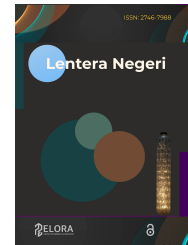




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Lentera Negeri

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Leveraging authentic brand storytelling and generative artificial intelligence for brand differentiation to enhance consumer engagement in the digital marketing ecosystem

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Jul 22th, 2026

Revised Aug 20th, 2026

Accepted Sept 21th, 2026

Keyword:

Authentic brand storytelling,
Generative artificial intelligence,
Consumer engagement

ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has transformed digital marketing by enabling brands to produce, personalize, and distribute content at unprecedented scale. However, increasing dependence on AI-generated content may create communication homogenization and weaken perceived brand authenticity, making differentiation and meaningful consumer engagement increasingly challenging. This study examines how authentic brand storytelling and GenAI can be strategically leveraged to strengthen brand differentiation and enhance consumer engagement within the digital marketing ecosystem. Using a library research approach, the study analyzes relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, scientific reports, and previous studies through content analysis. The findings indicate that authentic brand storytelling provides distinctive narrative meaning, while GenAI functions as an enabling capability for scalable, personalized, and multimodal communication. Brand differentiation emerges as a strategic mechanism connecting these resources with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consumer engagement. The study concludes that GenAI creates greater strategic value when governed by authentic brand identity, human oversight, narrative consistency, and consumer participation rather than used merely to increase content volume.



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Introduction

The rapid expansion of the digital marketing ecosystem has fundamentally changed the way brands compete for consumer attention, build relationships, and communicate value. The proliferation of social media platforms, short-form video, personalized advertising, and algorithmically curated content has created an environment in which consumers are continuously exposed to an enormous volume of branded messages. Although this environment provides brands with unprecedented opportunities to reach consumers, it simultaneously creates a critical differentiation problem: visibility does not necessarily translate into

meaningful consumer engagement. Consumers increasingly encounter content that is visually attractive, highly personalized, and technologically sophisticated, yet often perceive such content as repetitive, commercially driven, or lacking genuine human meaning. Recent research indicates that digital storytelling can strengthen consumer engagement when narratives generate emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses, while perceived authenticity plays an important role in determining how consumers evaluate online brand initiatives. At the same time, the rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has intensified both the opportunities and challenges of digital content creation by enabling brands to produce text, images, video, and personalized marketing materials at unprecedented speed and scale. Recent evidence shows that GenAI is increasingly being integrated into digital marketing for automated content creation, personalization, and customer experience development, while emerging studies demonstrate that AI-generated advertising can influence consumer engagement through mechanisms such as curiosity, perceived relevance, credibility, and enjoyment. Consequently, the central challenge for contemporary brands is no longer simply how to generate more content, but how to combine technological scalability with authentic narratives capable of establishing meaningful consumer connections and distinctive brand identities (Aicha & Bouzaabia, 2023).

Existing literature provides important explanations for the relationship between storytelling, authenticity, technology, and consumer engagement, but these perspectives remain fragmented and have not fully explained how authentic storytelling and GenAI can be strategically integrated to achieve brand differentiation. Brand storytelling research demonstrates that narrative elements such as plot, characters, and verisimilitude can stimulate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer engagement, indicating that stories can function as more than communication devices by becoming mechanisms through which consumers interact with brands and construct meaning. Similarly, research on authenticity suggests that consumers respond more favorably when digital engagement initiatives are perceived as consistent with the identity and positioning of the brand, emphasizing that authenticity is not merely an attribute of content but a relational perception formed through the interaction between brand identity and consumer interpretation. Meanwhile, emerging GenAI literature has primarily emphasized its technological capabilities, including content automation, personalization, efficiency, and the optimization of consumer interactions. A recent systematic review, for example, identifies growing scholarly attention to both affective and behavioral outcomes of GenAI-mediated customer engagement, while also highlighting the importance of disclosure and human involvement in shaping these outcomes. However, these streams of research have largely developed in parallel. Storytelling studies tend to emphasize narrative structure and consumer responses, whereas GenAI studies frequently concentrate on technological functionality and marketing efficiency. This creates a theoretical gap concerning how authentic brand storytelling can be strategically leveraged through GenAI to create distinctive brand meanings and, consequently, enhance consumer engagement. In other words, existing theories explain why storytelling can engage consumers and why AI can improve digital marketing capabilities, but they provide insufficient integrated understanding of how authenticity and generative technology can operate simultaneously as strategic mechanisms for brand differentiation within an increasingly AI-mediated digital marketing ecosystem (Aljarah Ibrahim, B., & López, 2025).

Against this background, this study aims to examine how authentic brand storytelling and Generative Artificial Intelligence can be leveraged as complementary strategic resources to achieve brand differentiation and enhance consumer engagement within the digital marketing ecosystem. More specifically, the study seeks to conceptualize the relationship between authentic storytelling and GenAI by examining how technological capabilities can support the development, personalization, and dissemination of brand narratives without undermining the authenticity that consumers associate with meaningful brand experiences. The study further aims to clarify the role of brand differentiation as a strategic mechanism through which authentic and technologically enhanced storytelling can translate into stronger consumer engagement. This objective is particularly relevant because emerging evidence suggests that storytelling and AI-enabled marketing can both influence consumer responses, yet their combined strategic role remains insufficiently developed in the literature. Recent research, for instance, indicates that AI marketing and creative storytelling can positively influence brand engagement, while other studies show that AI involvement may stimulate content engagement through consumer curiosity. Therefore, rather than treating storytelling and GenAI as independent marketing tools, this study positions them as interconnected components of a broader digital marketing strategy in which technological efficiency must be balanced with narrative authenticity, distinctive brand meaning, and consumer-centered engagement (Amos & Zhang, 2024).

