors ($\beta = 0.233$) and contextual factors ($\beta = 0.085$) on strategies suggest that implementation cannot be understood without attention to environmental and operational conditions. Although the coefficient for contextual factors was comparatively smaller, its statistical significance indicates that strategic responses remain sensitive to the context in which national social media marketing occurs. The significant relationship between the core category and strategies ($\beta = 0.234$) suggests that a stronger relational orientation is translated into more coherent marketing practices, while the strongest structural relationship—between strategies and outcomes ($\beta = 0.449$)—demonstrates the importance of implementation. This result is broadly compatible with studies showing that social media marketing strategies influence loyalty, purchase decisions, brand experience, and customer equity through intermediate mechanisms (2, 4, 8). Therefore, positive outcomes do not arise simply from adopting social media; they depend on the quality and coordination of the strategies implemented through those platforms.

Finally, the strong reliability and validity indices, predictive relevance values, and overall GOF of 0.65 indicate that the proposed model provides a coherent representation of social media-based relationship marketing within the studied context. The model’s multidimensional nature is particularly important because previous research has frequently focused on individual relationships, such as social media marketing and purchase decisions, influencer effectiveness, brand loyalty, brand awareness, customer experience, or artificial intelligence applications. The present findings integrate these fragmented perspectives into a broader structure emphasizing branding, content, technology, advertising, and interaction. Such integration is consistent with the increasingly complex nature of digital marketing, in which customer relationships emerge through the combined effects of technological systems, organizational capabilities, communication strategies, consumer participation, and brand-related experiences.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the quantitative population was restricted to experts and marketing managers in food manufacturing companies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries, particularly service organizations, technology firms, financial institutions, and small businesses. Second, despite achieving theoretical saturation in the qualitative phase, the number and professional background of the interviewed experts may have influenced the range of concepts identified. Third, the study used a cross-sectional design, and therefore the proposed causal relationships reflect theoretically structured associations rather than changes observed over time. Fourth, the quantitative data were based on questionnaire responses and may consequently have been affected by self-report bias, social desirability, or respondents' subjective interpretations of the constructs. Finally, national social media platforms may differ considerably in technological architecture, target audiences, patterns of use, and communication capabilities, while the present model treated national social media at a relatively general level rather than distinguishing among specific platforms.

Future studies should test the proposed model in industries other than food manufacturing and compare the relative importance of its dimensions across service, retail, financial, technological, educational, and tourism contexts. Longitudinal research could examine how social media-based relationship marketing develops over time and whether changes in branding, interaction, content strategies, or technology adoption produce corresponding changes in customer loyalty and behavioral outcomes. Researchers may also compare national and international social media platforms to determine whether the structure and strength of relationships among the identified dimensions differ according to platform characteristics. Future studies could incorporate customer-level data alongside managerial evaluations and examine mediating or moderating variables such as trust, satisfaction, perceived value, engagement, privacy concerns, digital literacy, platform credibility, and customer involvement. Experimental and behavioral-data approaches could also complement questionnaire-based research and provide stronger evidence regarding the causal effects of specific relationship marketing practices.

Managers should approach national social media as integrated relationship-management environments rather than merely as advertising channels. Organizations should develop coordinated strategies that simultaneously strengthen brand awareness and identity, produce relevant and engaging content, improve technological infrastructure, communicate value effectively, and maintain continuous interaction with customers. Dedicated systems should be established for collecting and responding to criticism, suggestions, and customer feedback, while customers should be encouraged to participate, share content, and become members of brand-related communities. Firms should also invest in staff training, analytics capabilities, technological support, and the localization of digital tools to ensure that their social media activities fit the characteristics of national platforms and domestic audiences. Performance evaluation should move beyond short-term indicators such as reach or impressions and include relationship-oriented measures such as engagement quality, customer retention, loyalty, brand equity, responsiveness, advocacy, and the continuity of customer–brand relationships.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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