

Original Research Article

Instagram and the Lost Identity: A Study of Residential Facades in Tehran (Case Study: Heravi, Aghdasieh, and Western Farjam Neighborhoods)*Mehdi Alirezaei¹, Amir Masoud Dabbagh^{2**}, Behrouz Mansouri³**1. Department of Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran.****2. Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Soore University, Tehran, Iran.****3. Department of Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran.**

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Abstract

Problem statement: Residential building facades in Tehran, key elements in shaping the city's urban identity have, in recent years, been subjected to the opposing forces of globalization and the pervasive influence of digital platforms such as Instagram. Together, these forces have led to profound transformations in the visual character of the city.

Research objective: This study aims to investigate Instagram's role in both promoting Iranian architectural heritage and enhancing public awareness regarding residential facade design in Tehran. The goal is to explore strategies that reduce visual fragmentation and prevent cultural erosion in the city's built environment.

Research method: A qualitative research approach was employed. The initial phase involved a critical analysis of six residential facades located in Tehran's Heravi, Aghdasieh, and Western Farjam neighborhoods. This was conducted through on-site visual observations and expert interviews with five architecture professionals. Subsequently, a systematic literature review was carried out, analyzing 21 scholarly articles to examine the global impact of social media on architectural identity and to evaluate strategies for preserving cultural heritage at a metropolitan scale. To contextualize the findings locally, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in architecture, media studies, and sociology.

Conclusion: The first phase of the study revealed a significant diversity in architectural styles and design approaches among the analyzed facades. This pronounced fragmentation reflects conflicting aesthetic preferences: on one hand, designs influenced by visually striking digital trends; on the other, globalized aesthetics often detached from local cultural and historical roots. The neglect of climate-responsive design principles further exacerbates this conflict, deepening the disconnect between contemporary facade design and Tehran's architectural heritage. The second phase demonstrated that Instagram, as a highly influential platform in Iran, plays a notable role in shaping architectural trends in Tehran. While its algorithms contribute to the visual homogenization of facades by promoting uniform design trends, the platform also holds considerable potential to disseminate sustainable, culturally aligned architectural practices.

Keywords: *Instagram, Iranian architecture, cultural heritage promotion, social media strategies, algorithmic challenges, residential facades, metropolitan Tehran.*

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the supervision of Dr. "Amir Masoud Dabbagh" and the advisement of Dr. "Behrooz Mansouri" at the Faculty of Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

In recent decades, globalization and the advancement of digital technologies have exerted a profound influence on architecture and the ways it is perceived and represented. These transformations have reshaped how built environments are designed, introduced, and consumed (Castells, 2010; Sklair, 2017). Within this context, visual platforms such as Instagram have emerged as powerful tools for architectural representation (Manovich, 2017). These media—ranging from visual platforms like Instagram to architectural magazines, websites, and other digital channels—are not merely passive conveyors of information; rather, they actively shape both public and professional tastes and even influence the trajectory of architectural practice. By prioritizing visual appeal, momentary innovation, and algorithmic popularity, they have become critical agents in redefining architectural values (Gillespie, 2018; Vastardis & Yang, 2022). While social media platforms have contributed to the democratization of architectural discourse by enabling broader participation, this democratization is constrained by a form of “algorithmic gatekeeping.” The algorithms prioritize designs that are visually striking and capable of rapidly capturing attention (Zuboff, 2019). As a result, indigenous and heritage-based architectural designs—rooted in local cultures—are increasingly marginalized, giving way to homogenized, globally-oriented styles that often lack identity (Frampton, 1983; UNESCO, 2011). This trend, observable in many parts of the world, threatens architectural diversity and pushes design toward uniformity. Consequently, vital questions arise regarding the preservation of cultural identity in urban spaces (ICOMOS, 2020; Dayaratne, 2017). Architectural theories such as Critical Regionalism (Frampton, 1983) and approaches within environmental psychology (Rapoport, 1969; Madanipour, 2017) emphasize that buildings are more than physical structures—they serve as vessels of cultural memory and as expressions of collective identity. However, the unrestrained proliferation of ephemeral and visually driven aesthetics in the digital realm poses a serious threat to these deeper architectural languages. Instead of contextually

grounded, culturally resonant designs, at present, numerous promotional designs can be observed that, despite their considerable visual appeal, lack local meaning and cultural authenticity. Although these designs may initially capture the viewer’s attention, their disconnection from indigenous cultural contexts prevents them from establishing a deep and lasting connection with the community. (Amiri, 2017). This paradox has turned social media into a double-edged sword: while it offers a platform to showcase cultural diversity, it simultaneously commodifies architecture and undermines its identity-rich dimensions. Among Iranian cities, Tehran stands as a prominent example of how globalization has impacted architecture and urban culture (Madanipour, 2017). Rapid urban development over the past half-century has transformed the metropolis into a dynamic laboratory of architectural experimentation, featuring a blend of traditional Qajar and Pahlavi styles alongside modern, postmodern, and contemporary designs (Khatami & Boujari, 2022). Nevertheless, in recent years, Tehran’s residential facades—which once reflected indigenous techniques such as brickwork, tilework, and climate-conscious design—have increasingly been shaped by global trends and commercial pressures. Instagram, as a widely used visual social platform in Iran, has played a crucial role in this shift. By favoring algorithmically optimized, surface-level design trends, the platform promotes styles that prioritize visual appeal over cultural depth. This dynamic not only disrupts the city’s visual coherence but also severs the emotional and cultural connection between citizens and their built environment (Dayaratne, 2017; UNESCO, 2021). Despite Tehran’s importance as a point of intersection between architectural heritage and digital culture, limited research in Iran has specifically addressed Instagram’s role in shaping architectural tastes and preferences. Most existing studies focus on the broader impact of social media on consumer behavior and cultural adaptation (Zuboff, 2019; Vastardis & Yang, 2022). Consequently, key questions about how algorithms marginalize Iranian architectural heritage—and the implications of this marginalization for the urban fabric—remain

largely unexplored. This gap is especially significant in the context of residential facades, which not only reflect but actively construct social and cultural identity. This research seeks to fill that gap by addressing the following fundamental question: How can Instagram be purposefully utilized to revive Iranian architectural identity in the design and promotion of residential facades in Tehran—to resist visual homogenization while reinforcing cultural continuity?