The fundamental argument of this study is that the strategic value of Generative Artificial Intelligence in digital marketing does not lie solely in its ability to produce content rapidly, but in its capacity to amplify authentic brand narratives while preserving the distinctive meanings that differentiate one brand from another. When GenAI is employed merely to increase content volume, brands may achieve greater visibility but risk producing homogeneous communication that weakens perceived authenticity and fails to establish meaningful consumer relationships. Conversely, when GenAI is strategically combined with authentic brand storytelling, its capabilities in personalization, content adaptation, and scalable communication can strengthen the delivery of distinctive narratives to relevant consumer segments. Such integration may enhance brand differentiation because consumers are not only exposed to more relevant content but also encounter coherent narratives that communicate the brand's values, identity, and uniqueness. This proposition is consistent with evidence that storytelling can activate multidimensional consumer engagement and that AI-enabled marketing characteristics can shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Accordingly, this study argues that authenticity should function as the human-centered foundation of GenAI-enabled brand communication, while GenAI should function as an enabling capability that expands the reach, personalization, and adaptability of authentic storytelling. The integration of these dimensions is therefore expected to provide a stronger basis for brand differentiation and ultimately generate deeper consumer engagement than either conventional storytelling or technology-driven content generation pursued independently. This perspective makes the study important both theoretically and managerially: theoretically, it connects previously fragmented streams of research on storytelling, authenticity, GenAI, brand differentiation, and consumer engagement; managerially, it provides a strategic perspective for brands seeking to remain distinctive and credible in a digital environment increasingly characterized by AI-generated content (Arango Singaraju, S. P., & Niininen, 2023).

Literature Review

Authentic Brand Storytelling

Authentic brand storytelling refers to the strategic use of credible, meaningful, and brand-consistent narratives to communicate a brand's identity, values, experiences, and purpose in ways that consumers perceive as genuine rather than merely promotional. Unlike conventional advertising, which primarily emphasizes functional attributes or persuasive claims, storytelling constructs a narrative context through which consumers can interpret what a brand represents and why it matters. Authenticity is therefore central to the effectiveness of brand storytelling because consumers do not evaluate narratives solely according to their informational content but also according to whether the stories appear consistent with the brand's actual identity, history, products, and values. Research on authentic storytelling demonstrates that consumers respond differently to forms of authenticity and that stronger authenticity cues can generate more favorable brand attitudes. In this sense, authentic brand storytelling can be understood as a relational communication process in which brands create narratives that enable consumers to connect brand meanings with their own experiences, values, and identities. Authentic storytelling consequently moves beyond the simple transmission of information toward the construction of credibility, emotional resonance, and symbolic meaning, making it particularly relevant in digital environments where consumers are increasingly exposed to large volumes of competing brand content (Arghashi & Yuksel, 2022).

Authentic brand storytelling can manifest through several interconnected forms, including heritage-based storytelling, founder and organizational stories, customer experience narratives, purpose-driven storytelling, behind-the-scenes narratives, and user-generated storytelling. Heritage-based storytelling emphasizes a brand's history, origins, traditions, and continuity, whereas founder stories communicate the personal motivations and values underlying the creation of the brand. Customer-centered narratives emphasize consumer experiences and testimonials, allowing the brand meaning to be constructed through experiences that appear less commercially controlled. Purpose-driven storytelling communicates broader social, environmental, or cultural values that extend beyond product functionality, while behind-the-scenes narratives provide visibility into production processes, organizational practices, and the people behind the brand. In digital environments, these forms can be distributed through social media posts, short-form videos, blogs, podcasts, interactive content, and user-generated media. Importantly, authenticity does not necessarily require every narrative element to be historical or completely spontaneous; rather, authenticity depends on the perceived consistency between the story, the brand's behavior, and the expectations of its audience. Evidence from brand storytelling research indicates that both indexical and iconic forms of authentic storytelling can influence brand attitudes, although consumer responses may vary according to product type and contextual factors. Thus, the manifestation of authentic brand storytelling should be understood as a multidimensional practice involving narrative content, credibility, consistency, emotional resonance, and consumer participation (Baek Kim, J., & Kim, 2024).

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) refers to a class of artificial intelligence technologies capable of generating new content—including text, images, audio, video, and other forms of multimodal output—based on patterns learned from large datasets. Within digital marketing, GenAI represents a significant development because it shifts artificial intelligence from primarily analyzing existing information toward actively producing communication content. Contemporary marketing research identifies GenAI as increasingly relevant to automated content creation, campaign personalization, customer interaction, creative development, and digital experience management. A recent systematic literature review demonstrates that GenAI is reshaping digital marketing through automated content generation, personalization, and new mechanisms for consumer engagement, while also identifying concerns related to privacy, bias, ethics, and responsible adoption. From a strategic perspective, GenAI can therefore be conceptualized not simply as an operational automation technology but as a marketing capability that expands the speed, scale, adaptability, and personalization of brand communication. Its relevance to the present study lies particularly in its potential to support brands in translating core narratives into diverse content formats while maintaining consistency across increasingly fragmented digital touchpoints (Bailey Bonifield, C. M., & Elhai, 2021).

