



The Mediating Role of Social Media Engagement in the Relationship Between Social Media Advertising and Brand Awareness: Evidence from Luxury Resorts in Bali

***Luh Linna Sagitarini**

Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia

Made Suardani

Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**

Luh Linna Sagitarini, Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia. ✉ linnasagitarini@pnb.ac.id

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Abstract

Background: Social media has become a dominant channel for brand building in the hospitality sector, especially for luxury hotels, where visual storytelling and symbolic value are crucial. However, limited research has explored how paid social media advertising (SMA) influences brand awareness (BA) through consumer engagement.

Objective: This study examines the direct and indirect effects of SMA on BA by applying the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, with social media engagement (ENG) serving as a mediator.

Methods: A survey was conducted involving 250 domestic and international tourists who had engaged with paid campaigns on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube from five five-star resorts in Bali. The EPIC model—Empathy, Persuasion, Impact, and Communication—was used to assess advertising effectiveness, while regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesized relationships.

Results: The results indicate that SMA directly enhances BA ($\beta = 0.52, p < .001$) and has an indirect effect through ENG as a significant mediator ($\beta = 0.47 \rightarrow \beta = 0.38, p < .001$). ENG independently strengthens BA ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001$), and the model collectively explains 61% of the variance in brand awareness. This study contributes theoretically by integrating the EPIC model into the SOR framework and demonstrating that social media engagement functions as a key mediating mechanism between advertising stimuli and brand awareness outcomes.

Conclusion: Practically, luxury hotel managers should invest in clear, persuasive, and emotionally resonant social media campaigns that stimulate consumer engagement, thereby reinforcing brand recognition and salience in competitive digital markets.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital platforms has transformed marketing strategies in the hospitality industry, positioning social media as a central channel for building consumer awareness and preference (Chu et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Among the many platforms available, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube are the most dominant in luxury hospitality promotion. Each platform has distinctive strengths for building branding and engagement. Instagram serves as the main channel for aesthetic storytelling, Facebook enables brands to reach a wider audience, TikTok allows users to participate interactively through short-form content, and YouTube presents immersive long-form narratives. The use of multiple platforms to build brand awareness is important to examine in relation to how paid social media advertising (SMA) across these platforms shapes brand awareness in luxury hospitality (Thirumaran et al., 2021). In this context, SMA is not merely complementary but also enables luxury hospitality brands to reach

niche markets through targeted campaigns, emotionally engaging storytelling, and measurable public engagement.

Based on reported industry data, digital advertising is now the dominant expenditure category in the global tourism and hospitality sector. Of total advertising spending, at least 55% was allocated to digital marketing based on 2024 data. Travelers who actively use visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are likely to develop an interest in visiting destinations they encounter on these platforms, as destination and hotel content shapes their travel ideas and preferences when deciding where to visit (Chalke et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2021). This shift in consumer behavior confirms the urgency for hotels to optimize paid social media campaigns, as traditional platforms and organic content alone are no longer sufficient to capture and sustain consumer attention.

This phenomenon is both unique and timely and is important to examine in the context of Bali, as it is one of the world's most recognized luxury destinations. At least five luxury resorts in Bali are internationally recognized and strategically located in key tourism areas: two resorts in Ubud, two resorts in Nusa Dua and Kuta, and one resort in Jimbaran. The hospitality market in Bali is characterized by intense competition to become the preferred choice of international travelers (Pitanatri et al., 2024). Millions of visitors travel to Bali annually for various purposes, and many of them are digitally savvy and actively engage with hotel brands through social media. This confirms that Bali is not only relevant but also one of the most suitable contexts for examining how brand awareness in luxury hospitality is formed through social media advertising. Insights from this market can inform broader strategies for destinations where competition is equally intense and digital engagement is a key determinant of consumer choice (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Roozen, 2025).