Research Background

The article “Visuality peaks, function lasts: an empirical investigation into the performance of iconic architecture on Instagram by” Alaily-Matar et al. (2024) investigates user interaction patterns with prominent architectural works on Instagram. By analyzing over 264,000 posts and 140,000 images from 2011 to 2019, the authors identified two dominant trends: buildings celebrated for their striking visual design initially receive intense online attention, which quickly diminishes; in contrast, structures that emphasize cultural or functional aspects sustain audience engagement over time. Their analysis revealed that visually driven posts tend to experience rapid declines in visibility after an initial spike, whereas content centered on cultural values promotes longer-term user interaction. In the study “Embodied spaces in digital times: Exploring the role of Instagram in shaping temporal dimensions and perceptions of architecture”, Wagiri (2024) explores how Instagram, through its visual mechanisms, mediates between spatial-temporal experiences and digital narratives. Employing a phenomenological approach, the author argues that Instagram transforms physical encounters with architecture into dynamic visual representations. The findings underscore Instagram’s impact on architectural design, emphasizing aesthetics tailored to the platform’s visual culture while raising concerns about the commodification and distortion of functional and historical dimensions. López-Chao & Lopez-Pena (2020), in their article “Aesthetical appeal and dissemination of architectural heritage photographs in instagram,” analyze the role of Instagram in shaping perceptions and dissemination

of architectural heritage. Their study examined 180 images tagged #patrimonioarquitectonico, identifying key factors influencing user interaction, including human presence, compositional framing, and color schemes. Cold color palettes, single-point perspectives, and moderate aesthetic quality were found to attract the highest engagement. Notably, building facades were the most frequently shared content, indicating a narrower focus on specific architectural elements. The study “A content analysis of architectural atmosphere influencing mindfulness through the lens of Instagram” by Thampanichwat et al. (2023), investigates how architectural settings depicted in Instagram posts using the hashtag #mindfulness contribute to heightened states of awareness. Analyzing 354 images, the researchers found that traditional Japanese architecture (46.89%), biophilic design (33.05%), and contemplative Buddhist spaces (20.06%) were most strongly associated with mindfulness. Key architectural features that fostered mindfulness included tranquil spaces, natural materials, soft color tones, and views of trees or nature.

The article “The influence of customer inspiration on social media marketing toward architectural service purchase intention” by Wissen & Anathan (2023) employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to assess how consumer inspiration functions as a mediating variable. Analyzing responses from 395 Instagram users in Bandung, the study focused on three factors: utilitarian content, hedonic content, and the personality trait of openness. Results showed that these factors significantly enhanced inspiration, which in turn had a direct and positive effect on purchase intention. The study concluded that utilitarian content—especially innovative and practical information—was the most effective trigger for consumer inspiration, while hedonic content and openness served complementary roles. The findings underscore the importance of strategically crafted, inspirational content in social media marketing within the architectural sector.

In “Great New Design: How Do We Talk about Media Architecture in Social Media”, Savic (2019) examines how architects, designers, and policymakers engage with the concept of media architecture on Twitter.

The study involved over 450,000 tweets from 250 architecture-related accounts using hashtags such as #mediaarchitecture and #MAB. Utilizing machine learning techniques including Word2Vec, SOM, and LDA, the research identified ten core themes: future cities, human-centered design, digital infrastructure, machine learning, and placemaking, among others. Savic (*ibid.*) critiques the homogenization of media architectural discourse and warns against the repetitive reproduction of buzzwords that may result in a limited, self-referential dialogue. The study calls for data-driven approaches to uncover emerging trends and issues in media architecture. Taken together, these studies suggest that social media—particularly Instagram and Twitter—play a complex, dual role in the representation and reinterpretation of architectural experience. On one hand, they emphasize visual allure and hedonic content to capture users' attention rapidly yet temporarily; on the other, content with cultural depth and utilitarian value tends to foster more sustained and meaningful engagement. The notion of consumer inspiration emerges as a pivotal psychological response to content stimuli, shaped by both content quality and user personality. Overall, the reviewed literature highlights the pressing need for rethinking architectural marketing strategies in digital contexts—strategies that strike a balance between visual seduction and cultural substance, and that deliver content that is both inspiring and grounded in identity.

Literature Review

• **Instagram: A threat to architectural identity**

Instagram, through its ease of access to architectural content and emphasis on visually appealing imagery, has significantly influenced public taste in architecture (Onanuga, 2022). The platform's algorithms tend to amplify modern and visually striking designs, which has gradually led to the dominance of global styles over local architectural expressions (Thampanichwat et al., 2023). This algorithmic preference not only alters public expectations but also nudges user preferences toward architectural forms often misaligned with indigenous cultural identities (Cotter, 2019). As a result, architects—responding to market pressures—often adopt

popular aesthetic trends, thereby reinforcing Instagram's growing impact on architectural design (Bedford, 2022).

• **The gradual erosion of Iranian architectural identity**

The erosion of Iranian architectural identity has emerged as a pressing concern in contemporary architectural discourse. Traditional Iranian architecture, characterized by intricate geometric patterns, use of local materials, and climate-responsive design rooted in regional culture, embodies a unique identity (Majabi, 2007, 64). However, neglecting these principles in favor of international styles has led to the gradual weakening of the nation's rich architectural heritage. Furthermore, the visual dissonance resulting from the juxtaposition of incongruous styles has produced urban environments lacking cohesion and cultural continuity (Ameri Sefat, 2016). The lack of educational content on platforms like Instagram exacerbates this identity erosion. Many Iranian users—especially those without architectural expertise—may lack a deep understanding or appreciation of the country's architectural legacy. In the absence of informative and context-rich content, visual preferences are shaped largely by captivating posts that often conflict with the fundamentals of traditional Iranian design (Alaily-Mattar et al., 2024). This gap underscores the urgent need for strategic initiatives aimed at raising awareness and fostering appreciation for indigenous architectural practices.