The manifestations of GenAI in digital marketing can be categorized into several major applications, including automated content generation, personalized communication, multimodal content creation, conversational interaction, creative ideation, and data-informed content adaptation. Automated content generation enables marketers to develop advertising copy, product descriptions, social media posts, email campaigns, and other textual materials at scale. Personalized communication allows generated content to be adapted according to consumer characteristics, preferences, behavioral patterns, or contextual information. Multimodal generation extends these capabilities to images, video, audio, and combinations of different media formats, thereby supporting integrated digital campaigns. GenAI can also facilitate conversational interaction through AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants, while creative ideation enables marketers to generate alternative concepts, narratives, visual directions, and campaign variations. Recent research identifies content creation and personalization as major themes in the application of GenAI to digital marketing and highlights its ability to support text, image, and multimodal campaign development. At the same time, the effectiveness of these manifestations depends on how the technology is integrated with human judgment, brand strategy, ethical safeguards, and consumer expectations. Accordingly, GenAI should not be regarded merely as a mechanism for increasing content volume but as an enabling capability whose strategic value depends on how effectively it supports relevant, distinctive, credible, and consumer-centered brand communication (Bakpayev Baek, T. H., van Esch, P., & Yoon, 2022).

Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement refers to the degree and nature of consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in interactions with a brand. The concept extends beyond conventional measures such as purchase intention or satisfaction because engagement captures the broader ways in which consumers think about, feel toward, and act in relation to brands across different touchpoints. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014), for example, conceptualize consumer brand engagement as positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity occurring during or related to consumer–brand interactions. Their framework identifies cognitive processing, affection, and activation as three important dimensions of consumer brand engagement. This conceptualization is particularly appropriate for digital marketing because consumer–brand relationships increasingly occur through interactive environments in which consumers can simultaneously consume, evaluate, respond to, share, and co-create brand content. Consequently, engagement should be viewed as a dynamic relational process rather than a one-directional response to promotional stimuli. In the context of authentic storytelling and GenAI, consumer engagement represents the ultimate outcome through which the effectiveness of brand narratives and technologically enabled interactions can be evaluated (Butcher & Sung, 2024).

Consumer engagement can manifest across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, each representing a different form of consumer involvement with the brand. Cognitive engagement involves attention, concentration, information processing, curiosity, and the mental effort consumers devote to understanding or interpreting brand content. Emotional engagement reflects feelings such as enjoyment, affection, enthusiasm, trust, identification, and emotional attachment generated through brand interactions. Behavioral engagement encompasses observable consumer actions, including clicking, commenting, liking, sharing, participating in brand communities, creating user-generated content, recommending brands, visiting digital platforms, and ultimately demonstrating usage or purchase-related behaviors. Hollebeek et al. (2014) distinguish these dimensions through cognitive processing, affection, and activation, providing an established

basis for understanding engagement as a multidimensional construct. Recent research on GenAI and customer engagement similarly distinguishes affective outcomes—such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment—from behavioral outcomes—including clicks, shares, purchases, and retention. This multidimensionality is important for the present study because authentic storytelling may initially stimulate cognitive and emotional engagement through meaningful narratives, while GenAI-enabled personalization and interaction may facilitate subsequent behavioral engagement. Consumer engagement can therefore serve as an important mechanism through which distinctive brand narratives are transformed into sustained consumer–brand relationships within the digital marketing ecosystem (Carlson Rahman, S. M., Rahman, M. M., Wyllie, J., & Voola, 2021).

Method

Research Object

The object of this study is the phenomenon of brand differentiation and consumer engagement in the increasingly AI-mediated digital marketing ecosystem, with particular attention to the strategic integration of authentic brand storytelling and Generative Artificial Intelligence. The study focuses on the problem faced by contemporary brands in maintaining distinctive and meaningful communication amid the rapid expansion of digitally generated content (Faruk Rahman, M., & Hasan, 2021). Specifically, the research examines how authentic narratives can function as a source of brand distinctiveness and how GenAI can support the creation, adaptation, personalization, and dissemination of such narratives across digital marketing channels. The phenomenon is important because the increasing availability of AI-generated content may improve communication efficiency while simultaneously creating risks of content homogenization, reduced perceived authenticity, and weakened consumer connection. Recent literature confirms that GenAI is rapidly transforming digital marketing through content creation and personalization, while emerging research has begun to examine its affective and behavioral implications for consumer engagement. Accordingly, the research object encompasses the conceptual relationship between authentic brand storytelling, GenAI capabilities, brand differentiation, and consumer engagement as reflected in the existing body of scholarly literature (Chahal Wirtz, J., & Verma, 2020).

Research Type and Data Sources

This study employs a library research approach, in which knowledge is developed through systematic examination, interpretation, and synthesis of existing written sources relevant to the research problem. The primary data consist of relevant scholarly literature addressing the relationship between authentic brand storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence, brand differentiation, and consumer engagement in digital marketing. These primary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, conceptual studies, empirical research, systematic literature reviews, and other academically credible publications that provide theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the phenomena under investigation. Secondary data comprise supporting literature that provides broader contextual and conceptual information concerning digital marketing, branding, artificial intelligence, consumer behavior, storytelling, authenticity, and engagement, including books, academic journals, research reports, and other scientific publications (Gao Li, G., Tsai, F., Gao, C., Zhu, M., & Qu, 2023). This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to integrate knowledge developed across several interconnected research streams rather than collect primary responses from consumers or organizations. Recent systematic reviews demonstrate that the GenAI marketing literature is interdisciplinary and encompasses technological, psychological, communication, innovation, and human–computer interaction perspectives, reinforcing the relevance of a literature-based approach for synthesizing these diverse streams (Crespo Ferreira, A. G., & Cardoso, 2023).

