

The Synergistic Mechanism of social media Visual Strategy and User Engagement in The Construction of High-End Hotel Brands

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Abstract. In today's highly visual social media environment, how luxury hotel brands effectively convey a sense of quality has become an important issue in brand marketing. This study focuses on Aman's visual communication practices on Instagram, examining the synergistic mechanisms between its visual strategies and user engagement. The study employs content analysis and case study methods to analyze Aman's visual coding from the perspectives of aesthetic tone, spatial and orderly sense, cultural and sensory narratives, and ritualized presentation. It also relies on user comments to analyze user engagement characteristics such as emotion-driven behavior, immersive pathways, and social identity recognition. Research findings indicate that consistent, high-quality visual content can effectively stimulate users' emotional resonance and immersive experiences, prompting them to engage in interactive behaviors such as liking, commenting, and using hashtags to check in, thereby creating a cycle of visual presentation and user engagement that amplifies the overall effect. Based on this, the study proposes a three-dimensional collaborative model of "visual coding—user engagement—emotional resonance," revealing the path to building a sense of quality for high-end hotel brands in the social media environment and providing practical strategic references for the digital marketing of luxury brands (especially luxury hotel brands).

Keywords: Aman; luxury hotels; Instagram; visual strategy; user engagement.

1. Introduction

Luxury goods have long been regarded as symbols of scarcity and refined change, but with advances in technology and the spread of social media, this paradigm is shifting. Social media has not only reshaped the way luxury brands communicate but also increased consumer participation and influence in brand image building. In the luxury travel sector, exclusive experiences and specific social circles still exist, but social media has become the core channel for luxury travel brands to communicate with consumers and interact with them [1]. This trend has not only changed the way information is conveyed but has also reshaped the relationship between users and brands. In the high-end hotel industry, brand image building is gradually shifting from one-way visual presentation to two-way interaction with users.

Previous studies have explored the visual style of luxury brands on social media and the mechanisms driving user engagement, but there has been limited discussion on how high-end hotels can shape their brand image through the synergistic effects of visual "quality" and user engagement [2-5]. In particular, there has been a lack of in-depth research on how core images in brand identity are encoded in social media interactions, integrated into unified visual symbols, and systematically analyzed.

Based on this, this paper selects Aman as a case study, focusing on its visual communication practices and user interaction characteristics on the Instagram platform, and specifically explores the role of "sense of quality" in brand image construction. The study employs a combination of text content analysis, content analysis, and visual semiotics analysis. It first systematically reviews relevant literature and previous research, then analyzes the image content and user interaction performance of Aman's official account to reveal the synergistic mechanism between visual elements and interactive behavior.

This paper aims to propose a ternary synergistic model of “visual coding—user engagement—emotional resonance” to explain the image construction process of high-end hotel brands in the social media environment, and on this basis, provide references for the optimization of visual content and interactive design for high-end hotels. This study does not attempt to exhaustively cover this topic, but rather aims to provide new perspectives and theoretical insights for future research on the communication mechanisms of high-end hotel brands in the digital media environment.

2. Literature Review

Social media has become an important platform for high-end hotel brands to build their image, with its visual storytelling and interactive mechanisms playing a central role in brand communication. A study analyzed user-uploaded hotel photos and found that the high-quality presentation of private spaces such as bedrooms and bathrooms is key to consumers' perception of comfort and design. However, the study focused on user-generated content and did not explore the brand's official visual strategy [2]. Another study pointed out that users tend to pay more attention to unique designs and high-quality details, which directly affects interactive behavior. However, the mechanism linking this to brand image building has not been analyzed in depth [4].

Previous research emphasizes that even the layout of text and colors in images can significantly affect user engagement [5]. Other studies have explored how luxury hotels use food images on social media to tell stories, revealing that they can convey cultural taste and hedonistic experiences while enhancing brand symbolic value; however, these studies focus on the single dimension of food [3]. Subsequent research expanded to include customer image, building appearance, and landscape views, pointing out that these elements can enhance immersion and a sense of belonging. Yet, the underlying mechanisms of user interaction behavior remain underexplored [6].

In terms of theoretical reviews, some scholars have summarized the role of social media in the communication of luxury brands, pointing out that the integration of visual narratives and interaction is key to enhancing engagement, but they have not conducted in-depth case studies specific to the hotel industry [7]. Another study emphasizes that luxury travel brands need to combine experiential and emotional resonance to maintain long-term relationships, but lacks a detailed discussion of visual strategies [1].