• **Iranian architecture through the lens of Instagram**

Despite the challenges it presents, Instagram holds undeniable potential for counteracting the erosion of Iranian architectural identity. Visually engaging and educational content can serve as powerful tools for architects and cultural promoters to guide public preference toward design approaches inspired by Iran's architectural heritage (Izadpanah & Gunce, 2021). For instance, sharing high-quality images of buildings that successfully integrate traditional elements into modern functions can visually demonstrate the relevance and beauty of vernacular design in contemporary contexts. When paired with narrative captions that articulate

cultural values and historical context, such posts can deepen users’ understanding and appreciation (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). Interactive features on Instagram—such as polls, Q&A sessions, and stories—can significantly enhance the impact of this content by stimulating curiosity and encouraging user engagement (Dwijendra & Yogantari, 2018). Ongoing dialogue between architects, content creators, and users creates opportunities to address misconceptions, foster cultural literacy, and cultivate a community that values and supports authentic architectural expressions (Chan et al., 2020). Collaborations with influencers, cultural institutions, and educational organizations can further amplify these efforts (MacDowall & Budge, 2021). Influencers who are invested in cultural preservation can lend credibility

and expand audience reach (Manovich, 2020). Partnerships with universities and museums can ensure content accuracy and provide access to rich archival and theoretical resources (Dhanesh et al., 2022). These collaborations also facilitate the organization of events and campaigns that highlight the importance of Iran’s architectural heritage and raise public awareness (Thomas et al., 2020). Finally, attention must be paid to Instagram’s algorithmic biases, which favor high-engagement, visually stimulating content. Therefore, crafting material that is simultaneously informative and aesthetically compelling is crucial (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021). Professional photography, compelling narratives, and visually striking design can significantly enhance the visibility and impact of heritage-oriented content (Chaudhary, 2021) (Fig1).