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates several complementary perspectives, with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, Consumer Brand Engagement theory, and brand authenticity and storytelling perspectives serving as the principal conceptual foundations. The S–O–R framework, originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), proposes that external stimuli influence an individual's internal cognitive and affective states, which subsequently generate behavioral responses. Within this research, authentic brand storytelling and GenAI-enabled marketing communication can be conceptualized as marketing stimuli that influence consumers' internal perceptions, emotions, and cognitive evaluations, ultimately affecting their engagement responses. This perspective is consistent with recent GenAI research that applies the S–O–R model to explain how AI-generated content and personalized digital interactions influence consumer perceptions and engagement outcomes. The second theoretical foundation is Consumer

Brand Engagement theory, particularly the conceptualization proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), which defines engagement through cognitive processing, affection, and activation. In addition, authenticity and brand storytelling perspectives provide the conceptual basis for understanding how credibility, narrative consistency, identity, and meaningful brand narratives contribute to differentiated brand meaning. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the assumptions required to examine how authentic storytelling functions as a meaning-oriented stimulus, how GenAI strengthens the scalability and adaptability of marketing communication, and how these mechanisms may contribute to consumer engagement and brand differentiation (Davvetas & Biraglia, 2022).

Data Collection Process

The data collection process was conducted through a structured examination of written sources relevant to the research objectives. The process began by identifying literature associated with the three central concepts—authentic brand storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence, and consumer engagement—together with supporting concepts such as brand differentiation, digital marketing, brand authenticity, personalization, and consumer–brand relationships (Gao & Liu, 2022). The researcher then reviewed books, previous research, academic papers, journal articles, scientific reports, conference materials, and other relevant written publications to identify concepts, theoretical arguments, empirical findings, and recurring themes. Particular attention was given to studies that directly examined storytelling authenticity, GenAI applications in marketing, and the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer engagement. Recent systematic reviews were also considered because they provide synthesized evidence regarding the development and application of GenAI in digital marketing and customer engagement. The collected literature was subsequently organized according to conceptual relevance and thematic similarity, enabling the researcher to compare findings across different studies and identify relationships, convergences, contradictions, and areas that remain insufficiently explained. Through this process, the literature served not only as a source of descriptive information but also as the empirical and conceptual basis for constructing the integrated argument of the study (Donthu Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, 2021).

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which involves systematically examining and interpreting textual information to identify recurring patterns, concepts, relationships, and significant meanings contained within the selected literature. The analysis began with the identification of relevant statements, arguments, findings, and theoretical propositions associated with authentic brand storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence, consumer engagement, and brand differentiation. The identified information was then classified into thematic categories corresponding to the three principal constructs and their manifestations. Subsequently, similarities and differences across the literature were compared to determine how the constructs have been conceptualized, operationalized, and connected in previous research. Particular attention was given to relationships between authenticity and storytelling, GenAI and marketing communication, and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer engagement. The analysis then proceeded through thematic synthesis, whereby findings from different sources were integrated to identify broader patterns and develop an explanatory interpretation of the phenomenon. This process enables the research to move beyond merely summarizing individual studies toward identifying conceptual relationships among the literature (Gołab-Andrzejak, 2023). The resulting synthesis is expected to clarify how authentic storytelling and GenAI can operate as complementary strategic resources for differentiation and engagement within the digital marketing ecosystem, while also revealing theoretical and practical implications arising from their intersection (Kshetri et al., 2024).

Results and Discussions

Integrated Findings on Authentic Brand Storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence, and Consumer Engagement (Haleem et al., 2022). The content analysis of the selected literature indicates that authentic brand storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), and consumer engagement constitute three interrelated dimensions within the contemporary digital marketing ecosystem. Rather than operating as independent marketing instruments, the three dimensions form a sequential and mutually reinforcing strategic relationship. Authentic brand storytelling provides the substantive foundation by communicating brand identity, values, experiences, and purpose through narratives that consumers perceive as credible and meaningful. GenAI subsequently functions as an enabling technological capability that facilitates the creation, adaptation, personalization, and distribution of these narratives across multiple digital touchpoints. Consumer engagement represents the outcome of this interaction, reflected in consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with the brand. The

literature consistently demonstrates that storytelling can activate multiple dimensions of engagement, while recent GenAI research shows that artificial intelligence is increasingly being applied to content generation and personalized customer experiences. Dessart and Pitardi (2019), for example, demonstrate that story plot, characters, and verisimilitude can stimulate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consumer responses. Meanwhile, recent systematic evidence identifies content creation and personalization as major applications of GenAI in digital marketing. These findings indicate that the strategic value of the three constructs becomes stronger when they are integrated rather than implemented separately (Huang & Rust, 2021).

The second major finding concerns the central role of authenticity in determining whether technologically enabled storytelling can produce meaningful brand differentiation. The analysis shows that technological sophistication alone does not guarantee distinctive brand communication. In an environment where GenAI allows competing organizations to generate comparable textual, visual, and audiovisual content, technological accessibility can potentially reduce rather than increase differentiation if brands rely on generic prompts, standardized communication patterns, or repetitive content structures. Authenticity therefore becomes a critical differentiating resource because it connects generated content to characteristics that are difficult to reproduce mechanically, including organizational history, distinctive values, lived experiences, founder narratives, customer experiences, and brand-specific cultural meanings. (Kaur et al, 2024) demonstrate that both indexical and iconic forms of authentic storytelling can positively influence brand attitudes, although their effects may vary according to product type and price. This suggests that authenticity is not simply an aesthetic characteristic of storytelling but a strategic mechanism through which consumers distinguish credible brand narratives from generic commercial communication. Accordingly, the literature synthesis indicates that GenAI should amplify the uniqueness already embedded within a brand rather than replace the substantive identity from which authenticity originates (Keller, 2020).

