

Social Media Influence on Real Estate Decision-Making Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

In a world where TikTok, Instagram, and algorithmic aesthetics prevail, real estate has evolved beyond traditional measures of square footage and location. Instead, it morphs into an exercise in presentation, perception, and performance. This paper takes a plunge into examining the dynamic continuums of engagement between social media and real estate, specifically how generational meta-preferences and Gen Z's norms of interacting with tightly curated digital lifestyle content have impacted housing aspirations, market behaviors, and the real estate industry's responses. Through analysis of trending reports, subject-matter expert evidence, and available market data, this case study examines the influence of perceived housing desirability on attitudes and behaviors, the cultivation of a comparison culture, and social media's expectations for designing and presenting spaces with visual narratives in mind. The case study analyzes which features younger buyers value - given demographic proportions - based on property visibility in "camera-ready" formats, aesthetic cues, and the "Instagrammability" of spaces. It further considers how real estate professionals are shifting business practices, gesturing toward short videos, emotionally loaded marketing, and curated brand identities that enter the consciousness of this generation. These shifts promote visibility and engagement while raising questions about affordability, loyalty, and longevity.

Keywords: Gen Z home buying trends; Social media influence on housing; Instagrammable home design; Real estate marketing strategies; Digital age housing preferences

INTRODUCTION

An oddly provocative question seems to arise when a TikTok house tour gathers millions of views within just a couple of hours: Are these truly living spaces, or are they spaces designed in an artificial aesthetic? In the digital age, Gen Z's conception of a "dream home"

often extends beyond practicality, location, or price, reflecting the influence of lighting, color schemes, and social-media-driven aesthetics. David Franco notes that, "cultural and social changes that have affected modern architecture have often materialized through discrete and ambiguous moments of disruption, moments at which reality upsets architecture's prevailing values by introducing new images and languages" (1). Gen Z is the first generation raised entirely on smartphones and social media; accordingly, inspiration for homes comes less from architectural magazines or realtors and more from online sources. Instead, inspiration flows from perpetual video loops generated by algorithms and curated Pinterest boards.

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With the proliferation of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube, young people may form visual tastes and lifestyle expectations prior to entering the housing market. Reference 2 notes, “Short-form video content has become a game-changer, allowing realtors to give quick property tours, highlight unique features, and capture the interest of potential buyers within seconds.” For Gen Z, a dream home extends beyond practical living; it reflects personal identity through camera-ready, visually curated spaces. From neutral palettes to gaming setups, modern kitchens, and indoor-outdoor terraces, homes are increasingly designed to appeal to both everyday life and social media presentation.

Notably, these aesthetic principles continue to shift. In just a few years, gray-washed floors and shiplap walls gave way to Japandi minimalism, biophilic design, and dopamine décor - not due to market fundamentals but because creators popularized them on social media. A micro-influencer can make a “hot take” famous; within a week, thousands of comments may follow, and the topic becomes widely discussed in relation to future home design. Following, as Reference 2 adds, “[w]ith targeted ads on Facebook, Instagram, and Google, realtors can reach highly specific audiences, maximizing their marketing dollars.” Social media does not merely reflect taste; it helps construct it.

Quick feedback loops from content to consumer imagination are a distinctive feature for Gen Z. Many teenagers and young adults see a lot of “dreamy” kitchen layouts or Instagram-infamous reading nooks, even if they’ve never walked into a similar place. Moreover, many influencers and users construct virtual dream homes - moving from mood boards and countless Pinterest saves to sandbox games such as *The Sims* and *Minecraft* - where interior design and layout become central to gameplay. Many of these living spaces are assembled online well before being realized in real life. Reference 3, for example, supports: “*Minecraft*, known for its blocky landscapes, has become a playground for young architects. Players design intricate structures, showcasing a level of creativity that extends beyond the confines of traditional architectural norms. This creativity might serve as inspiration for the real-world architects and urban planners of the future.” Social media platforms are reshaping Gen Z’s perception of what makes a “dream home,” shifting the focus from traditional functionality to aesthetic-driven, camera-ready features, impacting both personal expectations and the real estate industry. This trend is significant

