RESEARCH ARTICLE

Crafting emotional engagement and immersive experiences: Comprehensive scale development for and validation of hospitality marketing storytelling involvement

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Abstract

This study develops and validates a scale for gauging consumer involvement in storytelling (to create memorable and emotionally resonant experiences) in hospitality marketing through four phases: qualitative inquiry, construct definition, item refinement, and nomological validation. Validation involves 24 in-depth video interviews and consecutive online surveys. The hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale, with four dimensions—contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experience—comprising 14 items, precisely measures consumer involvement. The scale integrates narrative transportation theory and the elaboration likelihood model to enhance understanding of consumer engagement with fundamental human cognitive and emotional processes. The validated scale offers a valuable tool for marketers to precisely assess consumer involvement and strategically leverage storytelling to evoke emotions, foster brand loyalty, and judge campaign effectiveness. In diverse marketing contexts that elicit emotions, resonate with individuals, and foster immersive experiences, the scale demonstrates remarkable adaptability. Ultimately, it can help marketers craft compelling narratives, enhance brand perception, and strengthen consumer relationships, thereby contributing to emotional connections, optimizing strategies, and enhancing consumer engagement effectiveness.

KEYWORDS
content marketing, emotional engagement, hospitality, immersive experiences, involvement, scale development, storytelling

1 | INTRODUCTION

The need for a new marketing scale becomes evident as storytelling emerges as an effective tool, seamlessly blending psychological elements to create meaningful consumer experiences. Marketing scholars have identified storytelling as a mechanism to engage consumers and reinforce brand perception (Ryu et al., 2019; Tussyadiah et al., 2010), attitude (Nagar, 2019), preference (Tezer et al., 2020), and stimulate word of mouth (Kang et al., 2020). This is because storytelling fosters emotional connections and cultivates an authentic brand identity (Lund et al., 2018). As such, researchers have turned to investigating the impact of stories on

consumer-brand engagement (Hong et al., 2022; Lund et al., 2018; Ryu et al., 2019).

Emotional engagement and immersive experiences in storytelling play a crucial role in consumer-brand engagement (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). Storytelling effectively evokes emotions and engages consumers in compelling narratives, fostering deep connections and brand loyalty (Appel et al., 2021). Emotional engagement reflects a story's ability to evoke intense emotions and establish a profound audience bond (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019), indicating a significant brand connection (Hong et al., 2022). An immersive experience refers to a narrative that deeply engages the audience, blurring the line between reality and fiction. It involves creating an environment or narrative that captivates audience members' senses, emotions, and imagination, transporting them into the world of the story. Immersive experiences, characterized by vivid descriptions and interactive elements, further enhance engagement by creating a strong sense of presence.

Storytelling in content marketing is a strategic mechanism for conveying marketing or brand stories, eliciting emotions, and fostering genuine consumer-brand engagement. While social media interactions, such as likes and shares of a story, can determine consumer involvement in digital marketing storytelling, they may not fully capture the depth of such involvement. Recent research indicates that emotional engagement and immersive experiences help cultivate consumer involvement in storytelling, revealing methodological gaps in measurement approaches (Rather et al., 2019). For example, Ganassali and Matysiewicz (2021) and Júnior et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of analysing how story elements influence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement, highlighting the need for comprehensive measurement approaches for storytelling involvement. Therefore, addressing the gaps in validated scales of storytelling involvement is essential to gain a more accurate understanding of consumer involvement in storytelling and to enhance the effectiveness of content marketing strategies.

The traditional method for measuring consumer involvement is Zaichkowsky's (1985) involvement scale. While this scale is widely effective in assessing involvement, it is rooted in a more generalized concept and may not fully capture the nuances of emotional engagement and immersive experiences with marketing stories. As storytelling expands beyond hospitality marketing, there is a growing demand for a more specialized approach to measure universal consumer connections and responses. In addition, Hamelin et al. (2020) agricultural marketing storytelling scale emphasizes sensory experiences and consumption value. However, a concern is its generalizability, given deviations from standard validation processes and a lack of nomological validation. These issues further underscore the need for a validated marketing storytelling involvement scale.

This research addresses these research gaps by integrating narrative transportation theory (NTT) (Green & Brock, 2002) and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to capture a comprehensive view of emotional engagement and immersive experiences in storytelling. The NTT emphasizes the immersive and emotional aspects, whereas the ELM focuses on cognitive processing. This combined approach recognizes that emotional engagement involves both emotional and cognitive dimensions, with added immersive experiences. By integrating NTT and the ELM, our study explores how individuals emotionally connect with narratives, cognitively process information, and experience immersion in storytelling.

Despite the extensive research on storytelling in various marketing contexts (Herman, 2007; Júnior et al., 2023), we intentionally narrow down our study to the hospitality marketing context. In hospitality, consumers are not just after tangible benefits; they crave emotional connections and unforgettable experiences. Understanding how storytelling influences consumer behavior and engagement in hospitality is vital for crafting tailored marketing strategies. Although our study focuses on hospitality, the scale we develop can be adapted to broader marketing contexts, thus filling a critical gap in current methodologies. This is because emotional engagement and immersive experiences in storytelling are fundamental aspects of storytelling involvement, making our scale applicable across different marketing realms and offering insights into consumer psychology. Nonetheless, the integration of emotional and immersive elements in the scale offers a holistic measurement of consumer involvement, aiding marketers in creating more powerful stories. Such stories not only boost brand prominence and equity but also facilitate social interactivity and value co-creation, influencing customer attitudes. The practical tools derived from this scale have the potential to transform content marketing and storytelling involvement strategy, improving customer-brand engagement and overall business outcomes.

2 | THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF HOSPITALITY MARKETING STORYTELLING INVOLVEMENT

2.1 | Theoretical foundations

Exploring the theoretical foundations of storytelling in consumer behavior uncovers diverse frameworks. Consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) delves into intrinsic aspects, such as consumer identity and socio-historical consumption patterns. The service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) emphasizes storytelling's service-oriented nature, highlighting value exchange, while the industrial perspective addresses competitive advantage. In narrative structure studies, multimodality theory (Kress, 2009) scrutinizes characters, social meaning, and compositional value. These frameworks contribute to a nuanced understanding of how storytelling shapes consumer behavior.

In our study, we integrate NTT and the ELM. NTT provides insights into emotional and immersive storytelling, enhancing connections between consumers and hospitality brands. The gist of NTT is the idea of immersion and emotional connection. It helps comprehend how storytelling influences consumer attitudes and behaviors. We argue that NTT can offer insights into consumers'

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emotional journey when engaging with narratives (Mladenović et al., 2023). The underlying immersive nature of storytelling then develops the transportation effect, bringing consumers into the narrative world of brands and influencing their perceptions. Through this transportation, consumers develop positive attitudes.