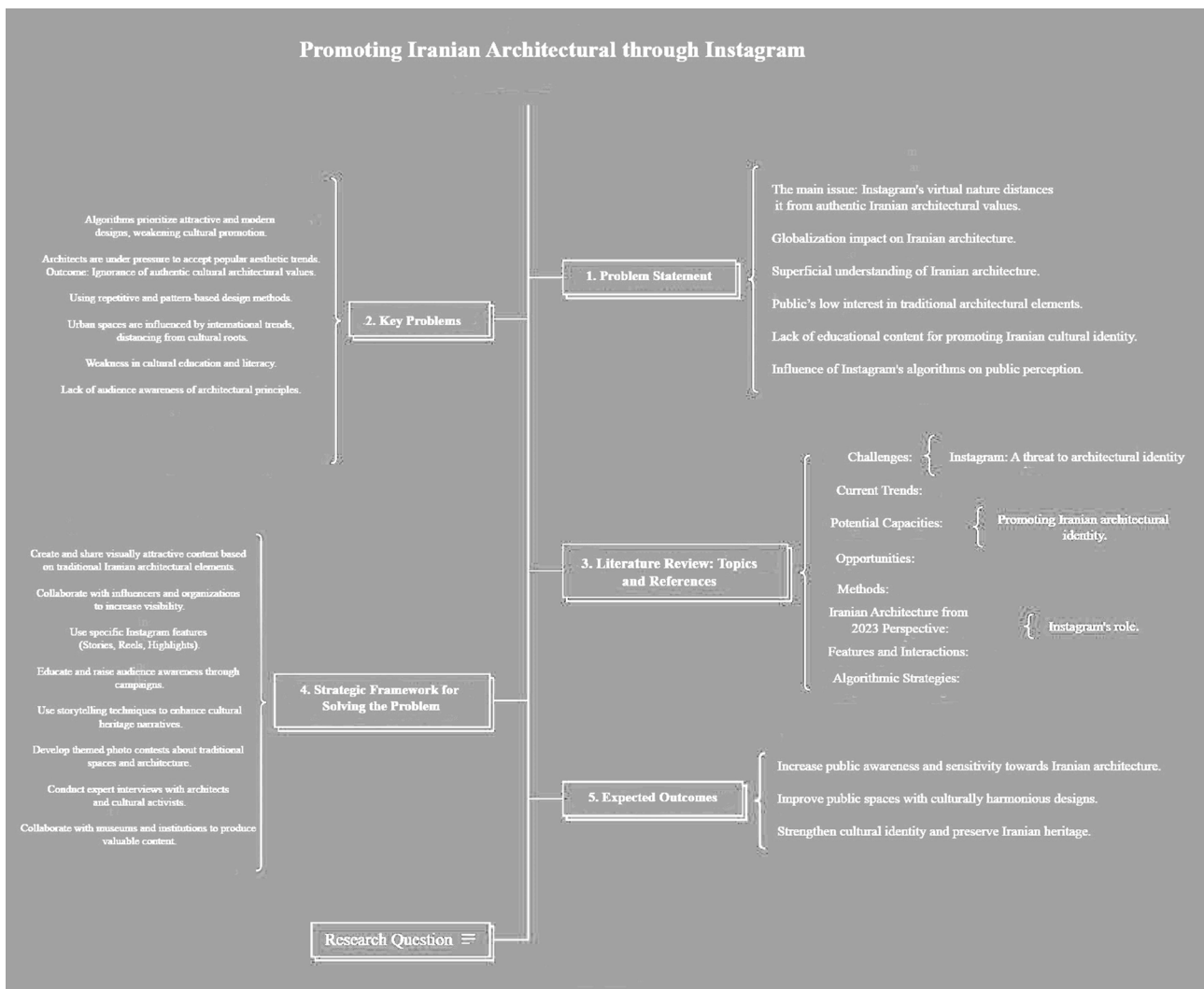


Fig. 1. A Strategic framework for promoting Iranian architectural heritage on Instagram. Source: Authors.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the role of Instagram in promoting Iranian architectural heritage and enhancing public awareness regarding residential facade design in the metropolitan context of Tehran. Given the relative novelty of this topic within domestic academic discourse, the research was structured around two complementary sub-studies to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. The first sub-study focused on empirical data collection through field observations and semi-structured interviews with architectural experts. In contrast, the second sub-study aimed to establish a conceptual framework by analyzing reputable international sources and localizing relevant strategies through expert dialogue across disciplines including urban sociology and media studies. Participant selection for the in-depth interviews was guided by a multilayered, systematic set of criteria. Initially, architectural professionals with proven expertise in one or more of the following areas were targeted: visual chaos in urban environments, Iranian architectural heritage and vernacular design principles, or facade design with cultural identity considerations. Five experts with at least five years of experience in academic teaching, architectural research, or practical design and supervision were identified based on their professional CVs, published work, and recommendations from academic advisors. In addition to academic and professional credentials, a key selection criterion was the ability to analyze architectural phenomena within the context of digital transformations—specifically the influence of Instagram on public aesthetic preferences in facade design. A preliminary screening interview ensured that only candidates with sufficient familiarity with social media platforms were invited to participate in full interviews. Geographic relevance (i.e., active engagement in Tehran), availability for face-to-face or virtual interviews, and willingness to participate voluntarily were further considerations in finalizing the participant pool. The sampling method employed was purposive sampling, which involved

creating a preliminary list of eligible university faculty members, architectural consultants, and independent professionals. After initial outreach, information exchange, and CV assessment, suitable candidates were selected based on both their availability and fit with the research criteria. To enrich the interdisciplinary scope of the second sub-study, three additional experts were brought in: two urban sociologists with a focus on cultural space and spatial consumption, and one media scholar with a deep understanding of Instagram's algorithmic mechanisms. These contributors were likewise selected through purposive sampling, with support from academic advisors to ensure theoretical alignment across disciplines. Interview data were collected in two phases. In the first sub-study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five architectural experts in parallel with a field analysis of six residential buildings across three selected neighborhoods in Tehran: Heravi, Aghdasieh, and Western Farjam. Each expert participated in two to three sessions, depending on availability and thematic relevance. In the second sub-study, the same five experts were re-engaged for follow-up interviews to review preliminary findings, and the three interdisciplinary experts were added for a broader analytical dialogue. Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke. In the familiarization phase, interview transcripts were fully transcribed, read thoroughly, and accompanied by margin notes to capture an initial sense of the narratives. During initial coding, meaningful statements and keywords were extracted from each paragraph to reflect underlying concerns and implicit insights regarding the relationship between architecture and social media. These codes were then grouped into clusters to form emergent thematic patterns. To ensure the credibility of findings, two complementary strategies were applied: member checking, where participants reviewed the coded data for interpretative accuracy; and intercoder reliability, where two independent researchers reviewed the

codes to minimize potential bias. To ground the analysis within a broader theoretical context, 21 international scholarly sources were reviewed on the impact of social media on cultural identity and vernacular architectural promotion. The findings of the present study were then compared with these external references to strengthen the analytical foundation.

Research Findings

In the first sub-study, the facades of residential buildings were evaluated based on a set of qualitative criteria, including aesthetic design, cultural integration, materiality and construction techniques, contextual harmony, functional performance, innovative elements, and environmental responsiveness. A series of site-specific photographs were collected from three distinct neighborhoods in Tehran—Heravi, Aghdasieh, and Western Farjam—and analyzed in collaboration with a panel of five experts: three academics specializing in architectural theory and two practitioners with

experience in facade design and urban construction (Tables 1, 2 & 3).

Field Findings: Analysis of Residential Facades in Heravi, Aghdasieh, and Western Farjam Neighborhoods

• Heravi Neighborhood

In Heravi, fieldwork was conducted on three residential buildings at three distinct times of day—morning, noon, and evening. The visual analysis, supported by expert interviews, revealed a prevalent combination of modern formal elements (such as expansive glass surfaces) and classical ornamental features (including stylized columns and exaggerated capitals). Experts attributed this hybridization to developers’ deliberate attempts to attract attention on social media platforms, particularly Instagram. As noted by one expert (Expert 2), such façades reflect a “response to evolving Instagram-driven aesthetics,” resulting in heightened visual clutter and a lack of aesthetic cohesion in the neighborhood’s architectural language¹.

Table 1. Codes and themes derived from the analysis of residential facades in Heravi Neighborhood, Tehran. Source: Authors.



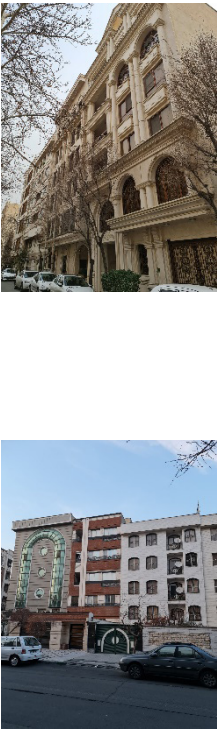
| Core Analytical Code | Description | Sample Case Illustration |
|--|--|---|
| Urban Disruption; Neglect of Iranian Architectural Vocabulary | The oversized circular motifs in this façade disrupt the continuity of the urban fabric and bear no relationship to traditional Iranian architectural forms, reflecting a disregard for vernacular design continuity. |  |
| Excessive Use of Forms; Lack of Narrative Design | Overuse of circular shapes, conflicting with rectangular masses, creates visual tension. The design lacks narrative depth and fails to convey cultural or symbolic meaning. | |
| Thermal Inefficiency; Poor Climatic Adaptation | The polished stone façade absorbs heat, increasing reliance on mechanical cooling systems. The absence of climate-responsive shading features reduces thermal performance. | |
| Mass Production Aesthetic; Lack of Artistic and Textural Identity | The use of beige stone as the dominant material reflects industrial-scale production and sacrifices Iran’s artisanal richness. The façade lacks visual diversity and artistic texture. | |
| Enclosed Façade; Social and Cultural Disconnect | The opaque and sealed-off design alienates residents from the street and local community. The lack of culturally rooted design elements contributes to social disconnection. |  |
| Urban Fragmentation; Individualism Over Architectural Coherence | The juxtaposition of a minimalist modern building (left) and a heavily ornamented neoclassical one (right) creates a disjointed urban scene. Design choices prioritize individualism over urban harmony. | |
| Excessive Ornamentation; Absence of Symbolic or Cultural Narrative | Overdecorated balconies and ornate iron railings (right) overshadow simplicity, while the left façade, though modern in its angular glass geometry, lacks symbolic or artistic depth. | |
| Suboptimal Thermal Performance; Minimal Strategies for Climate | The modern façade (left) features unshaded glazing unsuitable for Tehran’s hot summers. While the projecting balconies on the right provide some shade, they lack reflective materials or vegetation for energy efficiency. | |
| Repetitive Standard Materials; Limited Creative Use of Texture | The stone façade on the right reflects repetitive, mass-produced patterns, diminishing perceptual value. The left side, using glass and metal, prioritizes cost over material diversity and durability. | |
| Socio-Cultural Disjunction; Exclusivity Over Community Engagement | The right-hand building conveys a message of exclusivity and luxury tailored to elite preferences, distancing itself from communal architectural traditions. The left-hand modernist structure aligns with global design trends, overlooking Tehran’s cultural complexity. | |