However, three critical theoretical and empirical gaps persist. First, previous research has largely focused on user-generated content (UGC) in destination marketing, while the unique effect of paid social media advertising on brand awareness in luxury hospitality has received limited scholarly attention (Chu et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2013). Second, most hospitality branding studies treat hotels as a homogeneous category; however, luxury hotels differ fundamentally from budget and midscale properties because they rely more heavily on symbolic value, prestige, exclusivity, and visual storytelling to justify premium pricing (Mariani & Borghi, 2020; Sánchez Garza et al., 2024). Third, despite the theoretical recognition of engagement as a mediating mechanism, few empirical studies have explicitly tested this mediation pathway using a validated advertising effectiveness model within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework. Luxury hotels depend on the construction of prestige and value capture through symbolic value and visual storytelling, requiring distinct advertising strategies Mariani (2020) and Sánchez (2024), while non-luxury hotels focus more heavily on price sensitivity and functional value. The absence of segmentation reduces the managerial relevance of previous findings and limits theoretical development in hospitality marketing.

This study advances existing knowledge through three primary contributions. Theoretically, it introduces a novel integration of the EPIC advertising effectiveness framework Chu (2020) with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, positioning social media engagement as the mediating mechanism—an integration not previously tested in luxury hospitality contexts. This extends current theoretical understanding of how advertising stimuli are processed and translated into brand awareness outcomes (Kim & Ko, 2012; Harrigan et al., 2017). Empirically, this study examines the phenomenon in Bali, one of the most competitive luxury travel destinations in the world, where social media plays an important role in shaping travel ideas and consumer preferences. Managerially, the study provides practical guidelines for hotel marketers to design clear, emotionally resonant, and interactive campaigns that generate higher audience engagement and strengthen brand appeal. It emphasizes the importance of SMA as a strategic tool for building brand equity in luxury hospitality businesses and contributes to a deeper understanding of digital tourism marketing.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the role of SMA in enhancing brand awareness for five-star resorts in Bali, with social media engagement (ENG) positioned as a mediating variable based on the SOR model. More specifically, the study seeks to answer three research questions: (1) Does SMA directly improve brand awareness in luxury hotels. (2) Is SMA effective in stimulating consumer interaction with brand content. (3) Does engagement mediate

the relationship between SMA and brand awareness? In this way, the study responds to calls for contextually sensitive and mechanism-based approaches to understanding the effectiveness of digital marketing in hospitality Efendioğlu (2022) and Harrigan (2017) by testing these relationships.

Literature Review

Social Media Advertising in Hospitality

Initially, social media advertising (SMA) in the hospitality industry was merely a complementary communication tool. However, it has now become a strategic tool for driving brand equity. Chu (2020) explained that the dissemination of messages packaged through SMA is targeted and highly interactive, which has a significant impact on brand clarity. The role of social media in strategic marketing activities within the hospitality industry is further strengthened by existing bibliometric evidence, particularly as a builder of brand awareness (Sánchez Garza et al., 2024).

Brand Awareness as a Strategic Asset

Brand awareness is the foundation of brand equity. It shapes consumer recognition, evaluation, and purchase intention. Customers who engage with digital brand content tend to strengthen their brand awareness and evaluation (Harrigan et al., 2017). Likewise, certain visual designs with various nuances, shapes, and bright color schemes can significantly enhance consumer attention and engagement, ultimately reinforcing the formation of awareness (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Yu & Egger, 2021).

The Role of Engagement as a Mediator

Engagement mediates the relationship between digital advertising and brand outcomes. Various findings confirm that social media communication by influencers and companies enhances brand authenticity and prestige, which in turn affects consumer decision-making (Bastrygina et al., 2024; C. Wang et al., 2020). These findings show that engagement metrics not only indicate consumer interest but also function within the advertising mechanism as reinforcement for brand awareness.

Conceptual Framework

Referring to the review conducted across several studies, this research proposes a framework in which social media advertising (SMA) is positioned as an important precursor to brand awareness in luxury hospitality. SMA not only has a direct influence on awareness Chu (2020) and Sánchez (2024) but also plays an indirect role through social media engagement. Advertisements that are created in a visually and emotionally persuasive manner encourage consumer interactions, such as likes, shares, and comments Blanco (2024) and Yu (2021), which ultimately strengthen brand distinctiveness and consumer memory (Harrigan et al., 2017; C. Wang et al., 2020; Z. Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, the framework conceptualizes engagement as a mediating mechanism that translates the effect of advertising exposure into heightened awareness. This conceptualization is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the study's core constructs.