because Generation Z is no longer merely a passive recipient of digital design influences. On the contrary, they are the ones creating these influences. Their tastes now influence staging for online listings, product marketing, and architectural planning. For instance, developers keep an eye on what design elements become viral on TikTok. Things like curvy arches, a grand statement staircase, or comfy coziness tucked away tend to linger in the minds of buyers and are then shared with others. As more Gen Zers prepare to rent, buy, or design homes, the digital aesthetics they have been exposed to will likely underpin demand and reshape industry priorities.

This study examines how social media is actively reshaping Gen Z’s notion of the dream home. It investigates platform-driven trends, the influence of repeated exposure to curated spaces on perceptions and cultural expectations, and the resulting implications for the real estate industry. Having grown up immersed in digital media, this generation may now approach housing with a new consideration: is the home camera-ready?

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Literature and Scholarly Research

A literature-based research approach was utilized to develop the theoretical basis of the current project. The reviewer consulted books, scholarly articles, peer-reviewed journals, and industry reports to find evidence about various aspects of Gen Z’s consumer habits, social media, and real estate trends. A literature-based approach permitted the use of both empirical and expert evidence, enabling claims to be supported by reliable sources rather than anecdotes. By summarizing the data, the research part of the project positioned Gen Z’s housing preferences among different cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Cultural and Media Analysis

Cultural and media analysis was used to investigate how social media sites influence Gen Z’s housing ideals and consumer behavior. Sites such as TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube were treated as cultural texts with emphasis on algorithmic visibility, influencer content, and the viral nature of design trends. The cultural and media analysis approach allowed me to examine how aesthetic standards, the culture of comparison, and aspirational images are created and circulated online. The research examined

how one layer of digital media enables real-life expectations of housing and lifestyle through a Gen Z frame of reference. All data analyzed were publicly available through social media posts, articles, and other open sources. Therefore, this research did not require submission for Institutional Review Board approval or exemption.

Case Examples and Observational Analysis

A case-based and observational analysis was conducted to examine how abstract cultural forces influence actual design preferences and industry practices. Examinations on current design trends, such as Japandi minimalism, dopamine décor, and biophilic design, demonstrated patterns in Gen Z's aesthetic choices and responses to curated interior environments. Next, looking at digital tools and games, namely *The Sims*, *Minecraft*, and *Animal Crossing*, displayed various virtual spaces where younger audiences engage with home design to experiment. Lastly, viewing real estate marketing strategies, such as staging homes per direct-to-consumer influencer-style brands, demonstrated how the industry is responding to digitally influenced preferences. The methods and approaches used produced tangible examples that operated specifically between high-level cultural theory and concrete, real-world realities.

RESULTS

The Rise of Real Estate in the Digital Age

For Generation Z, social media has become a primary venue for refining and sharing aesthetic preferences, particularly for home design. Whereas former generations traditionally consumed print magazines, home design shows, and real estate advice, Gen Z is now exposed to living spaces mainly through digital footprints. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube democratize interior design by giving a voice to contributors - interior designers, micro-influencers, casual users, and everyday people - to shape design in real time. The rapid adoption of trends through short videos, snapshots, and moodboards fed into a loop of quick rise and quick extinction between creators and their audiences.

This trend contrasts with how prior generations, such as Generation X, developed tastes. For Gen X, home design might have drawn from long-standing cultural narratives and physical experiences, such as roaming around model homes or design expos. More to

the point, the value systems behind those designs were mainly about practicality, longevity, and long-term investment. In contrast, Gen Z's visual preferences tend to be more fluid, shaped by social media engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and virality, which place greater emphasis on visual appeal than on long-term functionality.