Table 2. Extracted codes and emerging themes from the analysis of residential Facades in Aghdasieh Neighborhood, Tehran. Source: Authors.

| Core Analytical Code | Interpretive Description | Sample Case Illustration |
|---|---|--|
| Overscaled Design; Incompatibility with Urban Context | The repeated use of neoclassical elements such as oversized arches and columns aims to evoke grandeur but appears exaggerated at the residential scale. The building overwhelms its modest urban surroundings. |  |
| Monotonous Expression; Excessive Luxury Symbolism | Repetition of classical columns and arches results in visual monotony and a lack of design innovation. Despite attempts to project opulence, over-decoration diminishes the aesthetic value. | |
| Lack of Shading; Minimal Climatic Consideration | Although large windows align visually with the classical theme, the absence of shading devices leads to increased solar heat gain. Stone, while thermally massive, is not integrated with passive cooling strategies. | |
| Durable but Lifeless Material Palette | The use of stone adds durability but gives the building a cold and rigid appearance. Decorative details hint at craftsmanship, but mass production and repetition reduce the design's authenticity. | |
| Disconnection from Local Culture; Emphasis on Exclusivity | The neoclassical style lacks resonance with the everyday lives of Tehran residents, reflecting a borrowed identity. The design promotes exclusivity rather than social interaction with the community. | |
| Fragmented Urban Identity; Absence of Unified Design Language | The façade displays stylistic fragmentation as if each section belongs to a different era. The combination of brick, white stone, and large glass panels creates a disjointed urban appearance. | |
| Visual Incoherence; Absence of Aesthetic Narrative | The mixture of rectangular and arched windows—especially the large arched glass panel—creates visual tension. The lack of thematic focus or cohesive storytelling results in aesthetic dissonance. | |
| Energy Inefficiency; Climatic Mismatch | Extensive glass surfaces in the central zone raise heat gain and reduce energy efficiency. Other areas also lack shading features, indicating poor adaptation to Tehran's variable climate. | |
| Imbalanced Material Composition; Weak Traditional-Modern Fusion | The attempt to balance traditional (brick) and modern (glass) materials falls short. White stone lacks texture and warmth, while greenish glass creates an industrial tone ill-suited to housing. | |
| Cultural Disconnection; Eclectic Style over Contextual Design | The design lacks cultural reference. A dominant industrial glass panel overshadows the subtle use of brick that could have reflected local heritage. The fragmented form disregards community-based architectural values. | |

• **Aghdasieh Neighborhood**

In Aghdasieh, a discernible preference for modern and minimalist design was observed. Two case study buildings exhibited typical features such as cubic volumes and glass façades; however, several functional inconsistencies were noted. For instance, the absence of deep balconies and proper shading solutions contradicts Tehran's climatic demands. Interview data suggested these contradictions stem from market pressure to produce visually impressive facades aligned with social media trends, even at the expense of climatic suitability and user comfort².

• **Western Farjam Neighborhood**

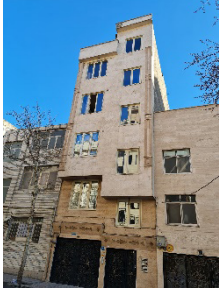
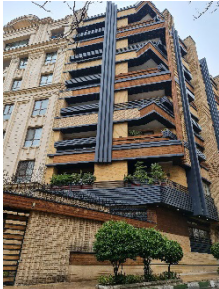
Despite being situated in a neighborhood with comparatively moderate socioeconomic status, Western Farjam showcased a striking juxtaposition between traditional materials (like brick and rough-cut stone) and contemporary forms. According to experts (Table 3), the dominant issue was the visual discontinuity between old and new structures,

undermining neighborhood cohesion. Social media, particularly Instagram, was cited as a motivating factor for retrofitting older buildings with contemporary façades—aesthetic upgrades aimed at achieving a more “up-to-date,” globalized visual profile³.

• **Summary of field observations and expert interviews**

- Dominance of Globalized Aesthetic Models: Across the three neighborhoods, despite their distinct economic and cultural contexts, residential façades are predominantly shaped by global aesthetic trends, often tailored for Instagram visibility rather than contextual appropriateness.
- Neglect of Climatic and Local Design Principles: Thematic codes highlight a widespread disregard for climate-responsive design, such as effective shading, suitable material use for Tehran's environment, and context-sensitive placement of openings (doors/windows).
- Stylistic Fragmentation: All three neighborhoods

Table 3. Extracted codes and emerging themes from the analysis of residential facades in Western Farjam Neighborhood, Tehran. Source: Authors.