The third finding demonstrates that authentic brand storytelling has a multidimensional manifestation that extends beyond firm-generated promotional narratives. The literature identifies heritage stories, founder narratives, employee stories, customer experiences, social-purpose narratives, behind-the-scenes content, and consumer-generated stories as important manifestations of brand storytelling. These forms differ in their sources and narrative structures but share the ability to provide consumers with contextual information through which brand meanings can be interpreted. Particularly important is the distinction between stories produced by firms and stories developed or shared by consumers themselves. Research by (Key Keel, A. L., Czaplewski, A. J., & Olson, 2021) shows that consumer-generated brand storytelling can produce more favorable brand attitudes through deeper cognitive processing and stronger positive emotional experiences compared with firm-generated brand stories. This finding expands the understanding of authenticity because authenticity can emerge not only from what organizations communicate but also from the degree to which consumers participate in constructing and circulating brand narratives. Therefore, the effectiveness of authentic storytelling is strengthened when brands create opportunities for consumers to contribute their own experiences rather than controlling every aspect of the narrative (Kraus Jones, P., Kailer, N., Weinmann, A., Chaparro-Banegas, N., & Roig-Tierno, 2021).

The fourth finding concerns the role of GenAI as a scalable marketing capability. The literature analysis indicates that GenAI has six particularly relevant manifestations: automated content generation, personalized communication, multimodal content creation, conversational interaction, creative ideation, and content adaptation. These capabilities enable organizations to transform a single strategic brand narrative into multiple content formats and variations appropriate for different platforms and consumer segments. Recent research confirms that GenAI is being applied to content creation, visual design, video production, personalization, and data-informed digital marketing activities. From a strategic perspective, this capability creates an important opportunity for brands because authentic narratives can be disseminated at greater speed and scale without necessarily requiring the same level of manual production effort. However, the analysis also indicates that scalability creates a potential contradiction: increasing the volume of generated content can undermine differentiation if content becomes excessively standardized. Therefore, GenAI produces strategic value when it is governed by a clearly defined brand identity, narrative architecture, and authenticity principles. The technology should consequently be viewed as an amplifier of brand meaning rather than as the primary source of brand meaning (Kumar et al., 2025).

Table 1. Synthesis of the Principal Constructs and Their Strategic Functions

Construct	Conceptual meaning	Main manifestations	Strategic function	Expected outcome
Authentic Brand Storytelling	Communication of brand identity, values, experiences, and purpose through	Heritage stories, founder stories, customer stories, purpose-driven narratives, behind-the-	Establishes credibility, emotional resonance, and	Stronger brand differentiation

Construct	Conceptual meaning	Main manifestations	Strategic function	Expected outcome
Generative Artificial Intelligence	credible and meaningful narratives	scenes content, consumer-generated stories	distinctive brand meaning	More relevant and extensive brand interactions
	Technology capable of generating and adapting textual, visual, audiovisual, and interactive content	Content generation, personalization, multimodal creation, conversational AI, creative ideation, content adaptation	Increases scalability, speed, personalization, and communication flexibility	
	The extent to which a brand is perceived as distinctive and meaningfully different from competing alternatives	Distinctive identity, unique narratives, symbolic meanings, differentiated experiences	Converts brand authenticity and technological capabilities into competitive distinctiveness	
Brand Differentiation	Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in consumer–brand interactions	Cognitive processing, affection, activation, interaction, sharing, participation, advocacy	Represents the consumer response to meaningful brand experiences	Stronger consumer–brand relationships

The fifth finding reveals that consumer engagement should be understood as a multidimensional outcome rather than as a simple measure of clicks, likes, or purchases. The literature indicates that engagement incorporates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. (Li et al., 2024) conceptualize consumer brand engagement through cognitive processing, affection, and activation, establishing a multidimensional framework for understanding consumers' positive brand-related activity during interactions with brands. The present synthesis indicates that authentic storytelling may initially stimulate cognitive engagement by encouraging consumers to process narrative content, compare the story with their existing perceptions, and interpret its meaning. Emotional engagement can subsequently emerge through feelings of identification, empathy, enjoyment, trust, or affection. Behavioral engagement may then become visible through commenting, sharing, recommending, participating, generating content, or engaging in brand-related activities. (Majerova Nadanyiova, M., & Patik, 2025) similarly demonstrate that story elements can activate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in digital environments. Thus, engagement should be regarded as a process that develops through multiple interconnected consumer responses rather than as a single behavioral indicator.

The sixth finding indicates that personalization represents one of the most important mechanisms connecting GenAI with consumer engagement. GenAI enables brands to modify the presentation, language, format, and emphasis of a core narrative according to different consumer segments and digital contexts. Such personalization can increase perceived relevance because consumers encounter stories that are more closely aligned with their interests, preferences, and circumstances. Recent research on GenAI and customer engagement distinguishes affective outcomes such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment from behavioral outcomes such as clicks, sharing, purchases, and retention, demonstrating that AI-mediated marketing can influence multiple dimensions of engagement. However, the findings also indicate that personalization must remain consistent with the brand's core identity. Excessive customization that changes the fundamental meaning of a brand narrative may create inconsistency and reduce authenticity. The strategic implication is therefore that GenAI should personalize the expression of a brand story while preserving the core meaning of that story. This distinction is fundamental because effective personalization should make a brand feel more relevant without making it appear inconsistent or opportunistic (Nordhoff & Zumstein, 2025).