Table 1 summarizes a study of social media posts about home aesthetics, showing that strong engagement often occurs when the home features striking landscaping and when photos are digitally enhanced for viewing. For example, an ultra-modern house with a waterfall island posted to @ibuilddevelopers collected more than 103,000 likes and 484 comments, representing peak engagement for that style. Another post by @al_subhanious featuring a modern home with a basement and home theater earned nearly 79,000 likes. These posts frequently target younger audiences with hashtags such as #trending and #spring. As far as the young generation is concerned, interaction with such posts denotes that these high-end immersive features are aspirational, cinematic, and socially shareable.

However, the trend is not solely about glitz or rapid editing. Table 1 highlights simpler feeds, such as @zimmer.estates (promoting rooftop chill zones and wellness perks) and @schultzarchitecture (showing sharp angles and bold eaves); these accounts also achieved high follower counts, suggesting younger buyers want spaces woven into daily life. Reference 4 finds that houses deliver mood - calm, buzz, or clean zen - rather than strict labels, and that estimated sale price tracks with feelings of excitement, coherence, and pleasantness.

Gen Z homebuyers place significant weight on the experiential and emotional qualities of a space, such as ambiance, flow, and overall vibe, alongside traditional physical features like square footage or number of bedrooms. Reference 4 states that "estimated sale price was influenced by excitement, coherence, and pleasantness," while renters showed concerns for "complexity, arousal, coherence, and pleasantness." Put simply, Gen Z weighs how lively, balanced, and enjoyable an area feels just as much as the number of bedrooms or square feet. Therefore, the emotional experience of a place to younger buyers is now almost as important to them as the exterior architecture.

In contrast, Gen Z's visual choices are somewhat fluid and created around the immediacy of being measured by social media - likes, shares, and viral popularity - all of which push for aesthetics geared to

Table 1. Engagement with Home Features in Relation to Perceived Gen Z Interests

Instagram Account	House Features Highlighted	Engagement (Likes)	Gen Z Appeal	Design Keywords
@ibuilddevelopers	Ultra-modern home with waterfall island, wide open views	103,000+	High-concept design + cinematic luxury	Waterfall Island, open plan, sleek
@al_subhanious	Basement theater and entertainment space in a modern layout	79,000+	Aspirational leisure + immersive lifestyle vibe	Smart lighting, home theater, cozy luxe
@zimmer.estates	Rooftop terrace, wellness amenities, abstract/unique architecture	Moderate-high	Mental health focus + unique personality expression	Wellness, rooftop, bold lines
@schultzarchitecture	Contemporary style with high ceilings, indoor-outdoor flow, and sharp geometric structures	Moderate	Design-forward appeal with minimalist drama	Open flow, geometric, sculptural
@trillionarestates	Sculptural curved sanctuary home on a cliff with a living cascade (waterfall element)	2,533	“Dream home” fantasy + luxury in nature	Cliffside, curved, luxury sanctuary
@tross3drealtor	Rustic home 30 min from the city with a game room and minimalist vibe	48,000	Escape vibe + multifunctional modern-rustic mix	Minimal rustic, entertainment, calm escape
@luxquisit	Neoclassical mansion with dreamland vibes and lush greenery	1,783	Fantasy lifestyle + timeless elegance	Green space, grand scale, open plan

Specific design elements and keywords (e.g., “*modern farmhouse*,” “*Japandi*”) stimulate engagement across multiple accounts. The findings suggest that engagement is influenced not only by the physical attributes of a home but also by the way features are framed, branded, and disseminated through digital vetting processes.

hitting you in the visuals as opposed to any kind of long-term functionality. Recent research demonstrates the importance that aesthetic considerations have on housing preferences, particularly among younger populations. Cetintahra and Cubukcu found that sale price was influenced by excitement, coherence, and pleasantness, whereas rental price was affected by complexity, arousal, coherence, and pleasantness. According to those findings, stimulating, harmonious, and pleasant feelings that neighborhoods give to Gen Z create an emotional impact on the valuation of homes. Simply put, younger buyers place considerable weight on how spaces feel and present, beyond just physical characteristics.