The ELM provides insights into cognitive processing and persuasion; it offers a framework for understanding how consumers process persuasive messages, examining storytelling's influence through two routes: central and peripheral. In other words, the ELM focuses on the cognitive perspective and the storytelling message processing. In general, central route processing pertains to the thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the narrative's core messages. Peripheral processing is a more superficial engagement with the narrative content (Yin et al., 2023).

Integration of NTT and the ELM allows a comprehensive analysis of storytelling's impact on consumer attitudes, emotions, and behaviors in hospitality marketing. Such integration provides a holistic analysis that enables storytelling to influence consumer involvement, where the symbiosis between emotional resonance and cognitive processing is captured. This enables marketers to craft narratives that can resonate deeply with consumers, combining all the relevant aspects of the storytelling itself and thus enabling consumers to process the message (narrative transportation). In other words, a storytelling can integrate emotional resonance and cognitive processing to capture both consumers' hearts and minds. Developing a robust scale based on these theories enables effective measurement of storytelling's impact on consumer involvement, guiding hospitality marketers in crafting engaging and persuasive stories.

2.2 | Elevating theoretical rigor

Our approach to integrating NTT and the ELM is novel, as it allows marketers to develop storytelling approaches that can provoke consumer engagement. That is, our study provides a paradigm shift, in that it aids marketers in crafting narratives that evoke emotions and addresses the cognitive processes influencing consumer perception.

Our study highlights the emotional–cognitive synergy. It is the first, to our knowledge, to integrate emotions and cognitions into the same study. This integration is relevant, as storytelling involves emotions and cognitive aspects, which are inseparable, thus influencing consumer behavior (Sarıca, 2023). Our study recognizes that emotions can serve to drive cognitive processes and vice versa. We offer a more dynamic and practical interpretation of how consumers engage with narratives, which is relevant to the complexity of real-world consumer experiences to examine storytelling involvement (Sarıca, 2023). This interconnected dynamic perspective represents a breakthrough in theoretical advancement, enriching the understanding of consumer engagement.

Integration of NTT and the ELM also helps marketers develop marketing strategies. Marketers can tailor their storytelling approaches to cater to both emotions and cognitive processes in narratives. This insight improves our scale's relevance to the industry, enabling marketers to be more cognizant of how to embed both emotions and cognitive process narratives as part of their storytelling values that are effective in engaging consumers. Our scale also provides more holistic actionable insights for strategic narrative construction and consumer engagement.

2.3 | The role of involvement

In storytelling, involvement is crucial, as it reveals the intensity and persistence of a consumer's connection with the brand through narrative. Consumer involvement is the perceived relevance based on needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). It reflects how much a consumer cares about a product, brand, or story. In storytelling, involvement manifests as interest and personal relevance. When a story or brand is personally relevant, it captures attention and becomes a meaningful part of the consumer's cognitive and emotional landscape (Kemp et al., 2021).

It is important to note the distinction between involvement and customer engagement (Li et al., 2020). Whereas involvement is a psychological concept reflecting the perceived relevance of and care for a product, brand, or story, customer engagement goes a step further, involving both experimental and instrumental value. In the storytelling context, this means that engagement requires more than just interest; it also requires active participation, interaction, and a deeper connection with the narrative. In the specific context of social media marketing, involvement can take the form of personal relevance of or interest in a brand (Santos et al., 2022). Social media platforms provide a space for consumers to express their involvement through likes, shares, comments, and other forms of interaction with storytelling content. Dwivedi (2015) supports the idea that involvement acts as an antecedent to customer engagement. Before consumers engage actively with a brand or narrative, they typically have a level of personal connection. In the storytelling landscape, involvement serves as a precursor, setting the stage for consumers to connect more deeply with the narrative.

2.4 | Effects of storytelling

In the realm of hospitality marketing, the profound influence of storytelling resonates deeply with consumers (Su et al., 2020). In the experience economy, in which emotional connections are important, narratives play a crucial role in shaping memorable consumption experiences. Narrative transportation (Kang et al., 2020) posits that consumers can be transformed by immersing themselves in a story, highlighting the emotional engagement facilitated by narratives. Previous research has emphasized the significance of background, core, and structure of effective storytelling (Mitchell & Clark, 2021). Strategically, storytelling shapes destination branding (Moin et al., 2020), incorporating narratives from both organizations and consumers. Operationalising storytelling involves infusing authenticity,

unique content, and a sense of exploration (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2021). In this vein, Ben Youssef et al. (2019) emphasize that in hospitality marketing, storytelling's measurable impacts on awareness, engagement, and behavior underscore its effectiveness in shaping consumer decisions. In the broader context of consumer behavior literature, storytelling is a powerful force shaping cognition and behavior. In advertising, storytelling's impact on engagement extends to persuasive effectiveness of emotions, imagery, and attention (Hamby & Jones, 2022). Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement transcend the boundaries of stories, influencing consumers' understanding, judgment, and recall.

3 | METHODS AND SCALE DEVELOPMENT

In this research, we introduce and validate a scale for measuring hospitality marketing storytelling involvement. The process follows well-established marketing scale development paradigms (Churchill, 1979) and evolves through four phases: qualitative inquiry (Phase 1), construct definition (Phase 2), item refinement (Phase 3), and nomological validation (Phase 4). Table 1 summarizes the methods and steps.

3.1 | Phase 1: Qualitative inquiry

In Phase 1 (qualitative inquiry), the methodology consisted of two sequential steps: unstructured interviews (Step 1) and structured interviews (Step 2). The unstructured interviews helped foster open iscussions of informants' perspectives in depth, facilitating the generation of rich insights. By contrast, the goal of the structured interviews was to delve deeper into the themes and statements identified during the unstructured interviews by employing targeted probes and questions (an example question is "How relevant do you find the themes (i.e., identified in Step 1) to your personal experiences with marketing storytelling?"). We conducted 24 (15 unstructured and 9 structured interviews) online video interviews via MS Teams ('Qualitative Online Interviews: Strategies, Design, and Skills', 2015). Data collection in both steps continued until we reached saturation; the criteria for saturation were redundancy of information, stability of themes, and limited enhancement of data richness in additional interviews. Table 2 presents the informant profiles.

We recruited informants in this phase by their active engagement in hospitality brands' social media storytelling, including at least one like, share, or comment on any brand's promotional content within the past 30 days. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring respondent privacy and confidentiality. We obtained informed consent before conducing the interviews, and respondents had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

During the unstructured interviews (Step 1), which had an average duration of 70 min, 15 informants (five men and ten women aged 21–61 years) shared their perspectives on various aspects related to themselves, their interest in stories, their views on storytelling, and how brands can engage them through storytelling. Transcriptions and recordings of the interviews underwent both open

TABLE 1 Methods and scale development.