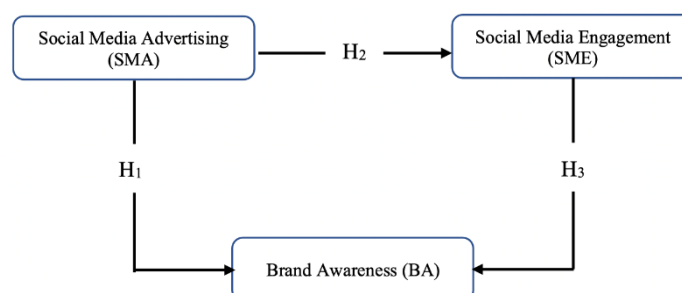


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Hypotheses Development

H₁: Social media advertising has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.

Justification: SMA directly enhances consumer familiarity and recall of hotel brands by delivering persuasive, targeted content (Chu et al., 2020; Sánchez Garza et al., 2024).

H₂: Social media advertising has a positive effect on social media engagement.

Justification: Advertising with visually appealing and human-centered elements stimulates consumer interaction in the form of likes, shares, and comments (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Yu & Egger, 2021).

H₃: Social media engagement has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Justification: Engagement functions as a key driver of consumer-brand connection, increasing brand recognition and salience in competitive environments (Harrigan et al., 2017; C. Wang et al., 2020; Z. Wang et al., 2024). To provide a concise overview, the proposed hypotheses and their theoretical justifications are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses and Supporting Literature

Hypothesis	Statement	Justification	Empirical Support (Q1 References)
H ₁	SMA → Brand Awareness (+)	SMA strengthens awareness by enhancing brand recall and salience	(Chu et al., 2020; Sánchez Garza et al., 2024)
H ₂	SMA → Engagement (+)	Creative features in advertising increase consumer interaction	(Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Yu & Egger, 2021)
H ₃	Engagement → Brand Awareness (+)	Engagement fosters brand recognition and evaluation	(Harrigan et al., 2017; C. Wang et al., 2020; Z. Wang et al., 2024)

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopted a quantitative explanatory design with the nature of causality testing to examine the relationships among advertising effectiveness, consumer engagement, and brand awareness. An explanatory design was selected because it allowed the study to go beyond description and provide an empirical demonstration of the effects of social media advertising (SMA) on brand outcomes in luxury hospitality (Lisa M. Given, 2008).

Justification for the EPIC Model

The selection of the EPIC Model, consisting of Empathy, Persuasion, Impact, and Communication, was based on its ability to capture both cognitive and affective reactions to advertising. This made the model especially relevant to luxury hospitality, where symbolic value and persuasive storytelling played central roles. Various studies in advertising and hospitality have applied this model because it can be used to examine multiple cognitive and affective dimensions of how consumers perceive advertising messages (Chu et al., 2020).

The core symbolic value, aesthetics, and narrative dimensions of luxury hotels made EPIC particularly appropriate for this study. The four dimensions were applied to emphasize the differentiation of luxury hotels as a means of competing in a highly competitive market. The empathy dimension represented how well the hotel aligned with tourists' aspirations. The persuasion dimension measured the extent to which consumer attitudes could be influenced. The impact dimension captured how memorable the advertising message was compared with competing brands. Finally, the communication dimension assessed the extent to which messages were transmitted clearly, without errors or ambiguity (Efendioğlu & Durmaz, 2022; Harrigan et al., 2017).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of followers of five-star luxury resorts in Ubud, Bali, Nusa Dua, Kuta, and Jimbaran. The sample included two resorts each from Ubud, Nusa Dua, and Kuta, and one resort from Jimbaran. Purposive sampling was used to select followers who had

interacted with at least one paid campaign on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube during the preceding six months. International and U.S. respondents were included to reduce bias in audience data derived from a digital-only presence. Based on the 10-times rule proposed by Hair (2021), the minimum required sample size was 110 respondents. A total of 250 valid responses were obtained, which confirmed sufficient statistical power for further analysis.