Overall, these findings highlight a distinct generational gap in design preferences: Gen Z values a “vibe” that reflects their emotions, while Gen X continues to view style as an integral part of daily living. Beyond questions of taste, social media amplifies visibility and demand. For instance, Instagram exposes viewers to a constant stream of striking images and

audio cues, in which even fleetingly relatable posts can capture attention within seconds. This dynamic has given rise to the concept of photo-friendly rooms, such as neon-lit gaming spaces, minimally decorated bedrooms, and cozy reading nooks, valued both as personal retreats and as shareable content designed to engage others.

With this attention in mind, rooms emphasize lighting and mood rather than solid architecture or the kind of comfort earlier generations valued. For Gen Z, an exciting way to engage in home design on the digital side is in inventive video games such as *The Sims* and *Minecraft*. In these open virtual worlds, users explore creations by experimenting with floor plans, color schemes, furniture layout, roof angles, and more—without financial cost or hiring an architect.

Exploring virtual houses reframes not only how users attend to, shape, and discuss notions of beauty but also how tastes develop. The open form of these genres of gaming really encourages people to think big in 3-D, and that imaginative freedom often stands in excess to

the stricter confines of what is permissible around real estate development. In short, these sites do not simply reflect Gen Z sensibilities; they have become media in which Gen Z communication itself influences and shapes design culture, turning isolated impressions into shared trends. In an equally quick manner does content spread in the digital realm. Today, a trending look can be old-fashioned the next week; kitchen or wallpaper styles in previous generations tended to persist for years.

The fast-moving digital scrapbook not only guides individual buyers but also pulses through the housing market itself, nudging agents, builders, and interior pros to rethink the colors, shapes, and materials that will earn a double tap from this new wave of owners.

What Gen Z Wants: Trends and Preferences

An analysis of popular Instagram house tour videos provides a visual and conceptual framework for understanding the Gen Z dream home. In essence, superposts with views ranging between 1.2-23 million - share a common design language, one that is modern, fluid, and cinematic. It is a conscious move, arising from an online value system where design choices are influenced by camera-ready visuals and social-theoretic

validation.

The videos consistently favor open-concept layouts and transitions that blur the boundary between indoor and outdoor spaces. Figure 1 shows the house @ Faye showcased to 1.5 million viewers; it features an outdoor BBQ and hangout space adjacent to a butler’s pantry, shifting from static ceremonial spaces toward versatile cooking and seating arrangements that create visual drama. Additionally, this Instagrammable blend of minimalism and glamour returns in @ RomanFamilyHome’s 23-million-view post: formal dining rooms have been displaced by versatile ones that consider lifestyle and visual composition equally.

Figure 1 shows that light and material choices - such as marble islands with warm-toned cabinetry, and LED integration - contribute to interiors that are visually striking, technologically responsive, and aligned with Gen Z’s preference for spaces that showcase personal style and camera-ready appeal. Similarly, @ KellyLeigh’s 13.3-million-view video features hidden functionality: a broad fireplace with space behind the cabinetry for a TV, this design melds traditional fixtures with integrated technology, producing an elegant, low-profile visual presence.