Stages of scale development process	Details
Phase 1: Qualitative inquiry - Step 1: Includes 15 unstructured interviews (for theme identification) - Step 2: Includes 9 structured interviews (for dimensions and item exploration)	- The thematic analysis of transcripts showed 15 themes. - Four dimensions—contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experience—and 40 items found that can capture the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement construct.
Phase 2: Construct definition	- Defined hospitality marketing storytelling involvement as *a tool that assesses customer involvement in marketing storytelling, encompassing contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experiences*.
Phase 3: Item refinement - Step 1: Item screening - Step 2: Content and face validity - Step 3: Scale purification and item refinement Data 1 (n = 164, online survey) used - Step 4: CFAData 2 (n = 198, online survey) used	- After the initial evaluation, eliminated eight items, resulting in a final set of 32 items. - The content and face validity of the 32 items assessed by five marketing experts (judges), leading to removal of seven items and retention of 25 items. - Exploratory factor analysis (EFA): 14 items loaded onto four factors (factor 1: three items for contextual cues; factor 2: three items for emotional engagement; factor 3: three items for mental cognition; factor 4: five items for immersive experience). - The convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model for both first and higher orders were satisfactory. - Assessed and accepted the model fit for the items.
Phase 4: Nomological validity and hypotheses development Data 2 (n = 198, online survey) used	- Both the measurement and structural models found to be significant, and all hypotheses, including mediation effects, accepted.

TABLE 2 Informant profile.

Informants	Gender	Age (years)	Description
Step 1			
I1	Female	30	Teacher of a school and single mother living in a small leased house.
I2	Male	32	A small shop owner living with a younger sister and his parents. His father is also a small businessman and a contributor to household earnings.
I3	Female	23	New graduate. Living with parents
I4	Female	47	Divorced mother with three children. She manages a business and lives in a rented house.
I5	Female	26	Unmarried and private service holder.
I6	Male	33	He and his wife are managers of a company, have three children, and their parents stay with them in their house.
I7	Male	29	Graduate student and private service holder. Newly married.
I8	Female	61	Mother with six children living in own home. She runs a small business with her husband.
I9	Male	40	He is an engineer, and his wife is a manager. There are four children and an elderly mother-in-law in the family.
I10	Female	34	Housewife with four children. The husband is a businessman.
I11	Female	21	Undergraduate student.
I12	Male	58	Retiree from government services. Now lives in the countryside and takes care of two grandchildren.
I13	Female	28	Part-time associate degree student and private service holder. Mother of three children.
I14	Female	41	She works for a private company and lives in a rented house with her husband and four children.
I15	Female	49	College lecturer with five children. Her husband is an educator.
Step 2			
I16	Female	64	A widow with seven children who live in a small city with her daughter.
I17	Male	34	The father of three children whose wife is employed. The family lives in a rented apartment.
I18	Female	37	Government staff whose husband works in the private sector. They have five children.
I19	Male	48	A surgeon who lives with a family of five.
I20	Female	20	Bachelor in accounting final semester student.
I21	Male	33	Holder of the bachelor's degree, who works for the local company. Has a wife and two children. They live in a small house.
I22	Female	55	Mother of seven children, four of whom live with her.
I23	Female	24	An unmarried junior executive who lives with her parents.
I24	Male	51	Works in the private sector. He lives in his own condo with his wife and four children.

and axial coding using Weiss's (1995) four-step method (coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration). The analysis of Step 1 identified several themes and statements, including authenticity, transparency, realism, originality, engagement, happiness, connection, sense, nostalgia, story understanding, effort in understanding, interaction with the story, immersive experience, mental transportation, and narrative presence.

In Step 2, we conducted structured interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 48 min. Nine informants participated, including four men and five women aged 20–64 years. In these interviews, we showed the informants the themes and questions identified in Step 1 and asked them to indicate how relevant and important the themes and questions were to their own experiences

with marketing storytelling. We also gave them the opportunity to suggest additional themes that had not been previously considered. The analysis technique repeated the method used in Step 1. Thematic analysis of Step 2's transcripts resulted in the identification of four dimensions: contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experience. Here, 40 items measured the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement construct. The overall conceptual understanding of the construct remained consistent with previous interpretations. Some informants also described a sense of immersion in a new world through their favorite marketer story. To ensure coherence and organization, we integrated the dimensions and items discovered in Phase 1 into the Phase 2 findings, in line with literature.

3.2 | Phase 2: Construct definition (process and findings)

In Phase 1, we identified four dimensions and generated an initial list of 40 items for hospitality marketing storytelling involvement. In Phase 2, we aligned these dimensions with established theories (i.e., NTT and the ELM), along with relevant literature, to develop measurements and allocate items to each dimension. We operationalised dimensions such as emotional engagement and mental cognition, eliciting both immediate emotional responses and deeper cognitive processing. By integrating principles from ELM, our measurements captured the diverse ways consumers engage with marketing stories. Our hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale is a tool that assesses *customer involvement in marketing storytelling*, encompassing contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experiences. By triangulating the findings from both phases, we consolidated the results and created a preliminary set of dimensions and operational definitions. We provide the triangulation in Table 3.

3.2.1 | Contextual cues

The analysis identified key themes, including authenticity, transparency, realism, and originality. Contextual cues influence consumers' perception and their connection with marketing storytelling (Pera & Viglia, 2016). Informants emphasized the importance of these cues,

revealing a shared understanding. Although some informants needed examples at first to grasp contextual cues, they all provided examples of authenticity, transparency, and realism, enhancing story credibility.

In terms of authenticity, an informant shared an experience in which a brand showed behind-the-scenes footage, helping to foster authenticity and a deeper connection between the informant and the brand (I16). Addressing transparency, another informant highlighted a case in which a company openly discussed a product recall and worked to maintain trust and credibility by explaining the reasons for the recall and outlining resolution steps (I04). Regarding realism, an informant cited an advertisement featuring a relatable family facing common challenges, contributing to a more convincing and relatable narrative (I12).

NTT and the ELM form a framework for grasping contextual cues. In NTT, authenticity, transparency, and realism act as pivotal cues, transporting consumers into the narrative and fostering emotional involvement. For example, behind-the-scenes footage, related to authenticity, enhances narrative transportation, enabling the establishment a deeper connection. The ELM's central and peripheral routes are evident, with cues serving both roles. Authentic and relatable elements prompt immediate affective responses (peripheral), capturing attention and fostering emotional involvement. Concurrently, these cues stimulate deeper cognitive processing (central), as consumers engage with authenticity, transparency, and realism in the narrative. Considering these findings, we define contextual cues as *strategic elements that shape consumer perceptions* by establishing authenticity and naturalness, which ultimately enhances the effectiveness of marketing storytelling.