Variables and Measurement Instruments

Three constructs were measured using established scales adapted to the luxury hospitality context. All items used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

- a) Social Media Advertising (SMA): This construct was measured using the EPIC Model Chu (2020), which captures empathy, referring to message relevance; persuasion, referring to the ability to influence attitudes; impact, referring to the strength of impressions; and communication, referring to message clarity.
- b) Social Media Engagement (ENG): This construct was measured based on interactions across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, including likes, comments, shares, tagging, subscriptions, duets, and reactions. The items were adapted from Harrigan (2017) and extended to reflect recent engagement formats on TikTok and YouTube (Yu & Egger, 2021).
- c) Brand Awareness (BA): This construct was measured through recognition, recall, and familiarity based on Keller's (2013) brand equity model and refined in hospitality contexts (Qing et al., 2024).

Table 2. Variables and Measurement Instruments

Construct	Dimension / Indicator	Example Item (Adapted)	Measurement	Source
Social Media Advertising (SMA)	Empathy (message relevance)	"The advertisement message feels relevant to my needs as a traveler."		(Chu et al., 2020)
		"The advertisement shows an understanding of what customers want in a luxury resort."		
	Persuasion (influence)	"The advertisement encourages me to consider staying at the resort."		(Chu et al., 2020)
		"The advertisement motivates me to search for more information about the resort."		
	Impact (strength of impression)	"The advertisement leaves a lasting impression on me compared to other resorts' ads."		(Chu et al., 2020)
		"The advertisement highlights unique features that distinguish the resort."		
	Communication (clarity)	"The advertisement content is clear and easy to understand."		(Chu et al., 2020)
		"The information in the advertisement is well structured and consistent."		
Social Media Engagement (ENG)	Interaction (likes & comments)	"I frequently like, comment on, or share the resorts' social media posts," "I participate in short-form		(Harrigan et al., 2017)

		video interactions (e.g., duets/stitches/ reactions),”	
	Sharing & Reposting	“I share or repost the resort’s platform-agnostic (follow/subscribe, share/repost, duet/stitch, comments, DMs) content on my own account.”	(Harrigan et al., 2017)
	Tagging / Direct Messaging	“I tag or direct-message friends to recommend the resorts’ content.”	(Harrigan et al., 2017)
	Community Participation	“I engage in discussions with other followers in the resort’s platform-agnostic (follow/subscribe, share/repost, duet/stitch, comments, DMs) community.”	(Yu & Egger, 2021)
Brand Awareness (BA)	Recognition	“I can easily recognize the resort brand when I see its logo or platform-agnostic (follow/subscribe, share/repost, duet/stitch, comments, DMs).”	(Keller, 2013; Qing et al., 2024)
	Recall	“When thinking about luxury resorts in Bali, this brand comes to my mind quickly.”	(Keller, 2013)
	Familiarity	“I feel familiar with and knowledgeable about the resort brand from its social media presence.”	(Qing et al., 2024)

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed from February to April 2024 via official accounts on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Respondents were screened based on their exposure to any paid campaign within the previous month. Before the broader survey was conducted, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was carried out to establish item clarity, and the reliability values exceeded the 0.70 threshold for Cronbach’s alpha (Hussey et al., 2025). The final instrument consisted of 11 indicators across three constructs, namely SMA, ENG, and BA, all of which were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. There was no retention strategy other than voluntary participation, and informed consent was required from participants before they accessed the survey. Participants were also informed about the academic nature of the research, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time. No personally identifiable data were collected, thereby maintaining respondent anonymity. The data were securely stored and analyzed only in aggregate form. These procedures were consistent with ethical principles for research in the social sciences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed in two stages. The first stage involved a descriptive analysis of the EPIC model dimensions, with mean scores interpreted against benchmarks in the literature, namely ≥ 4.20 as “highly effective” advertising (Chu et al., 2020). In the second stage, the hypothesized paths among SMA, ENG, and BA were tested using multiple regression analysis. A total of 5,000 bootstrapped samples with bias-corrected confidence intervals were used to test