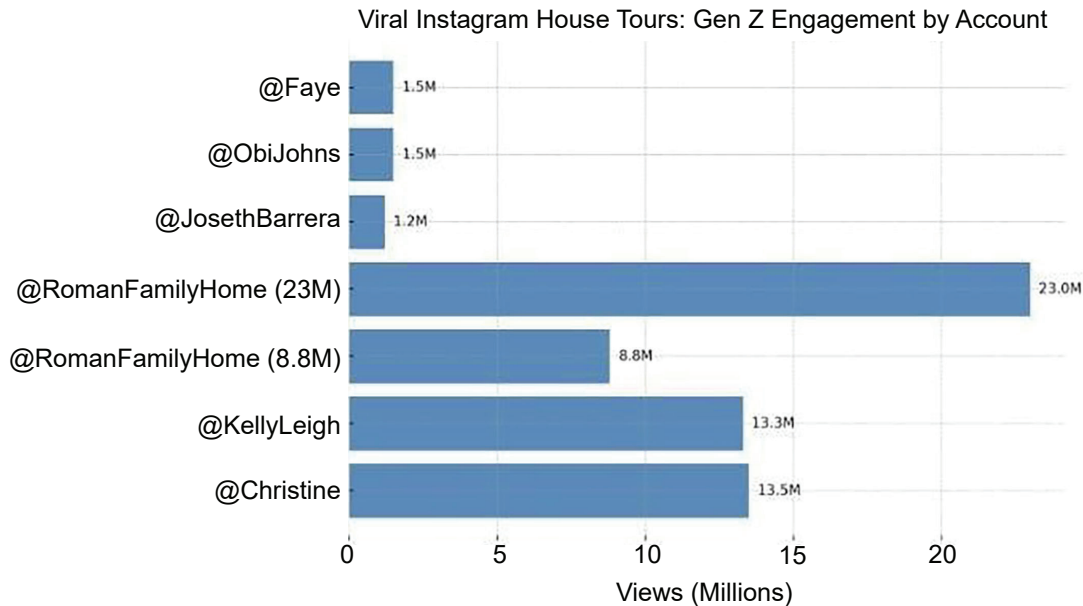


Figure 1. Viral Instagram House Tours: Gen Z Engagement by Account. Instagram has the capacity to easily stimulate mass popularity trends through mini house tours. The scope of reach spans from smaller accounts that attract steady engagement to larger creators, such as @RomanFamilyHome, with over 23 million views. This demonstrates the viral potential of visual housing content and how social media enables home design and features to become aesthetic currents that resonate as cultural standards among Gen Z.

The posts state that Gen Z appears to appreciate novelty, interactivity, and an element of surprise in interior design. The structural engineer Christine, whose videos have garnered 13.5 million views, showcased a house with a huge barn-style sliding wall concealing a secret playroom, therefore straddling a fine line between architecture and experience. As illustrated in Figure 1, examples such as the @zimmer.Estates rooftop wellness terrace and @schultzArchitecture's indoor-outdoor designs highlight how Gen Z homes prioritize playful, experiential, and socially shareable features rather than traditional formality.

Figure 1 highlights characteristics that may appeal to Gen Z, such as open-concept layouts, rooftop terraces, and multiple lounge areas with hidden rooms. Each of these characteristics is not focused on fixed, compartmentalized spaces, but adaptable spaces that are visually interesting to create environments that interact with daily life and allow them to tell stories on social media. The intended playfulness, camera-ready aesthetic, and interactivity suggest that Gen Z's housing preferences are shaped by digital exposure and an interest in experience, rather than by traditional ideas of functionality or formality.

This novel visual culture, sustained by creators and algorithms, is restructuring the paradigms of home ownership and fantasy. For example, many Gen Z consumers place less emphasis on permanence in home design and more on curation and contemporary, zeitgeist-driven aesthetics. With so many eyes and algorithms controlling what is viewed, the way we design the house is now an interactive spectacle with aesthetic choices having to satisfy the masses rather than private sensibilities.

These results clarify Gen Z preferences and indicate a shifting paradigm for real estate marketing and development. Builders and agents must consider issues like what the floor plans look like on video, what happens to materials when lit with filters, and how unique indoor features, such as secret doors and infinity showers, may trend on social media. All in all, this data supports the idea that social media is not just a way to present houses, but a platform for Gen Z's developing view of aspirational living.