The seventh finding concerns the relationship between authenticity and consumer trust. The content analysis shows that authenticity functions as an interpretive mechanism through which consumers evaluate whether brand communication is credible. When consumers perceive a story as consistent with the brand's actual behavior, history, identity, and values, the communication is more likely to generate favorable evaluations. Conversely, when AI-generated communication appears exaggerated, overly polished, generic, or inconsistent with actual brand practices, technological sophistication may become a source of skepticism rather than engagement. Yin et al. (2023) provide empirical evidence that authentic storytelling can improve brand attitudes and that consumers respond positively to both indexical and iconic authenticity cues. The synthesis therefore suggests that the increasing use of GenAI makes authenticity more—not less—important. As consumers become more familiar with AI-generated content, the distinctive value of human experience, organizational history, credible evidence, and

consistent brand behavior may become increasingly important in determining whether consumers accept and engage with brand narratives.

The eighth finding is the emergence of an integrated strategic pathway linking authentic storytelling, GenAI, brand differentiation, and consumer engagement. The literature indicates that authentic storytelling supplies the distinctive content foundation; GenAI provides scalability, personalization, and multimodal delivery; brand differentiation represents the strategic mechanism through which distinctive narratives become recognizable and meaningful relative to competitors; and consumer engagement represents the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response generated by these combined efforts. This relationship can be represented as Authentic Brand Storytelling → GenAI-enabled amplification and personalization → Brand Differentiation → Consumer Engagement. The pathway does not imply a purely linear process because consumer engagement can also generate feedback that enriches subsequent storytelling. Consumer-generated stories, comments, reactions, and participation can provide organizations with additional narrative material that can subsequently be incorporated into future brand communication. Research confirms the interactive character of story-based engagement and demonstrates that consumer responses can contribute to the continuing development of brand narratives. Therefore, the findings support a cyclical rather than exclusively linear model in which brand storytelling generates engagement, engagement generates consumer responses, and those responses become resources for subsequent storytelling.

Table 2. Integrated Relationship among the Research Constructs

Stage	Strategic process	Primary mechanism	Consumer response	Strategic implication
1	Authentic narrative development	Brand identity, values, history, purpose	Perceived credibility and relevance	Establishes narrative foundation
2	GenAI-enabled amplification	Generation, adaptation, personalization, multimodal delivery	Greater accessibility and relevance	Expands communication capability
3	Brand differentiation	Unique narrative positioning and consistent identity	Recognition and perceived distinctiveness	Creates competitive meaning
4	Consumer engagement	Cognitive, emotional, behavioral activation	Attention, affection, interaction, advocacy	Strengthens consumer–brand relationship
5	Consumer feedback	Comments, sharing, stories, participation	Co-creation and narrative contribution	Generates new storytelling resources

The findings demonstrate that authentic brand storytelling and GenAI should not be conceptualized as competing approaches to digital marketing. Instead, they represent complementary resources with fundamentally different strategic functions. Authentic storytelling provides the meaning, while GenAI provides the scalability and adaptability required to distribute that meaning across a complex digital ecosystem. This distinction is theoretically important because much of the emerging discussion surrounding GenAI emphasizes efficiency, automation, personalization, and content production, whereas storytelling research emphasizes narrative meaning, emotional resonance, and consumer interpretation. The present synthesis connects these two perspectives by proposing that technology creates greater strategic value when it operates in service of a meaningful narrative foundation. The finding is consistent with evidence that GenAI is transforming digital marketing through content creation and personalized customer experiences, while storytelling research demonstrates that narrative characteristics influence consumer engagement. Consequently, the competitive advantage of AI-enabled marketing does not primarily arise from possessing access to the technology, because competing brands can increasingly access similar technologies. Rather, advantage emerges from how effectively a brand combines technological capabilities with distinctive and authentic meaning.

The findings also contribute to the conceptualization of brand differentiation in the AI-mediated marketing environment. Traditional differentiation strategies often emphasize product attributes, service quality, price, visual identity, or customer experience. However, the rapid diffusion of GenAI creates a situation in which many brands can reproduce comparable visual styles, advertising formats, textual expressions, and campaign concepts. This reduces the ability of surface-level communication characteristics to sustain differentiation over time. Authentic brand storytelling offers an alternative basis for differentiation because it is anchored in brand-specific histories, experiences, values, and relationships that are more difficult for competitors to reproduce credibly. The implication is that differentiation is increasingly shifting from what brands produce toward what brands mean and how consistently they communicate that meaning. The authenticity literature supports this interpretation because consumers evaluate whether stories provide credible cues regarding brand identity and value. Therefore, in an AI-saturated communication environment, distinctive meaning may become a more durable source of differentiation than content novelty alone.

The findings further extend consumer engagement theory by positioning storytelling and GenAI as complementary antecedent mechanisms. Hollebeek et al. (2014) establish that engagement includes cognitive processing, affection, and activation. The present synthesis suggests that these dimensions may be activated through different but interconnected mechanisms. Authentic storytelling primarily contributes to cognitive and emotional activation by providing consumers with meaningful narrative structures through which they can interpret and emotionally connect with a brand. GenAI can strengthen these processes by adapting the narrative to different consumer contexts and delivering it through multiple formats. Behavioral engagement may then emerge when consumers interact with, share, comment on, or contribute to the narrative. Dessart and Pitardi (2019) provide supporting evidence that story plot, characters, and verisimilitude can trigger cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. The integrated perspective therefore suggests that consumer engagement is not simply a consequence of content exposure but an outcome of the interaction between narrative meaning, technological relevance, and consumer interpretation.