H1–H3. Common method bias was assessed using Harman’s single-factor test, with less than 50% of variance explained. Regression assumptions, including multicollinearity, residual normality, and heteroskedasticity, were also examined, and robust standard errors were applied where necessary. Therefore, the regression approach was deemed sufficient to provide insights into the study objectives and to prevent overparameterization (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 250 valid responses, 22.4% came from Ubud properties (2 resorts), 48.8% from Nusa Dua and Kuta properties (2 resorts), and 28.8% from Jimbaran properties (1 resort), reflecting Bali’s main luxury resort clusters. The demographic profile is presented in Table 3. Most respondents were female (55%) and aged 21–30 years (46%), with strong representation from higher education backgrounds (68% undergraduate and 22% postgraduate). In terms of nationality, 58% were domestic tourists and 42% were international tourists. Most respondents reported being active users of platform-agnostic social media engagement features, including following/subscribing, sharing/reposting, duetting/stitching, commenting, and direct messaging, and spent, on average, more than four hours per week on social media.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics (N = 250)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	113	45.2
	Female	137	54.8
Age	21–30 years	115	46.0
	31–40 years	80	32.0
	>40 years	55	22.0
Education	Undergraduate	170	68.0
	Postgraduate	55	22.0
	High School /	25	10.0
	Other		
Nationality	Domestic	145	58.0
	International	105	42.0
Platform-agnostic (follow/subscribe, share/repost,duet/stitch, comments, DMs) Use	> 4 hours/week	185	74.0
	< 4 hours/week	65	26.0

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the robustness of the measurement instruments, validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to hypothesis testing (Table 4). Construct validity was assessed through factor loadings, all of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that each item loaded significantly onto its intended construct. Convergent validity was further established, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were greater than 0.50, suggesting that a substantial proportion of variance was captured by the latent constructs. Reliability was examined using Cronbach’s alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). All Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the cut-off value of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal consistency across the measurement items. Likewise, all CR values were above 0.70, providing additional evidence of reliability. These results confirm that the constructs Social Media Advertising (SMA), Social Media Engagement (ENG), and Brand Awareness (BA) were measured with satisfactory reliability and validity.

Table 4. Validity and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE	Status
Social Media Advertising (SMA)	0.89	0.91	0.67	Valid & Reliable
Social Media Engagement (ENG)	0.87	0.90	0.65	Valid & Reliable
Brand Awareness (BA)	0.91	0.93	0.69	Valid & Reliable

Effectiveness of Social Media Advertising (EPIC Model)

The descriptive analysis using the EPIC Model (Empathy, Persuasion, Impact, and Communication) showed that social media advertising campaigns were evaluated as highly effective, with an overall EPIC Rate of 4.49. Among the four dimensions, Communication (M = 4.50) obtained the highest mean score, followed closely by Impact (M = 4.48), Empathy (M = 4.45), and Persuasion (M = 4.44). All four dimensions scored above 4.40, confirming the consistent effectiveness of the campaigns across different aspects of advertising performance.

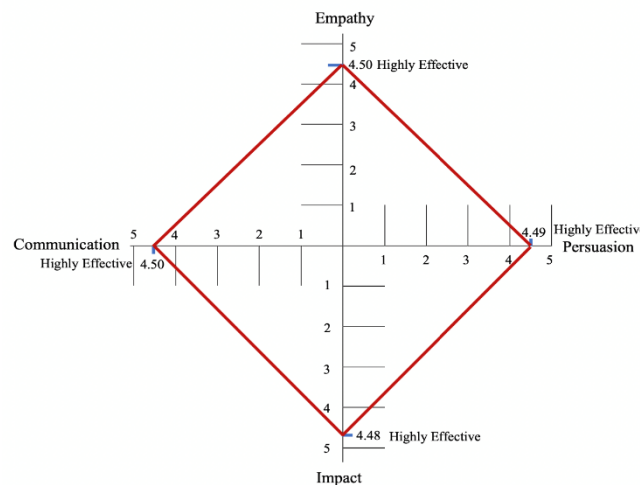


Figure 2.-EPIC Model Advertising Effectiveness Chart EPIC Model Advertising Effectiveness Chart