TABLE 3 Triangulation summary.

Example quotes	Initial themes	Dimensions
'Usually, I do not trust any brand story at first. I strongly believe that brands tell fabricated stories to influence us. I had food in a restaurant situated in London. That restaurant said they have Indian authentic food. But later I come to know that the owner of that restaurant is not an Indian national. Moreover, when I check with other Indian friends they also confirm that that restaurant does not sell authentic Indian food. So for me most of the marketing story is fake'.	▪ Authenticity ▪ Transparency ▪ Realistic ▪ Originality	▪ Contextual cues
'I was deeply moved while reading about the couple's experience at the X hotel. It brought back a flood of nostalgia as my spouse and I had stayed at the same hotel during our honeymoon. The story resonated with me on a personal level, and it felt like our own cherished memories were being recounted. It truly touched my heart and created a powerful connection between the story and my own experiences'.	▪ Engagement ▪ Happiness ▪ Connection ▪ Sense ▪ Nostalgia	▪ Emotional engagement
'Understanding the marketing story shared by X hotel was not easy because it had many complex layers and interesting elements. It required me to take a closer look to really understand its meaning.... This complexity made me even more curious and engaged. It motivated me to dig deeper, discover hidden messages, and establish a strong connection with the brand...; it was challenging, this captivating marketing story brought me a great sense of satisfaction as I uncovered its underlying storylines'.	▪ Story understanding ▪ Effort in understanding ▪ Interacting story	▪ Mental cognition
'The marketing story from X Cruise is incredibly immersive.... I feel completely drawn into its captivating storyline, as if I've been transported to a whole new world created by X.... The careful attention to detail and the smooth flow of the story make it feel incredibly real and believable.... I often find myself losing track of time, completely wrapped up in this intense mental world they've crafted.... This experience has deepened my connection with the brand, leaving a strong and lasting impression on me'.	▪ Immersive experience ▪ Mental transportation ▪ Narrative presence	▪ Immersive experience

3.2.2 | Emotional engagement

The qualitative analysis revealed emotional engagement themes in marketing storytelling such as engagement, happiness, connection, sense, and nostalgia. In discussing engagement, an informant (I03) shared, 'There's this tech brand I really like…. It felt like we were part of the process, not just passive users. It was awesome to see our ideas come to life, and it made me feel really connected to the brand'. Regarding happiness, another informant (I14) expressed: ' I saw this ice cream ad…. It wasn't just about the ice cream; it was like they were selling pure joy. It left me with this warm, happy feeling that stuck with me'. For connection, an informant (I05) shared insights about a fashion brand: 'There's this fashion brand I follow…. It's not just about the clothes; it's about shared values, creating a strong connection'. Regarding sense, an informant (I13) recounted: 'I had this amazing experience with a fragrance brand…. [It was] such a unique and memorable way to connect with a brand'. Finally, reflecting on nostalgia, an informant (I12) shared: 'This soft drink campaign hit me right in the feels…. It made me feel connected to the brand's history and my own past'.

Emotional engagement aligns with NTT, proposing that consumers mentally immerse themselves in the story world, experiencing real-life-like emotions (Cao et al., 2021). This immersive experience, with authentic and relatable narrative elements, generates positive and sometimes negative emotions. As mentioned previously, the ELM identifies two routes: peripheral cues for immediate emotional responses and central processing for deeper emotional connection (Y. K. Dwivedi et al., 2023). Both routes influence attitudes and behaviors, though the central route involves deeper cognitive engagement. Consumers actively process a narrative's authenticity, relatability, and substance, which fosters a profound emotional connection. According to the ELM, emotional engagement occurs through quick, emotional responses and thoughtful, cognitive processing, depending on the nature and presentation of storytelling elements. NTT suggests that individuals immersed in a compelling narrative undergo a psychological state of transportation, mentally entering the story world. In marketing storytelling, consumers are transported, experiencing emotions as real. Authentic and relatable narrative elements act as vehicles, creating a vivid, emotionally charged mental experience. For example, when a marketing story portrays relatable characters or situations, consumers feel transported, enhancing emotional engagement by making the narrative personally meaningful. Consequently, we define emotional engagement as the *process of evoking intense emotions in consumers*, leading to the creation of a lasting and meaningful connection between the brand and consumers.

3.2.3 | Mental cognition

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed robust cognitive processes and active engagement by informants in response to marketing stories. Key themes, including story understanding, effort in comprehension, and interaction with the story, emerged. Informants consistently demonstrated a clear grasp of narratives, finding them effortless to comprehend. Their proactive interaction with the stories showcased a high level of mental involvement. For example, (I07) reflected, 'Initially, I thought those brand X ads were about some unfulfillment in life. But as I paid more attention, I realized they were actually telling stories about love relationships. It was like a lightbulb moment, and I understood the narrative on a deeper level'. I15 highlighted the effortful aspect of comprehension: 'There was this one campaign with a really intricate plot. I had to put some effort into understanding the layers of the story. I replayed the ad a few times, read through the accompanying materials – I really wanted to grasp the main idea, and I felt a sense of accomplishment when I finally did'. I24 conveyed a personal responsibility in understanding the story: 'I feel personally responsible to get the story. If I don't understand it, I think I'm missing out on something important. There's this connection I want to establish with the narrative. It's not just about watching; it's about actively engaging and interacting with the content'. These respondent examples illustrate the depth of cognitive involvement and the active role of individuals in interactions with marketing stories. Such cognitive processes, as identified by Dessart and Pitardi (2019), showcase people's ability to comprehend narratives and their dedicated engagement with the content. These findings align with the NTT proposed by Guo et al. (2022), which suggests that mental cognition represents people's immersion into the narrative world, leading to a stronger connection. In addition, respondents' ease of comprehension resonates with the ELM (Munaro et al., 2021). Both NTT and the ELM offer distinct but complementary perspectives on individuals' engagement with marketing narratives. NTT suggests that exposure to a captivating story leads to psychological transportation (Cao et al., 2021), as evident in I07's transformative moment with brand X ads. Increased immersion then results in heightened connections, reflected in respondents actively seeking deeper understanding. This aligns with NTT, showing that respondents comprehend and actively engage with narratives. Respondents' ease of comprehension also aligns with the ELM, indicating a mix of both peripheral and central routes. For example, I15's effort in understanding a plot represents central processing, while I07's lightbulb moment aligns with peripheral cues, triggering immediate understanding. ELM underscores meticulous content evaluation, mirroring respondents' active engagement and central processing, surpassing surface-level reactions. Therefore, we define mental cognition in marketing storytelling as the *cognitive processes and engagement consumers exhibit* while interacting with the story.