| Core Analytical Code | Interpretive Description | Sample Case Illustration |
|---|---|--|
| Fragmented Urban Identity; Lack of Environmental Integration | The minimalist façade disconnects visually from its surrounding context. Its flat, sterile surface breaks continuity with neighboring buildings, contributing to an incoherent streetscape. |  |
| Visual Monotony; Minimal Symbolic or Narrative Value | The beige, uniform façade lacks decorative depth and visual interest. Limited ornamentation at the entryway fails to offer symbolic meaning or aesthetic richness. | |
| Energy Inefficiency; Disregard for Climatic Features | Absence of shading devices over windows results in increased heat gain, especially during Tehran’s hot summers. Although stone offers thermal mass, it is not integrated into passive design. | |
| Durable Yet Lifeless Materials; Lack of Textural Balance | The beige stone provides durability but gives the building a harsh, uninviting look. While the intricately designed metal doors on the ground floor show artistic value, they clash with the overall plainness. | |
| Cultural Ambiguity; Prioritizing Function Over Community | The design is rooted in functionalism, lacking cultural expression and vernacular references. The absence of interactive features creates a sense of detachment from the social fabric. | |
| Urban Contrast; Overbearing Contemporary Presence | The bold, modern structure starkly contrasts with its adjacent classical building. While angular balconies and vertical elements create a unique identity, the scale disrupts urban cohesion. |  |
| Bold Aesthetic with Visual Imbalance | The façade combines expressive balconies and strong vertical lines for dramatic effect. The mix of wood, brick, and black steel brings warmth but challenges visual harmony through material tension. | |
| Effective Shading; Sustainable but High-Maintenance Materials | Deep balconies offer functional solar shading, and materials like brick and wood enhance insulation. However, such natural materials demand constant maintenance in Tehran’s climate. | |
| Diverse Material Palette; Durability Concerns | A layered mix of brick, wood, and black steel produces a modern yet context-aware appearance. Despite its appeal, steel components risk corrosion if not properly maintained. | |
| Individualism Over Community; Lack of Cultural Anchoring | The design promotes a luxurious, individualized lifestyle through expensive materials and bold forms. The lack of open, communal spaces distances the building from Tehran’s traditional social values. | |

reveal a disjointed stylistic mixture—from classical and neoclassical to minimalistic and vernacular forms—often combined incoherently, leading to visual disharmony and identity disintegration in the urban fabric.

- Influence of Market Dynamics and Digital Aesthetics: According to interviewees, social media marketing plays a critical role in shaping design preferences. The drive for “Instagrammable” façades encourages developers to prioritize maximum visual impact and media appeal, often at the expense of cultural identity or climatic adaptability.

- The Reformative Potential of Social Media: Despite these concerns, several experts acknowledged Instagram’s potential as a cultural tool. If utilized intentionally—through educational content and public-facing architectural discourse—Instagram could evolve from a platform of aesthetic homogenization into a medium for promoting climate-conscious and culturally rooted creativity.

As part of the second sub-study, the research sought to address the following central question: How can Instagram and its network dynamics contribute to the structuring and promotion of contextually appropriate and culturally rooted facade design models in Tehran’s residential architecture, while simultaneously raising public awareness and positively shaping user preferences? To explore this, a thorough investigation of relevant international literature was conducted, which informed the development of a conceptual framework (Fig. 2).

Following a comprehensive review of the existing literature and the identification of the constructive role social media—particularly Instagram—can play in promoting architectural design aligned with local environmental, climatic, cultural, and vernacular conditions, the research moved toward contextualization. To adapt the general theoretical propositions to the specific socio-cultural, spatial, and climatic context of Iran, and more precisely, that of

Table 4. Multi-layered analytical matrix for comparative assessment of residential facades, interview themes, and digital influences across three neighborhoods. Source: Authors.

| Analytical Dimension | Heravi | Aghdasieh | Western Farjam |
|--|---|---|---|
| Dominant Stylistic Trend | Neoclassical-modern hybrid with ornamental-expressive elements | Transparent, simplified modern minimalism with a lack of climatic depth | Attempted aesthetic renewal via disjointed fusion of classical and contemporary |
| Type of Visual Disorder | Incoherent forms; glossy materials clashing with neutral backdrops | Lack of depth and shading; climatic detachment in media-driven form | The visual discontinuity between old and retrofitted façades |
| Key Social & Digital Drivers | A desire for online visibility through extravagant façade design | Algorithmic pressure to reproduce “sleek” and detached global styles | Façade renovation promoted via popular social media pages |
| Keywords from Expert Interviews | “Virtual luxury branding”, “superficial classicism” | “Climateless minimalism”, “digitally templated taste” | “Unprecedented renovation”, “modern skins on traditional cores” |
| Role of Climate in Design | Largely ignored; materials chosen for visual appeal only | Climate factors omitted in favor of media-centric form | Occasional use of traditional materials without climatic or functional logic |
| Connection to Iranian Architectural Identity | Total rupture; classical elements used as a mere visual reference | Failure to contextualize modern design; cultural depth stripped away | Attempted synthesis, but lacking conceptual and formal coherence |
| Algorithmic & Networked Taste Influence | High – façade as an Instagram branding tool | Very high – conformance to global digital aesthetics | Medium-high – driven by trending imagery and social influence |
| Corrective Potential via Social Media | Requires critical content on authenticity in form | Potential for localized minimalism through educational architecture pages | Opportunity to redefine renovation around tradition; promote local exemplars |
| Underlying Interpretive Theme | Aesthetic disconnection from environmental and cultural roots | Reduction of design to decontextualized minimalist forms | The tension between past and present in the absence of cohesive urban policy |
| Style Diversity and Coherence | High diversity with strong formal fragmentation | Moderate diversity with a lack of conceptual depth | High diversity with historical and visual rupture |
| Frequency of Key Themes in Interviews (%) | 68% globalized aesthetics, 87% algorithmic influence, 75% climate neglect | 85% algorithmic influence, 80% climatic disregard, 65% mimetic minimalism | 78% incoherent stylistic fusion, 70% media influence, 60% policy vacuum |

metropolitan Tehran, interviews were conducted with eight experts from the fields of architecture, urban culture, and media. Through these interviews, a set of theoretical propositions, analytical codes, and key themes were extracted to support the development of locally grounded strategies (Fig. 3).