Most viral TikToks and Instagram house tours favor themes that appeal to Gen Z - primarily open concepts, prominent focal features, and fluid spaces that flow from kitchens to living areas: spaces flow from the kitchen to areas usually defined as living interiors. For example, a viral tour of the Roman Family Home

(about 8.8 million views) features sliding glass doors and wooden beams that combine rustic cabin elements with modern finishes and wooden beams of a rustic sort of outdoor elegance, with a vernacular cabin feel, yet uplifting modern gratification. The emphasis is on fluidity rather than fixed function, a distinction that shapes how spaces are used socially and represented online.

Modern urban minimalist trends, white kitchens, marble countertops, and bold cabinetry, have been prominent in top-viewed kitchens of 2023 by creators such as Joseth Barrera, Poonam Torkzadeh, and Jennifer Cruz. LED lighting has become popular for accenting islands and cabinetry, as highlighted in many house tours. The emphasis on "soft modern" palettes - think beige flooring, herringbone backsplashes, and off-white stone - creates a warm yet contemporary vibe that feels both aspirational and approachable.

Smart technology integration and unique architectural details also stand out. Figure 1 points to hidden TVs (Kelly Leigh's living room), secret playrooms behind barn doors (Architect Engineer, Christine), and bold marble cooktops with gold hardware all reflect the intersection of innovation and luxury. Outside areas are also given care, with barbecue pits, fire pits, and greenery accentuating the indoor-outdoor link. It is notable that formal dining rooms and private offices are largely absent from viral home tours, suggesting a shift away from compartmentalized, traditional layouts toward more flexible, multifunctional spaces.

While these data describe an idealized modern home, they also reflect a socio-economic context: upper-middle-class households in urban and suburban settings. The increasing affluence of the upper-middle class is well documented, and the rise of informal dining spaces beyond viral tours suggests a waning acceptance of formal layouts.

From the above, one can infer that today's "dream home" prioritizes design cohesion, photogenic details, and social utility over traditional functional priorities. Houses such as these are made to be shared: every corner has been considered with purpose, maximized for the photographic opportunity. The reality for most people differs considerably from these aspirational spaces, but their influence remains significant: as Gen Z engages with virtual design games and house tours on social media, their expectations for real estate are increasingly woven into a hyper-visual domestic ideal.

Games such as *The Sims*, *Minecraft*, and *Animal*

Crossing provide tools for experimenting with home and community design. Players can create anything from minimalist modern homes to cozy cottages to bizarre castles, and share them on social media or within game communities. These games allow experimentation with architectural styles, interior design, and even neighborhood planning at a level of detail and customization often unavailable in real life, further blurring the lines between virtual and real spaces.

In addition to building houses in *The Sims*, users can furnish and decorate them with thousands of different items, allowing them to create spaces that are a reflection of their own preferences and current design trends. Real-world “dream homes” are aspirational but sometimes unachievable, and the game’s limitations, such as a four-story height cap and the requirement for expansion packs for specific aesthetics, highlight both the creative potential and the challenges of digital design. Even more flexibility is provided by *Minecraft*, whose block-based building system allows for the construction of large, complex structures, though those who prefer realism may find the game’s pixelated look to be a drawback. With thousands of items for customizing homes and neighborhoods, *Animal Crossing* encourages players to create aesthetically pleasing and socially shareable spaces. The game focuses on both indoor and outdoor decoration.

These digital spaces act as testing grounds to experiment with and mold personal design preferences. Posting images or videos of these digital homes on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or Pinterest reinforces the concept that houses are more than just living spaces; they’re also places to express oneself and perform online. This trend clicks with Gen Z, who are used to mixing their online and offline selves. Because of this, the looks and elements that become popular in these games, such as open layouts, stark contrasts, tweaked lighting, and one-of-a-kind architectural touches, tend to spill over into real-world home design trends. Social media’s focus on visuals speeds up this process even more.

Psychological and Social Effects

Real estate agent Robbie Randolph observes that the constant exposure to perceived perfection on social media has reshaped industry thinking and established new norms that diverge from traditional conceptions of “home.”