3.2.4 | Immersive experience

Examination of the interview transcripts highlighted robust immersive experience and active engagement among study informants in response to marketing stories. Immersive experience was marked by informants completely diving into the story, mentally transporting themselves into story world, showing a high level of involvement

(Blumenthal & Jensen, 2019). Immersive experience played a pivotal role in cultivating effective emotional connections. Informants vividly described being transported to joyful family gatherings through the evocative X logo and jingle, evoking a cascade of positive emotions. For example, one informant (I07) discussed, "The moment I heard the jingle, I could almost smell the holiday feast and feel the warmth of being surrounded by loved ones." Such immersive experience not only aroused emotional responses but also sparked cognitive engagement, forging enduring bonds between consumers and marketers. Such resonance aligns seamlessly with the principles of NTT, which stresses the immersive engagement's dual impact on connecting with consumers emotionally and cognitively. Moreover, this immersive experience is intricately linked with the ELM. When consumers are immersed in a marketing story that aligns with their personal beliefs and values, they are more likely to engage in deep processing. As another informant (I09) expressed, "I found myself reflecting on how X has been a part of our family traditions for generations, and it made me appreciate the brand even more." This deep processing fosters a more thoughtful and enduring relationship between consumers and brands, as per the principles of the ELM. Therefore, we define immersive experience in marketing storytelling as the *consumer's complete absorption and mental transportation* into the world crafted by the marketer. This deep-level experience helps forge enduring connections between consumers and the marketer, facilitating stronger cognitive processing.

3.3 | Phase 3: Item refinement

Phase 3 of the study involved four steps in developing the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale: item screening, content and face validity assessment, scale purification and item refinement, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In Step 1, we critically examined a pool of 40 initial items derived from the qualitative thematic analysis, representing perceived brand stories. We removed 8 items with issues such as loaded questions, double-barrel questions, leading questions, and presumed questions, which left 32 items for further evaluation.

Step 2 focused on content and face validity (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004), in which five marketing experts provided recommendations. We removed 7 items on the basis of their feedback, which resulted in 25 items.

In Step 3, we conducted scale purification and item refinement following Ahmed and Hooi Ting (2022) recommendations. We collected the data for this step using a convenience sampling method. The analysis in G*Power 3.1.9.7 for linear multiple regression, considering an effect size (f^2) of 0.15, power of 0.95, and four predictors, determined a minimum sample size of 124. The sample size, termed 'quan data-1', surpassed this requirement (164). We contacted the respondents in this stage through the messaging options available on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Upon contact, we provided them with a link to the Google Form for the online survey questionnaire, following the provision of

an information sheet and consent form to ensure ethical compliance (we followed the same criteria and procedure for the data collection of 'quan data-2'). In this survey, the respondents were aged 18–71 years, and 68% identified as female.

We deemed 11 items with low item-to-total correlations unsuitable and subsequently removed them from the scale. The suitability of conducting an EFA was confirmed by the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test. We categorized the remaining 14 items into four factors, explaining a cumulative variance of 74.02%. To evaluate the reliability of the scale, we computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Despite ongoing debates about reliability estimation methods and suggestions for alternatives such as Malkewitz, Schwall, Meesters and Hardt (2023) recent findings indicate that the performance of Cronbach's alpha and omega is similar. Therefore, we opted to use Cronbach's alpha for our estimation. The computed values were 0.75 for contextual cues, 0.86 for emotional engagement, 0.83 for mental cognition, and 0.89 for immersive experience factors (see Table 4 for detailed results). To address common method bias, we applied the Harman single-factor score criteria by loading all 14 items onto a single factor. The resultant single-factor score of 35.50% indicated that common method bias had a nonsignificant impact on the data set, as it accounted for less than 50% of the overall variation. We then subjected the 14-item covariance matrix to CFA (Watkins, 2018).

We conducted CFA following the methodology proposed by Ahmed and Ting (2023). This analysis used a new data set ('quan data-2') comprising 194 respondents, surpassing the minimum sample size of 124 as determined by the G*Power analysis. The data collection method and respondent selection criteria for 'quan data-2' was similar to those of 'quan data-1'. In this data set, respondents were aged 18–68 years, and 61% identified as female. We conducted the CFA using AMOS 19 software.

The results of the CFA showed that the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale exhibited both convergent and discriminant validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.52 (the minimum threshold is 0.50), meaning that the scale items explained more than 52% of the variance in the latent constructs. In addition, the composite reliability (CR) values surpassed 0.76, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.60, which indicates high internal consistency. Discriminant validity was also achieved according to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria. The model fit indices indicated a good fit ($p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.309$; CFI = 0.940, GFI = 0.902; AGFI = 0.854; TLI = 0.922; IFI = 0.941; NFI = 0.901; RFI = 0.871; RMSEA = 0.083; see Table 5 and Figure 1 for detailed results).

3.4 | Phase 4: Nomological validity and hypotheses development

To achieve nomological validity, we examined the role of hospitality marketing storytelling involvement and its relationship to brand prominence and its antecedents. Brand prominence refers to consumers' recognition of a brand based on its visible elements

TABLE 4 Exploratory factor analysis.

Variables	Loadings	Cronbach's alphas
Contextual cues		0.75
CC1. The marketing story creates an authentic experience.	0.789	
CC2. The marketing story effectively communicates its origins, fostering a strong connection with the audience.	0.864	
CC3. The marketing story flows naturally and feels genuine.	0.775	
Emotional engagement		0.86
EE1. The marketing story's elements evoke profound emotions in me.	0.911	
EE2. The marketing story fills me with happiness.	0.894	
EE3. Marketing stories deeply engage my senses.	0.874	
Mental cognition		0.83
MC1. I have a clear understanding of the marketing story.	0.940	
MC2. Understanding the marketing story is effortless for me.	0.877	
MC3. I actively engage and interact with the marketing story.	0.613	
Immersive experience		0.89
IE1. The marketing story effectively creates an immersive experience.	0.873	
IE2. The marketing story makes me feel fully absorbed in its storyline.	0.918	
IE3. Thinking about my favorite brand's marketing story mentally transports me into its created world.	0.956	
IE4. My favorite brand's marketing story immerses me in a vivid mental world that fades when I shift my focus.	0.676	
IE5. I lose track of time when I engage with my favorite brand's marketing story.	0.656	

TABLE 5 Confirmatory factor analysis.