Discussion

This study examined six residential facades across three distinct neighborhoods in Tehran—Aghdasieh, Heravi, and Western Farjam—to uncover the complex interplay between globalization, cultural heritage, and the growing influence of digital platforms like Instagram on façade design. The findings indicate that residential facades in Tehran serve as reflective surfaces for broader architectural transformations

in Iran, where the increasing commercialization of design and algorithm-driven visibility have gradually marginalized traditional architectural languages. While Instagram has facilitated the homogenization of architectural styles and diminished cultural distinctions, it also holds significant potential to reframe residential facades as expressions of collective identity and sustainable architectural approaches. The study argues that, beyond functioning as a purely visual medium, Instagram can become a meaningful tool for the revitalization and reinterpretation of architectural identity in Tehran, especially within the realm of residential architecture.

• Fragmentation of architectural identity: Algorithmic homogenization in Tehran’s facades

The analysis of the six case studies highlights a sharp



Fig. 2. Core themes identified from the literature on the positive influence of social media (Instagram) in promoting architectural design and enhancing public awareness. Source: Authors.

fragmentation of architectural identity in Tehran. This fragmentation stems directly from the impact of globalization and the algorithmic logic embedded in digital platforms. Globalized aesthetics have begun to eclipse local design principles, creating stark contradictions in the visual language of urban facades. For instance, a comparison between the third case’s extravagant neoclassical style and the fifth case’s algorithm-optimized minimalism vividly illustrates the rift between architectural form and cultural substance. Instagram’s algorithms, which reward high-engagement content (likes, shares), have redirected architectural design priorities toward visual spectacle over cultural narrative. This echoes Kenneth

Frampton (1983) ’s critique of Critical Regionalism, in which he warns that globalization threatens to erase the specific cultural character of regions. As scholars such as Zuboff (2019) and Gillespie (2018) observe, Instagram functions as a powerful taste-making mechanism, guiding architects and developers toward designs that prioritize viral appeal over contextual integrity. The outcome is a proliferation of visually captivating but culturally detached facades, contributing to an increasingly placeless urban fabric.

• **The erosion of sustainable principles: A detachment from tradition and climate**

One of the more alarming findings concerns the decline of climate-responsive design in Tehran’s contemporary

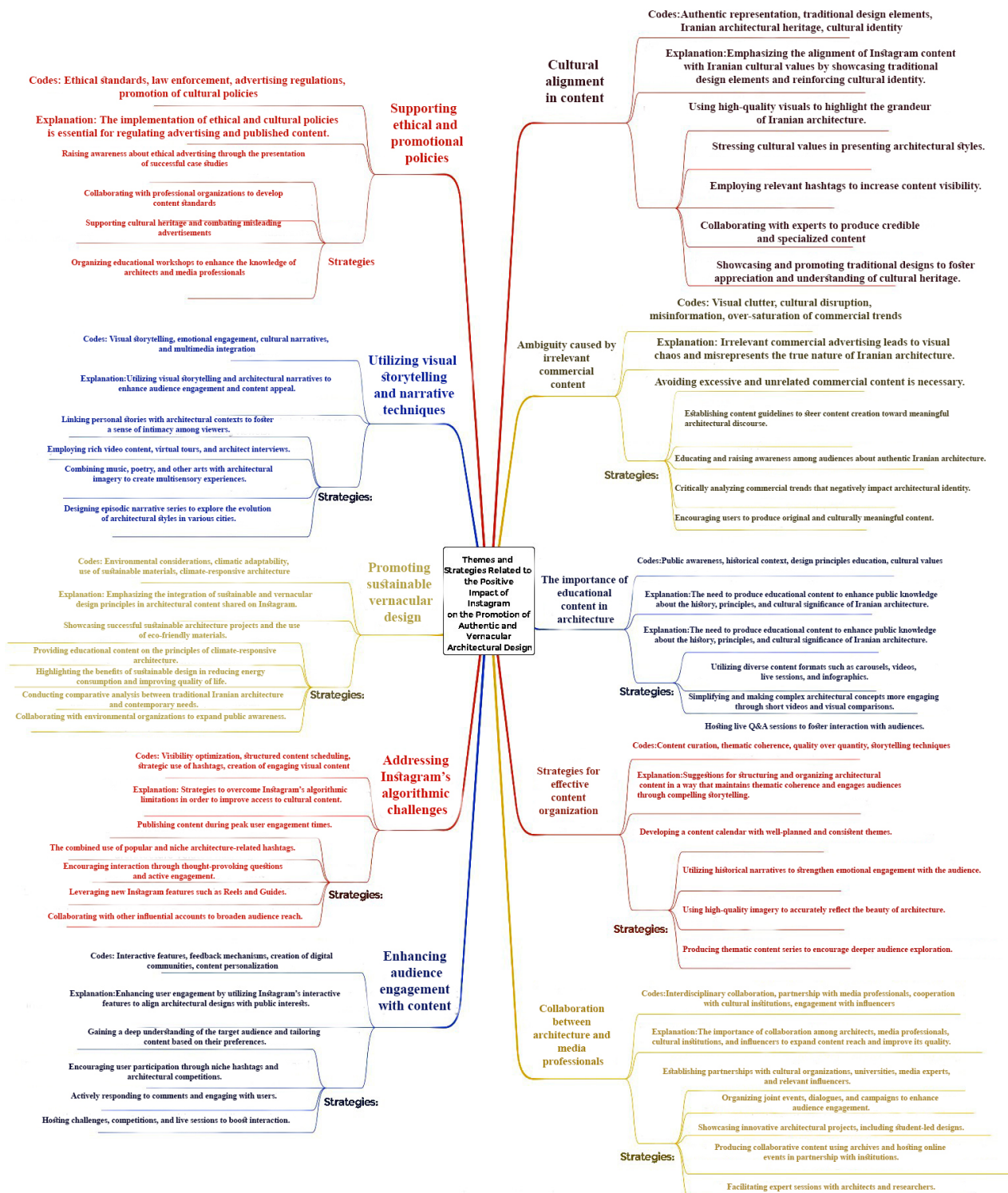


Fig. 3. Themes and analytical codes derived from expert interviews to inform practical strategies for Instagram’s positive impact on promoting culturally authentic and vernacular residential façade design in Iran. Source: Authors.

residential facades. Traditional Iranian architecture has long integrated environmental strategies—such as wind towers, shaded courtyards, and locally adapted materials—to ensure thermal comfort and sustainability (Madanipour, 2017). However, the studied cases reveal a trend toward neglecting these principles. Excessive

use of unshaded glass facades (e.g., Case 4) and climate-insensitive minimalism (e.g., Case 5) exemplify this shift.