Gen Z’s constant exposure to visually perfect homes online has redefined what “house envy” means

today. Swan notes, “Heavy social media use has been linked with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor sleep, lack of motivation, and poor social skills” (2). Usage of the International Society for Technology in Education based formats of TikTok and Instagram has transformed what was once just an occasional peek at a neighbor’s home into endless involuntary scrolling through unattainable lifestyles, further contributing to our inability to focus on reality through digital comparison of others and perception of their lifestyles.

Studies substantiate this observation of psychological stress associated with digital comparison.

Reference 6 found that “in all articles reviewed, a simple correlation was found between [social comparison] on [social networking sites], envy, and depression.” One respondent in the reference’s survey echoed this, saying, “Sometimes I feel bad about my own apartment after seeing those perfect homes on TikTok.”

The “Instagrammable home” - spaces designed for online display - has become part of what many Gen Zers want to live in. Reference 7 states, “Social media is changing design. Clients now want spaces that look good on Instagram more than spaces that are purely functional.” So strong is the push to stay “on trend” that these young renters commonly redecorate their bedrooms in order to maintain their social media validity.

Reference 7 suggests that a growing number of clients want their homes to be instantly ready for photographs, driving a desire for bold, envy-inducing rooms designed to be shared online. This has reduced interest in formerly standard features - such as formal dining rooms or dedicated home offices - which are often seen as less photogenic than an all-pink kitchen or a neon-lit flex room.

Many Gen Z prospective buyers face a gap between aspirational housing seen on social media and what they can realistically afford, creating tension between desire and financial reality. Reference 8 explains, “The most significant headwind for Gen Z prospective buyers is affordability, as home prices and mortgage rates remain prohibitively high and inventory critically low.” Reference 9 reveals a frustration in this gap: “91% of Gen Z individuals are skeptical about their ability to afford a home, and [many] underestimate the true costs associated with homeownership.”

The demand to curate homes for social media is changing interior design and altering expectations about living spaces and identity. Reference 5 indicates,

“Heavy social media use has been linked with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor sleep, lack of motivation, and poor social skills among Gen Z.” There exists a tension between aspiration and access. This tension reveals the changing relationship with ‘home’ that is mediated by the screens that are frequently used. This cultural phenomenon reflects a transformation in how Gen Z experiences home, with both positive and negative consequences.

DISCUSSION

The rapid growth of social media has transformed real estate marketing, particularly for younger buyers. Agents now act as content creators, producing short videos with popular music, transitions, and narratives to engage users.

Rather than relying solely on MLS listings and professional photography, realtors now present homes as experiences. One agent observed that TikTok and Instagram are “the new front door” for today’s homebuyer. Reference 13 provides insight: “TikTok gave me visibility, and I could give the audience value.” This shift highlights a basic change: Discovery is no longer passive; it combines personalization with algorithms. Agents must act like influencers and provide content that feels natural and leads to sales.

Many realtors are seeing more engagement and better-quality leads in their sphere through this digital landscape. Tracey provides additional insight: “TikTok has completely changed my life. There were days I got two or four hundred inquiries for one apartment. All of my business comes from TikTok—I got 100% of my business from TikTok almost instantly” (7). The success of this method points to an important recognition: buyers are not just buying properties, but also lifestyle, ambiance, and the notion of belonging. Buyers get an emotional attachment to listening to what they’ve seen either in an aspirational way or in a relatable way, before they’ve seen the home in person. That emotional connection has changed staging: agents and designers now prepare homes to appeal both to in-person walkthroughs and to the camera. Reference 10 conveys the idea that “[m]ost of my clients now ask how something will look in a photo before they care about how it feels day to day.”

Reference 11, therefore, indicates a convergence of interior design and social media psychology. Attention to clean lines, symmetry, and colors that “pop” on screen has taken precedence over some traditional

functional considerations. Staging a space is no longer about creating a neutral environment; it is increasingly about creating a brand.