Some studies focus on platform characteristics and visual matching. Research has found that high brightness, warm colors, and symmetrical composition can significantly improve user emotional responses and willingness to interact [8]. Other studies have also proposed the concept of “Instagrammable hotels,” arguing that the unity of spatial aesthetics and brand personality is crucial for promoting content sharing. However, these studies mostly remain at the level of strategic recommendations and lack analysis of the long-term construction of brand image [9].

In terms of digital marketing, some scholars have analyzed the digital promotion model of luxury hotels. Although they mention the importance of visual presentation, they do not sufficiently explore the synergistic mechanism between visual content and user interaction [10]. In summary, existing studies have mostly focused on single variables (such as visual features or user engagement) and lack systematic research revealing the synergistic effects of both variables.

This paper will examine the chain of “visual communication—user interaction—brand perception” and, using the example of Aman Instagram account, explore how high-end hotels can use visual strategies to stimulate user engagement and jointly construct their brand image through synergistic effects. This will fill a gap in mechanism-level research and provide luxury hotels with practical integrated strategies for social media management.

3. Aman's Visual Communication and User Interaction on Instagram

3.1. Brand Background and Platform Positioning

Aman is a world-renowned ultra-luxury hotel brand founded in 1988. It is renowned for its minimalist design, immersive natural landscapes, and highly private guest experience. The brand philosophy emphasizes “quiet luxury,” rejecting ostentatious decoration and dense commercial elements in favor of creating a subtle yet distinctive sense of prestige through spatial aesthetics and local culture [7]. To date, Aman has only operated approximately 35 hotels and resorts worldwide, with locations in mainland China limited to Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Lijiang. The brand's limited distribution strengthens its image of “rarity creates value,” consistent with the typical strategy of luxury brands that enhance their worth through scarcity [7].

In its social media strategy, Aman avoids using Instagram as a straightforward advertising or booking platform. Instead, it positions the account as a kind of “visual business card” to convey the brand's identity. Unlike the typical promotional content found in many hotel accounts, Aman's official account is more like an art photography collection or high-end lifestyle magazine, conveying the brand's spirit through a coherent visual narrative [1]. This method corresponds with the larger trend in luxury branding's digital shift—from functionality toward aesthetics and emotional resonance—highlighting immersive experiences and cultivating a sense of emotional connection [7].

Instagram's platform characteristics provide a natural advantage for Aman's visual communication. As a highly visual social media platform, its algorithm tends to recommend high-quality, aesthetically consistent image content [5]. In addition, the platform's unique telepresence mechanism can enhance users' immersion in visual content and emotional responses, thereby deepening the psychological connection between users and brands [8]. Therefore, what Aman has created on Instagram is not merely a showcase of hotel products, but a symbolic brand space that embodies lifestyle aspirations and emotional projections.

3.2. Visual Content Characteristics and Strategies

Aman has consistently utilized low-saturation filters, ample negative space composition, and natural landscape imagery on its official Instagram account to convey a sense of tranquility, elegance, and uniqueness, reflecting the brand's distinctive aesthetic. At the same time, the images released by Aman Resorts also show a high degree of reliance on a unified aesthetic tone and refined narrative strategy to reinforce its “quiet luxury” brand image. Overall, its core visual strategy can be divided into four major aspects: a sense of space and order, a cultural and sensory narrative, a balanced presentation of people and scenery, and a stable, ritualized visual rhythm.

3.2.1 Sense of Space and Order

Aman makes extensive use of symmetrical composition, depth extension, and regular line arrangements in its spatial presentation to create a sense of openness and stability. For example, Amansara in Siem Reap, Cambodia, is set against the backdrop of ancient ruins from the Angkor period. The arrangement of the stage and dining tables along the central axis, reinforced by the vertical lines of the backdrop, provides a clear sense of spatial guidance and conveys an atmosphere of solemnity and sacredness. At Amankila in Bali, Indonesia, the design follows a three-tiered sequence of pool, beach, and ocean, which is highlighted by the presence of parallel horizontal lines.

This visual technique not only emphasizes the layered nature of the space in terms of form, but also psychologically suggests a sense of high-end quality and order, echoing the conclusion in that the high-quality presentation of private spaces can enhance comfort and design perception [2]. Combined with the narrative immersion theory in, this orderly composition helps guide the viewer's emotions into a specific scene, thereby strengthening the brand's symbolic value and emotional connection [8].