Regression Analysis: Testing Hypotheses

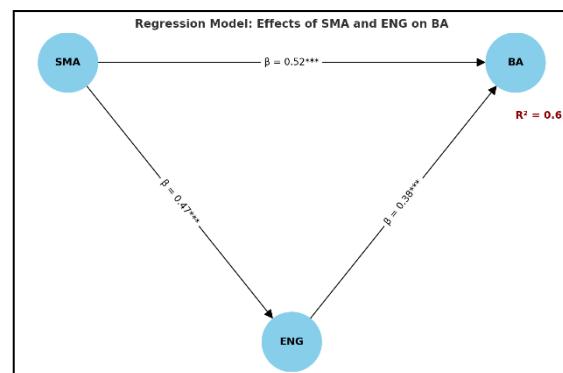
Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis testing the hypothesized relationships among Social Media Advertising (SMA), Social Media Engagement (ENG), and Brand Awareness (BA). A substantial positive direct effect of SMA on BA was confirmed ($\beta = 0.52, t = 6.74, p < .001$), supporting H1. This finding indicates that higher perceived advertising effectiveness—across empathy, persuasion, impact, and communication dimensions—corresponded to greater consumer brand recognition, recall, and familiarity. SMA also significantly influenced ENG (H2: $\beta = 0.47, t = 5.98, p < .001$), suggesting that effective advertising stimulates consumer interactions on social media platforms, including likes, comments, shares, reposts, and direct messages.

Lastly, the results for H3 supported a significant positive effect of ENG on BA ($\beta = 0.38, t = 4.95, p < .001$). This means that engagement behaviors amplified consumers' awareness and mental brand image associations with the resort brands. The regression model reached an acceptable level of explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.61$), indicating that 61% of the variance in BA was jointly explained by SMA and ENG. This confirms that the model provides a solid representation of the primary drivers of brand awareness within the luxury hospitality context.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H ₁	SMA → BA	0.52	6.74	<0.001	Supported
H ₂	SMA → ENG	0.47	5.98	<0.001	Supported
H ₃	ENG → BA	0.38	4.95	<0.001	Supported
	Model R ² (BA)	0.61	–	–	Strong

Figure 3 visualizes the structural relationships among social media advertising, social media engagement, and brand awareness. It depicts the standardized path coefficients (β) obtained through regression analysis, as well as the explained variance (R^2) in brand awareness. This figure serves as a concise representation of the hypothesized model and its empirical support.

**Figure 3.** Regression Model: Effects of SMA and ENG on BA

Discussion

Theoretical Contribution

The findings of this study provide empirical confirmation that social media advertising (SMA) significantly enhances brand awareness (BA), both directly and indirectly, through social media engagement (ENG). The mediating effect of ENG shows that passive exposure to SMA alone is not sufficient to create an impact unless it is accompanied by interactive actions such as likes, shares, and comments. This is consistent with Engagement Theory, which explains that active participation fosters stronger brand connections (Taheri et al., 2021).

Recent studies on luxury digital branding have also confirmed this relationship. Bastrygina (2024) found that original and authentic influencer-generated content with emotional appeal can increase brand engagement and resonance, while Chong (2024) showed that interactive short-video platforms significantly increase familiarity with and purchase intention toward luxury brands. These findings indicate that engagement facilitates information processing while strengthening emotional and cognitive ties to luxury hospitality brands.

The findings obtained in this study align with previous hospitality studies that emphasize the role of engagement as a mediator between advertising and consumer outcomes (Harrigan et al., 2017; Mariani & Borghi, 2020). Furthermore, this study extends the literature by applying the EPIC model, which evaluates empathy, persuasion, impact, and communication within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. Integrating these components provides a comprehensive explanation of how advertising stimulates consumer awareness in luxury hospitality. Of the four components, communication emerged as the strongest dimension ($M = 4.50$), confirming existing research that clear and coherent messages are important in cognitive memory formation Barreda (2016), while extending this insight to the luxury context, where symbolic value and prestige amplify the effect.

Compared with studies in broader tourism markets, such as Nguyen (2021), and studies on European destinations, such as Blanco (2024), the current results confirm that engagement remains a robust mediator across cultural settings. However, this research makes a novel contribution by demonstrating that, in luxury resorts, advertising effectiveness depends not only on emotional appeal but also on message clarity, reflecting the higher expectations of discerning

luxury consumers. Furthermore, the explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.61$) suggests that SMA and engagement jointly account for a substantial proportion of the variance in awareness, indicating a stronger effect than that reported in several multi-sector meta-analyses (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025).