Another important discussion concerns the paradox of GenAI-enabled authenticity. GenAI can make communication more personalized and contextually relevant, but its use may simultaneously raise questions about whether the resulting communication is genuinely representative of the brand. This creates an authenticity paradox: the same technology that enables brands to communicate more effectively can potentially weaken authenticity if consumers perceive the content as artificial, generic, or excessively automated. Recent research specifically examining GenAI and customer engagement identifies disclosure effects and human-in-the-loop moderation as important areas of inquiry, suggesting that the relationship between AI use and engagement cannot be understood solely through technological performance (Kusumawati et al., 2025). The present study therefore argues that authenticity in AI-mediated marketing should not be interpreted as the absence of technology. Instead, authenticity should be understood as the consistency between technological communication and the underlying reality of the brand. A brand can use GenAI extensively and still communicate authentically when the technology faithfully supports genuine organizational values, experiences, and commitments.

The role of human oversight consequently becomes a central managerial implication. Although GenAI can generate content efficiently, human marketers remain necessary to determine whether generated narratives are strategically consistent, factually appropriate, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the brand's identity. Human involvement is especially important when storytelling incorporates emotionally sensitive subjects, organizational history, social causes, or customer experiences (Rosyalita & Elyanida, 2024). The literature on emerging GenAI applications emphasizes both the benefits of automation and the challenges associated with responsible implementation. Therefore, the appropriate strategic model is not human versus AI, but human-guided AI. Human actors should define the narrative architecture, authenticity boundaries, brand voice, and ethical principles, while GenAI can assist with content adaptation, variation, personalization, and distribution. Such an arrangement enables organizations to capture technological efficiency without surrendering narrative control.

The analysis also indicates that consumer-generated storytelling represents an important bridge between authenticity and engagement. When consumers share their own experiences, stories become less dependent on organizational claims and increasingly grounded in lived consumer experiences. Research shows that consumer brand storytelling can generate deeper cognitive processing and stronger positive emotional responses than firm-created stories in certain contexts. This suggests that brands should not merely use GenAI to produce more organizational content but should also employ technology to identify, organize, amplify, and appropriately respond to consumer-generated narratives. Such an approach transforms consumers from passive recipients of AI-generated content into active participants in the brand's narrative ecosystem. Consequently, GenAI may contribute to authenticity indirectly by strengthening the visibility of genuine consumer experiences rather than manufacturing artificial authenticity.

The findings further suggest that personalization should be governed by a principle of narrative consistency. Personalization is valuable when it changes the way a story is presented while preserving the central identity and meaning of the brand. For example, the same brand purpose may be communicated through different visual formats, language styles, product contexts, or levels of informational detail for different audiences. However, personalization becomes problematic when different consumer segments receive fundamentally contradictory brand meanings. The literature on GenAI identifies personalization as one of its principal marketing applications, while engagement research indicates that relevance and interaction are important components of meaningful consumer relationships. The theoretical implication is that effective AI-enabled personalization should operate within a stable brand narrative core. This core functions as a boundary condition that ensures technological adaptation does not compromise brand coherence.

The integrated findings can also be interpreted through the Stimulus–Organism–Response perspective introduced in the methodological foundation. Authentic brand storytelling and GenAI-enabled communication

represent external stimuli that consumers encounter within digital environments. These stimuli influence internal cognitive and affective states, including perceptions of authenticity, relevance, trust, identification, curiosity, and emotional resonance. Consumer engagement then represents the response manifested through cognitive processing, emotional attachment, and behavioral activation. Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) engagement dimensions provide empirical support for understanding these responses as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities. From this perspective, brand differentiation can be positioned as an important interpretive mechanism because consumers evaluate whether the stimulus represents something distinctive relative to competing brands. Therefore, the S–O–R framework helps explain not only whether AI-generated storytelling produces engagement but also why engagement may be stronger when the content is perceived as authentic and distinctive.

Table 3. Proposed Conceptual Model and Propositions

Proposition	Relationship	Explanation
P1	Authentic Brand Storytelling → Brand Differentiation	Authentic narratives communicate distinctive brand identity, values, history, and purpose, strengthening perceived uniqueness.
P2	GenAI → Brand Differentiation	GenAI enhances content adaptability and personalization, but differentiation depends on whether these capabilities are anchored in distinctive brand meaning.
P3	Authentic Brand Storytelling → Consumer Engagement	Meaningful and credible narratives stimulate cognitive processing, emotional responses, and behavioral participation.
P4	GenAI → Consumer Engagement	GenAI can enhance relevance, personalization, accessibility, and interaction, thereby supporting engagement.
P5	Brand Differentiation → Consumer Engagement	Distinctive brand meanings facilitate recognition, relevance, identification, and stronger consumer–brand interaction.
P6	Authentic Brand Storytelling × GenAI → Brand Differentiation	The combination of authentic narrative substance and AI-enabled scalability creates a stronger basis for differentiation than either resource alone.
P7	Brand Differentiation mediates the relationship between Authentic Brand Storytelling and Consumer Engagement	Authentic narratives become more engaging when they establish a distinctive and recognizable brand meaning.
P8	Brand Differentiation mediates the relationship between GenAI and Consumer Engagement	GenAI's effect on engagement is strengthened when technological capabilities produce distinctive rather than generic communication.
P9	Human oversight moderates GenAI effectiveness	Human control over brand meaning, authenticity, ethics, and narrative consistency strengthens the positive contribution of GenAI.
P10	Consumer-generated storytelling strengthens the authenticity–engagement relationship	Consumer participation provides lived experiences that can increase credibility, emotional resonance, and interactive engagement.