3.2.2 A Cultural and Sensory Narrative

Aman incorporates cultural symbols and sensory details of the destination into its content to create an immersive aesthetic experience. Visual presentation is an important part of the dining experience. Although Aman does not focus on food in its overall marketing, its Nama by Aman series still conveys its attention to seasonal ingredients and culinary details through close-up shots of exquisite plating, the texture of tableware, and chefs preparing meals. This is consistent with the research findings mentioned in the literature regarding how food imagery can enhance sensory immersion and cultural narratives, indicating that although food imagery accounts for a small proportion of the content, it plays an important role in creating details and atmosphere [5]. In cultural content, such as the visual presentation of the Laotian Pi Mai New Year festival, Aman captures the dynamic poses and costume details of the dancers, keeping the background simple so that the cultural symbols become the focus of the image. Such images not only convey the unique cultural resources of the destination, but also create a sense of participation and cultural immersion through the combination of colors, movements, and scenes, echoing the view emphasized in the literature that “high-quality, unique details can enhance user interaction” [4].

3.2.3 A Balanced Presentation of People and Scenery

Unlike some luxury hotels that completely de-humanize their visuals, Aman adopts a more flexible approach: in food and culture-related content, people (chefs, dancers) appear more as contextual elements rather than being the focal point, allowing viewers to focus on the environment and details themselves; In content related to activities and landscapes, such as yoga and sailing, the proportion of people is relatively higher, with a stronger sense of dynamic participation, but the visuals still ensure that the vastness and beauty of the environment remain the dominant focus. This “character-landscape symbiosis” approach preserves immersion while avoiding weakening the atmosphere of the environment, in line with the principle of balancing ‘exclusivity’ and “immersion” in luxury brands as described in [7].

3.2.4 A Stable, Ritualized Visual Rhythm

In terms of posting patterns, Aman maintains consistency in tone, theme, and content structure, forming a stable visual identification system. Research shows that the match between platform mechanisms and content style is key to improving interaction rates, and Aman's ritualized operations are highly compatible with Instagram's preference for high-quality visual content [9]. This consistency not only optimizes the platform's algorithmic recommendations, but also establishes clear brand expectations and aesthetic inertia in the minds of users, thereby promoting long-term emotional stickiness and interaction frequency.

In summary, Aman's Instagram strategy combines spatial order, cultural symbols, the proportion of people and scenery, and a stable visual rhythm to construct a brand narrative of “quiet luxury.” These strategies not only meet the aesthetic expectations of high-end users, but also continue to reinforce brand value on a sensory, emotional, and cultural level.

3.3. User Participation Behavior and Pathways

On Aman's Instagram account, user comments are highly emotional and vision-driven, with frequently used words such as “dream destination,” “paradise-like,” and “peaceful and loving,” expressing a strong desire for the destination and aesthetic recognition. Such comments reflect that high-quality visual content is more likely to evoke emotional resonance, thereby stimulating the desire to interact [4]. Emotional resonance becomes a prerequisite for user engagement. As viewers browse, they are immersed in the mood shaped by the images and respond by articulating their feelings and aspirations in text.

Users' engagement paths often follow a progressive process of “visual attraction—emotional arousal—resonance—interaction—sharing.” First, Aman's high-quality images are highly immersive in terms of composition, color, and narrative, capturing users' attention in a short period of time. Subsequently, this immersive experience will trigger emotional responses in users, such as relaxation,

pleasure, and anticipation, thereby establishing an emotional connection with the brand. According to narrative immersion theory, the blending of several elements is what enables viewers to be absorbed into a given context, ultimately enhancing both brand connection and identity—a process reflected in Aman's approach [8].

In terms of sharing behavior, Aman clientele often use hashtags related to the brand or destination in their comments to perform a social media check in, such as tagging the hotel name or city. This behavior is not only a public expression of personal travel aspirations, but also a means of constructing social identity. According to existing research, combining multisensory stimulation with emotions can significantly increase users' desire to share, and Aman's content does just that by presenting a combination of visual, cultural, and sensory elements, guiding users to externalize their personal emotions into visible social symbols [9].

The platform mechanism also plays a facilitating role in this process. Instagram's hashtag search and algorithmic recommendation features make it easier for content tagged with brands or destinations to be seen by like-minded interest groups, thereby creating a community-based follow and diffusion effect. This diffusion not only increases brand exposure, but also encourages users to form a sense of belonging within the same visual and emotional framework, creating a community communication loop centered on visuals.

Overall, Aman uses a high-quality, immersive visual strategy to guide users from simple viewing to emotional interaction and active sharing. With the help of platform algorithms and social tags, this further amplifies brand influence and community recognition.