	CR	AVE	Contextual cues	Mental cognition	Emotional engagement	Immersive experience
Contextual cues	0.762	0.517	0.719			
Mental cognition	0.832	0.636	0.272	0.798		
Emotional engagement	0.883	0.716	0.239	0.099	0.846	
Immersive experience	0.894	0.636	0.113	0.602	0.001	0.797

(Han et al., 2010). Previous research has identified antecedents of brand prominence, including customer social status seeking, need for uniqueness, and iconic value (Greenberg et al., 2020). However, we argue that favorable hospitality marketing storytelling involvement is crucial for brand prominence. Thus, we examine the mediating effects of hospitality marketing storytelling involvement on the relationships between brand prominence and its antecedents. The findings provide insights into the contributions of storytelling involvement in hospitality marketing and its underlying mechanisms, benefiting theoretical understanding and practical applications for marketers.

3.4.1 | Brand prominence

Societal shifts have given rise to brand prominence—a fusion of wealth, social status, and consumer choices (Aw et al., 2021). Rooted in historical transitions in which affluence determined societal standing, brand prominence is exemplified through opulence, echoing the theory of conspicuous consumption (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). In contemporary marketing, possessions, especially high-priced items such as holiday packages, signify success through an established 'snob appeal.' Brand choices, which are potent social signals, pave the way for exploring how social status seeking, the need for uniqueness,
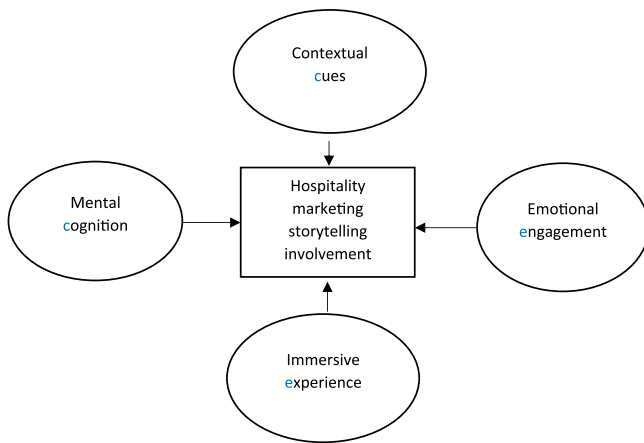
FIGURE 1 Confirmatory factor analysis.

and iconic value, intertwined with hospitality marketing storytelling, shape brand prominence.

This conceptualization aligns with symbolic consumption theory (Luna-Cortés, 2017), unveiling intricacies of consumer behavior in hospitality marketing. Symbolic consumption theory, emphasizing product meanings, adeptly translates motivations for brand prominence, highlighting individual expression, prestige projection, and socio-cultural communication through consumption.

3.4.2 | Social status seeking

Consumers with a desire for social status seeking often opt for hedonistic products and prominently branded services to project prestige and distinguish themselves from others (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021). While prior research indicates a positive correlation between social status seeking and brand prominence (Pino et al., 2019), we contend that consumers' social status seeking also shapes their involvement in hospitality marketing storytelling. This influence arises from the desire for status display and self-expression, the allure of experiential and emotional narratives, and the pursuit of social validation and recognition. We also suggest that hospitality marketing storytelling involvement acts as a mediator in the relationship between customers' social status seeking and brand prominence. Thus, we posit the following:

H1. Social status seeking has a positive influence on hospitality marketing storytelling involvement.

H2. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement mediates the relationships between customer social status seeking and brand prominence.

3.4.3 | Customers need for uniqueness

Previous research indicates that consumers often purchase branded products and services to differentiate themselves from others, driven by

their need for uniqueness (Abosag et al., 2020). Need for uniqueness theory, as conceptualized by Snyder and Fromkin (1977), emphasizes the intrinsic human inclination to perceive oneself as distinct, constituting a foundational aspect of behavior. Furthermore, literature indicates that individuals with a high need for uniqueness frequently opt for unconventional choices as a means of showcasing their distinctiveness. This behavior fosters a deeper identification with the underdog narrative and lends support to brands aligned with such narratives. Moreover, studies suggest a positive association between a consumer's need for uniqueness and brand prominence (Greenberg et al., 2020). However, we propose that both the need for uniqueness and hospitality marketing storytelling involvement collectively influence brand prominence. Thus:

H3. The need for uniqueness has a positive influence on hospitality marketing storytelling involvement.

H4. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement mediates the positive relationship between a customer's need for uniqueness and brand prominence.

3.4.4 | Iconic value

The iconic value of a brand refers to the use of symbols and embodies significant universal values, resulting in its immediate recognition. Prior research has emphasized the significant impact of a brand's iconic value on brand prominence (Greenberg et al., 2020). Iconic value encompasses a brand's assets, such as beliefs and concepts, which are expressed through brand-specific sense-making and sense-giving practices, setting the brand apart from its competitors (Warren et al., 2019). Dias and Cavalheiro (2022) posited that consumers highly admire brand stories for their identity value, perceiving them as vehicles of self-expression. Despite the influence of iconic value on brand prominence, we argue that involvement in a brand's storytelling aids a consumer in understanding and appreciating the brand's iconic value. Thus:

H5. Iconic value positively influences hospitality marketing storytelling involvement.

H6. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement positively influences brand prominence.

H7. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement mediates the positive relationship between iconic value and brand prominence.

3.4.5 | Procedure

For hypotheses testing and validation, we used the partial least squares structural equation modeling approach with SmartPLS 3.2.9 software (Ali et al., 2018), following the procedure's two steps: measurement model and structural model evaluation. To ensure nomological validity, we treated the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement construct as a

second-order factor, with the first-order constructs summed algebraically (Sarstedt et al., 2019). We analysed the reflective-reflective model using the 'quan data-2' data set.

3.4.6 | Results of first-order measurement model

The measurement model for hospitality marketing storytelling involvement exhibited strong and statistically significant first-order factor loadings, indicating robust relationships between the indicators and their respective constructs. The model evaluation considered various criteria, including indicator loading, Cronbach's alpha, CR, AVE, and discriminant validity. All indicator loadings exceeded 0.696, meeting the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating a substantial relationship between the indicators and their underlying constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.71 to 0.87, surpassing the threshold of 0.70 and indicating high internal consistency and reliability. Similarly, CR values ranged from 0.83 to 0.91, further supporting the reliability of the measurement model by exceeding the 0.70 threshold. The AVE values, ranging from 0.63 to 0.76, exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.50. (Hair et al., 2019), indicating satisfactory convergent validity (see Table 6 for detailed results). In addition, the first-order measurement model showed satisfactory discriminant validity according to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, with diagonal values (square roots of the AVEs) exceeding non-diagonal values (latent variable correlations), indicating distinct constructs (see Table 7).