• Instagram’s dual role in architectural transformation: Homogenization and potential for revival

The second component of the study investigates the

ambivalent role of Instagram in shaping Tehran's architectural landscape. While the platform accelerates stylistic homogenization, it simultaneously presents a unique opportunity for democratizing architectural discourse and raising public awareness about sustainable, context-sensitive design. As shown in [Table 1](#), Instagram—when used strategically—can become a powerful medium for reshaping architectural narratives in Tehran. For example, showcasing high-quality images of facades that successfully integrate vernacular elements with contemporary function can serve as a counterbalance to aesthetic uniformity. Case 6 illustrates this point well, utilizing natural materials and angular balconies to embody both tradition and innovation. Instagram's storytelling tools—such as Reels and Carousels—enable architects and cultural practitioners to communicate the historical, environmental, and aesthetic values of such designs in accessible and engaging formats. These findings align with [Thampanichwat et al. \(2023\)](#), who emphasize the crucial role of visual narratives in advancing sustainable and culturally resonant design. Addressing the influence of algorithmic curation on façade homogenization requires coordinated action among stakeholders. Active participation from architects, cultural institutions, digital influencers, and policymakers is essential for producing content that both educates and inspires. Collaborations with museums and universities can enhance accuracy and cultural depth, while partnerships with influencers can extend reach and visibility ([MacDowall & Budge, 2021](#)). Campaigns highlighting traditional features—such as brickwork, tile motifs, and climate-adapted designs—can illustrate how Iranian architecture can thrive within the contemporary urban context while maintaining its authenticity. [Table 2](#) presents practical strategies to enhance Instagram's role in architectural discourse. Diversifying content formats—such as live Q&A sessions, educational posts, and interactive features—can help engage broader audiences and foster meaningful dialogue. Focusing on topics like the evolution of Tehran's architectural identity, the benefits of sustainable design, and the cultural value

of traditional architectural elements can elevate public consciousness and gradually influence design decision-making within the city.

Conclusion

The residential facades of Tehran stand at a critical intersection of historical tradition, rapid globalization, and the expanding influence of digital culture. In this multilayered and evolving context, the preservation of cultural identity—particularly in an era increasingly shaped by algorithms—emerges as a complex and pressing challenge. Findings from this study demonstrate that Instagram, as one of the most widely used visual social media platforms in Iran, plays a dual role in shaping the architectural identity of residential facades across the metropolis. On one hand, its algorithm-driven ecosystem encourages the proliferation of aesthetic homogeneity through visually appealing but culturally superficial designs. On the other hand, the platform holds significant potential as a medium for reinvigorating Iranian architectural identity and fostering deeper engagement between architects, citizens, and cultural heritage. While Instagram's visual culture often promotes an architecture that seeks instant attention rather than contextual resonance, the platform's interactive and educational capabilities offer a valuable opportunity to reconnect design with deeper cultural and environmental values. Over the past decades, Tehran's residential facades have undergone a dramatic transformation, becoming fragmented reflections of a city negotiating between diverse architectural languages and a drift from its environmental and cultural roots. Facades are not merely outcomes of urban change—they are active agents in shaping it. In this dynamic, Instagram emerges as a powerful cultural actor, with the capacity to influence not only how buildings are perceived but also how they are conceived. With strategic use and thoughtful content creation, the platform can become a tool for promoting designs that honor Tehran's

historical identity while embracing contemporary innovation. It thus has the potential to contribute to a more cohesive visual identity for the city. A key insight from this research is the tension between visual appeal and conceptual depth in Tehran's residential architecture. As case studies illustrate, the prioritization of surface aesthetics over deeper cultural and environmental content has gradually undermined the contextual richness that once defined Iranian architecture. Façades dominated by either excessive ornamentation or context-less minimalism are symptomatic of a wider trend toward architectural commodification, intensified by Instagram's emphasis on immediate engagement and image-centric content. However, this does not imply that Instagram is inherently detrimental to architectural discourse. On the contrary, when leveraged thoughtfully, it can become an instrument for cultural advocacy. Through the dissemination of high-quality, contextually aware content, architects can guide public preferences toward designs that are both aesthetically compelling and culturally grounded. The platform's interactive features also enable dynamic dialogue between architects, citizens, and other stakeholders—fostering a more inclusive and participatory architectural culture. By democratizing architectural discourse, Instagram can empower urban dwellers to play an active role in shaping their built environment. Given Instagram's expansive reach and its high levels of engagement, it holds the potential to become a transformative medium for redefining residential façade design in Tehran—not merely as physical structures, but as carriers of collective memory and symbols of urban identity.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

Endnotes

1. Expert 3: Some property owners, disregarding both the local climate and the visual coherence of the neighborhood, pursue designs that are merely aimed at going viral on Instagram. Elements such as Roman

columns and ornate capitals quickly attract attention in such contexts, prompting developers to adopt them regardless of appropriateness.

2. Expert 1: The minimalism currently seen in the façades of the Aghdasieh district reflects a reductive form of minimalism that merely imitates Western aesthetic norms. For designers to develop an authentically Iranian interpretation, they must also consider Tehran's arid climate and the cultural patterns of everyday life among its residents.

3. Expert 5: In the western Farjam area, many property owners try to align the appearance of their buildings with trends popularized by Instagram decor or construction pages. As a result, semi-old buildings clad in ultra-modern materials end up bearing no contextual relation to their surrounding urban fabric.

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