3.4. Coordination Mechanism Analysis

Aman's brand communication effectiveness on Instagram stems from the synergistic mechanism formed between visual strategy and user engagement. Its operation can be summarized as a chain of “visual coding—emotional immersion—user participation—brand recognition”: a unified aesthetic tone, a sense of space and order, cultural and sensory narratives, and ritualistic presentations brought about by color tones and thematic cycles all contribute to the brand's visual coding. These elements not only confirm the conclusion that high-quality private spaces enhance comfort and design aesthetics, but also align with narrative immersion theory—the combination of multiple cues can enable viewers to mentally “enter” the scene depicted in the image, thereby enhancing the brand's symbolic value [2,8].

On this basis, high-quality visuals first stimulate users' emotional responses and immersive experiences. Existing research indicates that such content is more likely to trigger interaction [4]. The commentary analysis of this study shows that users often express their longing and emotional resonance with phrases such as “dream destination” and “visual enjoyment,” and then participate through direct interaction in the form of likes, comments, and the use of brand tags. Some users will repost or tag locations, creating user-generated content (UGC) that drives secondary dissemination of brand information.

This process is bidirectional: brand visual shaping is the prerequisite for interaction, while user participation in turn feeds back into the brand image. When users share content that combines spatial aesthetics with personal experiences, it not only expands the brand's reach but also strengthens its association with a specific lifestyle. The findings point to a shift in social media branding, where image building is no longer one-sided but instead co-created by brands together with users [9].

Compared with previous research that has tended to examine visual and interactive elements in isolation, this case study highlights their close interdependence in practice. Visual strategies not only serve as the starting point for content creation but also act as triggers for users' emotional resonance and participation. In turn, user interaction affects how content circulates, as platform algorithms and community sharing increase its visibility and reproduction. Taken together, this collaborative mechanism offers a fresh perspective on how brand value is constructed for luxury hotels on social media, while also providing empirical support for the visual coding—user engagement—emotional resonance” model developed in the next chapter.

4. A Three-Dimensional Model for Building Social Media Brands for High-End Hotels

Based on a case study of Aman's Instagram account, this study proposes a three-part collaborative model of “visual coding—user engagement—emotional resonance” to reveal how high-end hotel brands can effectively construct a sense of quality on social media. First, visual coding is the starting point for brand image building. Brands use high-quality images and short videos to convey aesthetic values, cultural connotations, and emotional associations to their audience, thereby laying the foundation for the perception of “quality.” Careful visual design—in composition, color, and narrative—serves both to display the hotel’s physical setting and to frame it as part of a symbolic lifestyle and value system.

User engagement is essential to how visual coding works. People who are drawn to images and feel an emotional response often like a post, leave a short comment, repost, or add a brand tag. These small actions allow them to take part in the brand story. Over time, such repeated involvement builds a stronger emotional link with the brand and creates a sense of belonging within the social media community. As users keep interacting and sharing, the visual messages spread more widely, so the brand becomes more visible and gains greater influence.

Finally, emotional resonance emerges as the central outcome of the ternary model. The visual experience and interactive practices reinforce one another, generating strong emotional reactions in users, such as longing, pleasure, and a sense of belonging. These reactions strengthen users’ recognition of the brand and at the same time endow it with symbolic value. It can thus be seen that “sense of quality” does not rely solely on the one-way transmission of visual content, nor is it perceived or disseminated unilaterally by users. Rather, it is the result of a collaborative effort between visual strategy and user participation.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study expands the understanding of the “visual-perception-resonance” pathway in brand communication theory and fills the theoretical gap in luxury brand research regarding the perception mechanism of “sense of quality.” By highlighting the interaction between visual narrative and user emotion, this study provides a starting point for examining the connections between visual strategy and user behavior in the digital environments of luxury hotels and brands.

5. Conclusion

This study uses Aman's Instagram operations as a case study to reveal how high-end hotels can evoke emotional resonance and interactive behavior among users through a unified aesthetic tone, spatial composition, cultural narrative, and ritualized presentation, thereby constructing a sense of “quality” through the synergistic effects of visual appeal and engagement. The results show that the sense of quality in high-end hotels is not solely dependent on visual communication or user perception, but rather a process in which the two factors are mutually reinforcing and amplify each other.

This finding provides a reference for luxury brands' digital communication: while maintaining visual consistency, cultural and sensory elements should be integrated to enhance immersion, and platform mechanisms should be utilized to promote the reposting of user-generated content, thereby continuously strengthening brand identity. This study adds to our understanding of the mechanisms behind brand quality perception and provides practical guidance for social media strategies for high-end hotels.

Future research could validate this mechanism in cross-platform and cross-cultural contexts, combining experimental and interview methods to explore in depth the role of different visual elements in influencing emotions and motivation to participate, thereby providing more precise theoretical support and practical guidance for the global digital communication of luxury brands.

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