Practical Implications

From a managerial standpoint, the findings emphasize that clear, persuasive, and interactive advertising content should be prioritized in luxury hospitality marketing. Platform-agnostic campaigns that incorporate follow/subscribe functions, share/repost features, duet/stitch options, comments, and direct messages (DMs), while integrating visually compelling imagery with human-centered storytelling, are more likely to drive engagement, which in turn strengthens brand recognition and recall. This finding emphasizes that luxury hotels should not rely solely on static promotional content. Instead, they should employ strategies that incorporate interactive features, such as hashtags, user-generated content contests, influencer collaborations, and immersive short-form videos (Chalke et al., 2025; Chong, 2024).

One very important finding is that engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, and shares, are not only indicators of online activity but also leading indicators of increased awareness. Such findings provide valuable tools that marketers can use to evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of advertising expenditure, especially in highly competitive destination businesses where conversion tracking may not occur immediately. Existing findings show that hotels allocating a larger percentage of their budget to interactive campaigns achieve higher ROI in terms of brand awareness and brand equity compared with hotels that rely on non-interactive advertising (Dwivedi et al., 2021). These findings are important for practitioners because they indicate that resource allocation should consider both message clarity and format interactivity to maximize awareness creation.

Contextual Implications

These results are especially pertinent to Bali, a global center of luxury tourism. Bali is an appropriate location for studying the dynamics of SMA and engagement because of its numerous five-star resorts and digitally active international travelers. These findings are consistent with prior studies (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Roozen, 2025). However, they cannot be generalized to mid-range hotels, because the decision-making process of mid-range hotel consumers is primarily influenced by functional attributes, including price and convenience. This illustrates the significance of market segmentation in digital advertising research, since strategies that are effective for premium brands may not necessarily transfer to non-premium settings.

The results imply that, for tourism destinations beyond Bali, the effectiveness of SMA is determined by the extent to which a market relies on visual discovery and symbolic consumption. Destinations such as the Maldives, Dubai, and Santorini, which are characterized by visual appeal and premium positioning, may benefit from similar techniques to attract luxury clients. However, mass-market destinations may require a different market positioning strategy. This study therefore makes an important contribution to hospitality theory and provides transferable knowledge for other luxury-driven tourism markets, where engagement and awareness are vital antecedents of brand equity.

Novelty and Integration

Overall, the novelty of this study lies in its integration of the EPIC model with the SOR framework to explain SMA effectiveness in the luxury hospitality domain. It provides empirical support for both the direct and indirect effects of SMA on BA by showing that brand awareness is strengthened through message clarity and engagement. This dual-path model deepens the conceptualization of digital advertising in tourism and offers a contribution to managerial practice by identifying evidence-based actionable levers—communication and interactivity—that are important for enhancing brand salience under conditions of intense visual competition.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social media advertising has both direct and indirect effects on brand awareness in the luxury hospitality industry, with consumer engagement acting as the

primary mediator. By integrating the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework and the EPIC model (empathy, persuasion, impact, and communication), this study demonstrates that clear, persuasive, and interactive creative campaigns can transform passive ad exposure into strong brand recognition. In other words, active consumer engagement serves as a crucial bridge linking advertising exposure to the development of deep brand awareness.

From a practical standpoint, luxury hotel marketers are advised to prioritize interactive campaigns that leverage influencer collaborations, user-generated content, and immersive short-form videos to boost brand visibility and recognition. Although this study has expanded its scope to include five luxury resorts across four major platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube), the limitations of its cross-sectional design prevent it from observing long-term effects. Therefore, future research is expected to expand the context to multi-platform and multi-destination settings, employ a longitudinal design, and measure tangible performance indicators such as booking conversions, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and consumer loyalty to obtain a deeper understanding.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Luh Linna Sagitarini was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, research methodology design, data collection, formal data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the original manuscript draft. Made Suardani contributed to the supervision of the research process, validation of the research findings, provision of resources, project administration, and critical review and editing of the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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