For Gen Z buyers, visual appeal and emotional resonance often take precedence over purely functional considerations. Homes must perform both as livable spaces and as platforms for personal expression and social sharing. Reference 12 reports, “We’re thinking about the Instagram shot as much as we are about the walkthrough. Clients mention it in every consultation.” Real estate agents have morphed from selling square footage to curating an experience. The language of listings has shifted from technical descriptors like “3 bed, 2.5 bath” to emotional ones such as “sun-drenched breakfast nook” or “spacious boho sanctuary.” Wofford’s study addresses this topic as well: “Lifestyle phrases like ‘entertainer’s dream’ or ‘Instagram-worthy kitchen’ absolutely drive more clicks, shares, and showings” (10).

The language we draw from captures aspirational lifestyles and allows buyers to envision themselves living in the context. For many, that “vibe” is the deciding factor in the purchasing process, especially Gen Z, whose identity is tied to the environment. In fact, aesthetic alignment can easily outweigh traditional aspects like layout or distance to work. One buyer indicated that when determining a property, their considerations included a house that not only fulfilled their practical needs but also contributed to their brand and online presence. Reference 14 articulates, “With the rise of social media, today’s buyers seek homes that showcase well online, look good in photos, and fit their personal aesthetic.” This connects to a cultural observation: the members of Gen Z are digital natives, and therefore a home is less about simply what they live in and more about how they express themselves, something to lay claim to and showcase, embrace, and share.

Consequently, builders are revising plans and detailing to be camera-friendly, with lighting adaptable to digital presentation and simplified finishes. Reference 10 mentions, “We’re living in the era of digital real estate, where technology has ushered in a wave of change, redefining how people discover, buy, and rent properties. In this respect, there is an architectural reaction to a digital trend. Just like in the earlier parts of the century when houses were designed around TV rooms or open concept kitchens, houses in the future may be designed around what appears best in somebody’s newsfeed. This prompts another set of

questions: Are we designing with real life in mind or with the lens? And what happens when aesthetics shift as quickly as algorithmic trends do? Some developers have begun to experiment with “creator-ready” homes, featuring integrated ring-light access, built-in vlogging stations, and smart lighting presets to assist content creation. Reference 15 specifies, “Technology continues to transform the housing market, with buyers expecting more digital tools and smart features than ever before.”

If this becomes the norm, homes may be designed less for daily function or resale value and more for content creation and lifestyle marketing. This could definitively change the definition of “livability” in the next 10 years. This phenomenon indicates a cultural realignment in which emotion, identity, and technology increasingly influence major life decisions, including housing.

CONCLUSION

Social media is no longer a passive backdrop; it now sits at the foreground of how Gen Z envisions, compares, and selects housing. Members of this generation do not merely scroll through houses; they digest curated experiences, internalize idyllic aesthetics, and form perceptions of success and self-worth via others’ digital home displays. This dynamic has created a housing market that must adapt both functionally and aesthetically, where visuals, vibe, and relatability are weighed alongside square footage and price. From agents to developers in real estate, the adaptation is on the fast track. Realtors increasingly position themselves not only as marketers of properties but also as presenters of lifestyle, tailoring their content to resonate with digitally native audiences. From short-form video, curated content, and architecture that lends itself to camera-ready design, the industry is evolving to meet the expectations of a generation of consumers shaped by the endless scroll.

This change poses both challenges and opportunities. Digital comparison has created new psychological pressures and widened the gap between possibility and affordability, but it has also democratized access to real estate knowledge and exposed Gen Z to endless global design possibilities that previously existed in exclusive circles. Moving forward, the real estate industry must maintain equilibrium, leveraging social media as an opportunity for connection and education, while remaining grounded in three critical realities: budget, function, and authenticity. There is no question

that the way “home” is defined is changing, and Gen Z is entering the market eyes wide open: phone in hand. “Home” is no longer simply a place to live but a projection of self, carefully curated for viewing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this work.

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