TABLE 6 Measurement model (first-order).

Variable	Loadings	Cronbach's alphas	CRs	AVEs
Contextual cues		0.713	0.838	0.635
CC1	0.798			
CC2	0.870			
CC3	0.714			
Emotional engagement		0.845	0.906	0.763
EE1	0.860			
EE2	0.920			
EE3	0.839			
Mental cognition		0.818	0.892	0.735
MC1	0.786			
MC2	0.879			
MC3	0.903			
Immersive experience		0.876	0.910	0.671
IE1	0.818			
IE2	0.696			
IE3	0.867			
IE4	0.868			
IE5	0.834			

3.4.7 | Results of the second-order measurement model

The second-order factor loadings of the nomological network were strong and statistically significant (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Table 8 presents the internal consistency and reliability measures. Indicator loadings ranged from 0.61 to 0.93, Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.63 to 0.88, CRs ranged from 0.78 to 0.92, and AVE values ranged from 0.48 to 0.80, meeting the acceptable criteria. The higher-order measurement model also demonstrated acceptable discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker (1981) (see

TABLE 7 Discriminant validity (first-order).

	1	2	3	4
1. **Mental cognition**	0.857			
2. **Emotional engagement**	0.249	0.874		
3. **Contextual cues**	0.323	0.313	0.797	
4. **Immersive experience**	0.540	0.222	0.196	0.819

TABLE 8 Measurement model (second-order).

Variables	Loadings	Cronbach's alphas	CRs	AVEs
Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement		0.639	0.788	0.484
Contextual cues	0.648			
Emotional engagement	0.618			
Mental cognition	0.779			
Immersive experience	0.724			
Brand prominence		0.830	0.898	0.748
BP1	0.909			
BP2	0.919			
BP3	0.757			
Social status seeking		0.726	0.844	0.644
SS1	0.784			
SS2	0.862			
SS3	0.757			
Iconic value		0.721	0.873	0.775
IV1	0.824			
IV2	0.932			
Need for uniqueness		0.882	0.927	0.809
NU1	0.865			
NU2	0.907			
NU3	0.927			

Table 9). Overall, the measurement model achieved satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2016).

3.4.8 | Results of structural model

All four direct relationships were significant, with p-values below 0.05 and t-values above 1.96 (see Table 10 and Figure 2 for detailed results), in support of H1, H3, H5 and H6. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement mediated the positive relationships between brand prominence and customer social status seeking, need for uniqueness, and iconic value, as Table 11 shows. The indirect mediation analysis based on indirect effects provided support for H2, H4, and H7, with p-values below 0.05 and t-values above 1.96 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

4 | DISCUSSION

Nomological validation of the hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale, with four dimensions and 14 items, has significant theoretical implications for hospitality marketing and consumer behavior research. Validating the dimensions—contextual cues, emotional engagement, mental cognition, and immersive experience—as a holistic measure of storytelling involvement establishes a robust foundation. This, in turn, aids in understanding how storytelling can profoundly shape consumer attitudes and behaviors. Thus, we urge

researchers to explore specific aspects resonating with consumers to advance the theoretical landscape.

4.1 | Theoretical contributions

A distinctive feature of our study is the integration of NTT and the ELM within the context of hospitality marketing storytelling. Our study establishes the complementarity between these two theoretical frameworks, confirms the effectiveness of the validated scale, and sheds light on how storytelling can be a potent elicitor of both emotional and cognitive responses. This integrative approach can prove instrumental for brands in crafting narratives that wield persuasive influence within the realm of hospitality marketing, transcending industry boundaries to offer insights applicable to diverse domains in which storytelling is a linchpin in communication strategies. Our study also provides further understanding of NTT principles, especially emotional engagement and the creation of vivid mental imagery. Our main goal was to understand how storytelling evokes emotional (heart) and cognitive (mind) responses.

Our study puts a strong emphasis on emotional engagement and thus differs from the broad approach of traditional scales. Emotional engagement in hospitality storytelling is vital, as it resonates strongly with fundamental human needs. In a world driven by connections,

TABLE 9 Discriminant validity (second-order).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Brand prominence	**0.865**				
2. Customers social status seeking	0.355	**0.802**			
3. Iconic value	0.443	0.405	**0.880**		
4. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement	0.512	0.493	0.455	**0.695**	
5. Need for uniqueness	0.469	0.486	0.498	0.452	**0.900**

FIGURE 2 Structural model.

TABLE 10 Direct relationships.

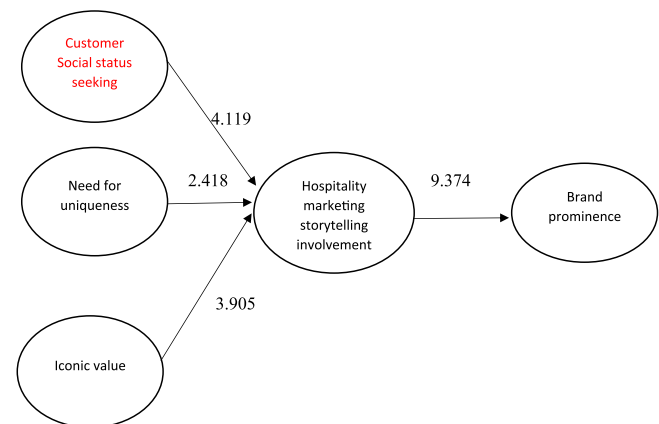| Hypothesis	Original sample	SD	T- statistics	p-values	R²	F²	Results
H1. Social status seeking → hospitality marketing storytelling involvement	0.307	0.074	4.119	0.000	0.343	0.104	Supported
H3. Need for uniqueness → hospitality marketing storytelling involvement	0.183	0.076	2.418	0.016		0.034	Supported
H5. Iconic value → hospitality marketing storytelling involvement	0.239	0.061	3.905	0.000		0.063	Supported
H6. Hospitality marketing storytelling involvement → brand prominence	0.512	0.055	9.374	0.000	0.263	0.356	Supported

TABLE 11 Mediation analysis.

Hypothesis	Original sample	SD	T-Statistics	p-values	Results
H2. Social status seeking → brand **prominence**	0.157	0.042	3.788	0.000	Supported
H4. Need for uniqueness → brand **prominence**	0.094	0.042	2.213	0.027	Supported
H7. Iconic value → brand **prominence**	0.123	0.036	3.45	0.001	Supported

consumers may seek storytelling that can fulfill their emotional desires for belonging and authenticity. These emotional connections build trust and loyalty and create enduring networks. By prioritizing emotional engagement and thus influencing consumer behavior and brand perceptions, our scales for hospitality marketing can rise above traditional scales.