The proposed conceptual model therefore positions brand differentiation as the central strategic mechanism linking authentic brand storytelling and GenAI to consumer engagement. This positioning represents an important extension of conventional digital marketing perspectives. Authentic storytelling alone can produce emotional resonance, but its strategic contribution becomes stronger when consumers recognize the story as distinctive to a particular brand. Similarly, GenAI can increase content volume, personalization, and delivery efficiency, but these capabilities do not automatically create differentiation. Differentiation emerges when technology is used to communicate meanings that competitors cannot easily reproduce with equivalent credibility. Thus, the combined effect of authentic storytelling and GenAI is expected to be greater than their isolated effects because the two resources perform complementary functions: storytelling supplies distinctive meaning, while GenAI supplies technological reach and adaptability. This interpretation is consistent with storytelling research demonstrating the engagement potential of narrative content and emerging GenAI research demonstrating the technology's ability to support personalized digital marketing.

The findings have important implications for marketing strategy. First, organizations should develop an explicit brand narrative architecture before implementing GenAI at scale. Such architecture should identify the brand's core identity, values, origin story, purpose, distinctive experiences, and narrative boundaries. Second, organizations should use GenAI primarily to adapt and distribute these narratives rather than to replace them with generic machine-generated content. Third, marketing teams should establish human review mechanisms to ensure

that generated content remains consistent with brand identity and authenticity. Fourth, organizations should encourage consumers to contribute stories, testimonials, experiences, and creative interpretations that can enrich the brand's narrative ecosystem. Finally, engagement measurement should move beyond surface-level metrics such as impressions and likes toward multidimensional indicators covering cognitive attention, emotional response, participation, sharing, advocacy, and relationship development. These recommendations are supported by the broader literature demonstrating that engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions rather than a single behavioral outcome (Rosyalita et al., 2026).

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by integrating three research streams that have frequently developed separately: brand storytelling and authenticity, artificial intelligence in digital marketing, and consumer engagement. Storytelling research explains how narrative characteristics can generate consumer responses, authenticity research explains why credible narrative cues influence brand evaluation, and GenAI research explains how artificial intelligence is transforming content creation and personalization. The present synthesis connects these perspectives through brand differentiation and proposes that the strategic effectiveness of GenAI depends substantially on the meaning embedded in the content it produces. This theoretical integration suggests that future research should not evaluate AI marketing exclusively according to efficiency or technological sophistication. Instead, AI-enabled marketing should also be evaluated according to whether it strengthens authenticity, distinctive brand meaning, and multidimensional consumer engagement. The study consequently contributes an integrated perspective in which technology and authenticity are not treated as opposing dimensions but as complementary resources within a differentiated digital brand strategy.

Finally, the overall discussion establishes that the future of digital marketing is unlikely to be determined simply by which brands adopt GenAI first or produce the largest volume of AI-generated content. Competitive advantage is more likely to emerge from the ability to combine technological intelligence with narrative authenticity. As AI-generated content becomes increasingly accessible, content production itself may become less distinctive, making the underlying source of meaning increasingly important. Brands that use GenAI without a clear identity risk producing communication that is efficient but interchangeable. In contrast, brands that use GenAI to amplify authentic experiences, distinctive values, credible stories, and consumer participation can transform technological capability into meaningful differentiation. The resulting strategic pathway can therefore be summarized as authentic meaning → AI-enabled amplification → distinctive brand differentiation → multidimensional consumer engagement → stronger consumer–brand relationships. This conclusion reinforces the central argument of the study that GenAI should not replace authenticity; rather, it should be strategically governed to make authentic brand storytelling more relevant, scalable, adaptive, and engaging within the contemporary digital marketing ecosystem.

Conclusions

This study concludes that authentic brand storytelling and Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) represent complementary strategic resources for strengthening brand differentiation and consumer engagement within the contemporary digital marketing ecosystem. The literature synthesis demonstrates that authentic storytelling provides the substantive foundation for communicating distinctive brand identity, values, experiences, and purpose, while GenAI enhances the scalability, personalization, adaptability, and multimodal delivery of these narratives. However, technological capability alone does not guarantee differentiation or engagement. The strategic value of GenAI depends on its ability to amplify authentic brand meanings rather than replace them with generic or standardized content. Brand differentiation consequently emerges as a critical mechanism connecting authentic storytelling and AI-enabled communication with consumer engagement, particularly through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. The findings further indicate that human oversight, narrative consistency, and consumer participation are essential to maintaining authenticity when brands increasingly rely on AI-generated content. The study contributes theoretically by integrating perspectives on authentic brand storytelling, Generative Artificial Intelligence, brand differentiation, and consumer engagement into a unified conceptual framework. The proposed relationship suggests that authentic meaning provides the foundation, GenAI provides technological amplification, brand differentiation converts distinctive narratives into competitive meaning, and consumer engagement represents the resulting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response. From a managerial perspective, brands should therefore prioritize the development of a clear and authentic narrative identity before deploying GenAI at scale, use AI to personalize and extend rather than fabricate brand stories, and maintain human governance over authenticity, ethical standards, and brand consistency. Future research can empirically test the proposed relationships across different industries, consumer segments, digital platforms, and cultural contexts, particularly by examining how consumers respond to different levels of AI

disclosure, personalization, and human involvement in brand storytelling. Overall, the study emphasizes that sustainable differentiation in an increasingly AI-mediated marketplace will depend not on producing more content, but on using advanced technology to communicate more authentic, distinctive, and meaningful brand stories.

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