The study also emphasizes cognitive processing, which is important for satisfying human needs for intellectual stimulation and meaning. As social animals, humans crave narratives that can enhance their experiences. Cognitive engagement can build a unique connection by tapping into consumers' curiosity and intellect, thus creating a more memorable engagement. When the intellectual aspect elevates hospitality storytelling beyond emotional appeal, it may provide a holistic and enriching experience that resonates with the complex nature of human cognition and social interaction. We acknowledge that storytelling can trigger emotions and influence how individuals process and retain information (Hong et al., 2022), which strengthens the theoretical foundation of our scale.

Within the frame of NTT, we establish the importance of emotional involvement and how consumers can be transported into stories relevant to their emotions. Indeed, our study shows how brands can foster consumers' sense of connection with and belonging to brands. More important, our validated scale contributes to the potency of storytelling, which acts as a persuasive tool that is relatable to consumer experiences in hospitality marketing.

In terms of the ELM, our study features the role of cognitive processing in influencing attitudes and behaviors. We emphasize how consumers' motivation and ability to process information derive from the central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Storytelling is instrumental in satisfying the basic human needs required for intellectual stimulation and meaning. We show how narratives can stimulate thought and improve the overall consumer experience. The integration between NTT and the ELM shows how cognitive engagement can be intertwined with emotional elements to establish a unique relationship between consumers' curiosity and intellect.

Relevant to the ELM, we support marketing strategies that prioritize cognitive processing. In today's competitive landscape, offering meaningful and thought-provoking narratives that can stimulate intellectual curiosity is important. Storytelling, as a marketing strategy tool, can create memorable engagement, which can boost the overall consumer experience beyond traditional emotional appeals and build trust in and loyalty to the brand.

In general, our study highlights the importance of a balanced approach (emotional and cognitive) in hospitality storytelling. Creating a holistic and enriching consumer experience is paramount, given the complex nature of human cognition and social interaction.

4.2 | Practical implications

Our validated hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale can help marketers assess consumer involvement accurately and craft stories tailored to specific target audiences, to enhance brand perception and recognition. Use of engaging storytelling techniques guided by the scale can foster a sense of belonging among consumers, thereby strengthening the bond between consumers and the brand for lasting connections. The findings underscore storytelling's pivotal role in heightening emotional experiences and brand connections. For hospitality marketers, crafting stories aligned with brand identity and values and, in turn, transforming customers into brand advocates who actively share positive experiences are strategic imperatives.

The scale can help marketers systematically assess the effectiveness of their storytelling campaigns, enabling them to iteratively monitor changes in consumer involvement over time. This feedback-driven approach facilitates dynamic content optimization, ensuring efficient resource allocation. The scale holds promise for adaptation in diverse cross-cultural marketing contexts. It could become a valuable asset for international marketers, particularly in gauging potential cultural differences in storytelling involvement. Understanding how consumers from various cultural backgrounds respond to storytelling would enable brands to craft narratives that resonate with specific cultural values, norms, and preferences. This adaptive strategy ensures a more inclusive approach, transcending cultural barriers and aligning with the core interests of international marketers.

In the dynamic digital and social media landscape, the scale should prove invaluable to marketers. By facilitating effective assessment of consumer engagement and immersion in marketing stories online, the scale offers insights for optimizing marketing strategies across diverse digital platforms. Marketers can customize stories with the specific preferences and interests of the target audience, ensuring a resonant digital presence. Indeed, fostering emotional engagement can lead to enduring connections and trust,

which form the basis for brand loyalty. We suggest that marketers craft authentic storytelling that reflects the brand's values and identity. This is because genuine storytelling resonates with consumers, creating a sense of trust and connection. We also encourage marketers to center narratives on consumers' experiences and emotions, so that consumers can relate to them, which can help build empathy and strengthen the emotional connection. Marketers should also maintain a consistent brand voice across storytelling platforms, to build familiarity and trust.

Furthermore, marketers should pay attention to understanding the elements that contribute to immersion (creation of content that goes beyond traditional storytelling) that can actively involve consumers. By strategically focusing on immersion elements, marketers can tailor narratives to elicit specific emotional responses and stimulate cognitive engagement that results in immersive experiences. This approach can enhance the precision of storytelling strategies and optimize their impact on consumer involvement, thereby contributing to overall marketing effectiveness in the dynamic landscape of hospitality marketing.

To ensure coherency and relevancy of integrating NTT and ELM principles, we suggest that practitioners consider the content creation (to ensure that the content is engaging and memorable), communication channels (to maximize audience appeal and to have properly tailored messages to different segments), engagement tactics (to reach out to consumers through emotionally driven narratives and intellectually stimulating content), and cognitive elements (reasoned thinking and decision-making). In other words, we suggest that marketers create a narrative that engages both consumers' emotional and intellectual faculties to enhance memory retention and recall and thereby reinforce the impact of their storytelling.

Marketers can also craft their brand narratives to feature relatable characters and themes. By doing so, the narratives can meet the emotional needs of consumers. Moreover, incorporating personal stories can establish a sense of authenticity and belonging, which is important to build sustainable emotional connections. To differentiate storytelling from the conventional approach, embedding storytelling that encourages reflective thinking and intellectual stimulation is also important. Narratives should provide informative content, interesting messages, or thought-provoking situations that cater to the cognitive needs of the different consumer segments.

As our study integrates NTT and ELM elements into one study, we emphasize the importance of training for marketers to understand the dual nature of storytelling—that is, emotional and cognitive engagement. Marketers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to understand how to incorporate the dual elements to create cohesive and challenging storytelling that connects with the emotional and intellectual needs of the target audience.

4.3 | Limitations and future research avenues

The hospitality marketing storytelling involvement scale, though valuable, is limited in its reliance on an online hospitality consumer sample based only on gender, potentially neglecting cultural nuances. To enhance the scale's applicability and validity, we encourage future research to delve into the impact of cultural variations on consumer responses. We call for further exploration of the nuanced interplay between hospitality marketing storytelling involvement and psychological constructs. To do so, researchers could investigate dynamics such as the dichotomy between brand love and brand hate or phenomena such as positive versus vindictive word of mouth to gain more comprehensive insights into the impacts of marketing storytelling. Also required is an inquiry into the implications of marketing storytelling on psychological constructs such as brand betrayal, postpurchase regret, and phenomena such as dark tourism. Understanding how storytelling involvement intersects with these aspects can uncover new dimensions in consumer behavior, contributing to a holistic understanding of hospitality marketing narratives. Furthermore, our study does not explore the impact of high versus low storytelling involvement on consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, future research could endeavor to shed light on how varying degrees of involvement shape consumer choices in the dynamic landscape of the hospitality sector.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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