

The Influence of Social Media Platforms on the Design of Houses in the State of Kuwait

Dr Fawzi A. Al-Zamil^{a*} and Dr Ahmed M. Alawadhi^b

*^aInterior Design Department, College of Basic Education, Ardiyah,
State of Kuwait; ^bInterior Design Department, College of Basic
Education, Ardiyah, State of Kuwait*

Fa.Alzamil@paaet.edu.kw; Amh.Alawadhi@paaet.edu.kw

Widespread access to smartphones, the internet and social media has made information about building and design widely available, but this raises challenges for designers and engineers, who must be prepared to work with clients who bring predefined requirements and judgments. This research used an online survey to gather quantitative data from one hundred Kuwaiti citizens who were in the process of designing and building their future house; this data is presented in the form of numerical values, which are easily exhibited in the form of charts and tables. This research confirms the heavy usage of social media by Kuwait's general public, with younger age groups depending on it the most; overall, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat were used the most. The research shows that social media plays a major role in raising awareness about home design and building, with users looking to Instagram most frequently for ideas, followed by Pinterest. Since forming personal opinions is a sophisticated process, individuals might not even realize how exposure to social media has influenced them. This research aims to notify designers and engineers about the changing nature of their industry and calls upon them to develop new skills and tools to respond to this trend.

Keywords: construction – housing - interior Design - social media - taste

[ARABIC ABSTRACT]

تأثير منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على تصميم المنازل في دولة الكويت

إن الانتشار الواسع للهواتف الذكية وتوافر شبكات الاتصال ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي جعل المعلومات التي تعني في التصميم والبناء والانشاء متاحة للجميع. الأمر الذي أوجد تحديات للمصممين والمهندسين والذين يجب ان يكونوا مهئين للعمل مع عملاء يأتون بمعطيات واحكام مسبقة. ان هذا البحث يستعمل الاستبانة الرقمية لجمع معلومات كمية من مئة مشارك كويتي الجنسية ممن يقومون في اجراءات تصميم وبناء منازلهم الان. وقد تم عرض نتائج الاستبيان كإحصاءات ورسومات بيانية وجداول. ان هذا البحث يؤكد على الانتشار الكبير لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وتأثيرها من قبل كافة فئات المجتمع، وان المجموعات الاصغر سناً تعتمد عليها بشكل أكبر. وبشكل عام فان الانستغرام وتويتر وسناب شات يعتبران الاكثر استخداماً. ان هذا البحث يوضح ان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تلعب دوراً كبيراً في نشر الوعي حول تصميم المنازل والبناء وتعتبر منصة الانستغرام الاكثر شيوعاً لهذا الغرض يليها البينتريست. وحيث ان عملية تشكيل الآراء تعتبر عملية غير سهلة بين العميل والمصمم، فان الافراد قد لا يعون كيف تؤثر عليهم وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. ان هذا البحث يهدف لأخبار المصموم والمهندسون حول التحديات الجديدة التي تطراً على مجال عملهم، وتدعوهم لتطوير مهارات وادوات جديدة في التصميم للتعامل مع هذه الظاهرة الحديثة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الانشاء - السكن - التصميم الداخلي - وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي - الذوق

Introduction

The state of Kuwait is undergoing a period of rapid development, especially in the housing sector. As the majority of its citizens are eligible for land and loans with easy repayment terms, many seek to design and build their own house instead of renting or buying an already constructed house. Traditionally, most beneficiaries of housing welfare lack knowledge and expertise in house design and construction, so they seek the help of a professional designer and engineer to plan and build their house. However, with the spread of smartphones and ease of access to the internet and various social media platforms, most people tend to seek information from Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and other sources to learn about building and construction. This widespread practice poses new challenges for professional designers, for they must be prepared to work with clients who come with predefined requirements and judgments.

This paper aims to document the widespread reliance of Kuwaiti citizens on social media platforms to gain insights about house design and construction. It also seeks to identify which social media platforms are preferred by the general public, as well as who has the most influence on new landowners when forming ideas about house design and construction.

Our research gathered data from a selected sample of Kuwaiti citizens who were in the process of designing and building their future house. The researchers choose to utilize the digital questionnaire tool and the facilities it offers. This study relies on the notion that

landowners turn to social media platforms to obtain information about house design and construction. Thus, this work seeks to alert designers to the changing nature of the design industry in response to this trend, and it calls upon professional designers, engineers, and builders to develop new skills and tools in this context.

Research Problem

The authors have observed that since the advent of the social media revolution, new Kuwaiti homeowners are increasingly turning to social media platforms for information that has a significant bearing on major design decisions. This access to random information about house design and construction raises new challenges for professional designers and engineers. This phenomenon must be acknowledged and addressed during the design phases.

Through experience in the field, it can be seen that social media influences many clients, who collect images of interiors and house designs that inspire them and often want to apply published designs for their own homes. Ultimately, the design differs from the clients' desired picture of their house. Sometimes homeowners choose materials that are unsuitable for Kuwait's harsh desert weather; for instance, large windows are not practical, since summer temperatures reach 50° Celsius, unless the designer chooses specific treatments and orientation for the windows. Often, the arbitrary solution does not suit the client's needs or personality, the culture, or the local context; at the same time, the outcome does not match the picture that the client was originally attracted to on social media platforms. Another example is

when the client is interested in a particular interior design floor plan, like the open floor plan that minimizes or revokes privacy, whereas family privacy is a significant factor in the Kuwaiti Muslim houses and culture. In general, social media can be a beneficial and inspirational tool, especially in design; however, the input of a professional and experienced designer is crucial to achieving a successful project.

Research Questions

- Do Kuwaiti homeowners rely on social media platforms for information that influences design decisions?
- Which social media platforms do Kuwaiti homeowners access to get design advice or information?
- Who has more impact on client decisions: content creators on social media or professional designers?

Preference and Taste

Looking at dictionaries, one can find “taste” referring to one of the five senses, but other definitions include “individual preference” and “critical judgment, discernment, or appreciation” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definitions 4,5). All individuals can form opinions on various matters, but architecture and design are artforms, and having a personal opinion about them requires education and experience.

The issue of aesthetic appreciation and taste in regard to art, design and fashion has been discussed throughout the history of philosophical thought. Aristotle emphasized the role the senses play in obtaining knowledge and making judgments; later, seventeenth and

eighteenth century thinkers made significant contributions to the idea of taste. For David Hume, taste is a personal experience with standards that are determined by the individual, and according to Alexander Gerard, it takes imagination to have good taste. For Immanuel Kant, although taste is a subjective concept, beautiful things seem to appeal to all people; he emphasized the idea with four moments. The first moment, disinterested pleasure, corresponds with quality, where the object has nothing to give other than the pleasure of itself. The second moment, universal pleasure, corresponds with quantity; it preserves the common belief (or feeling) that judgments about beauty are not completely subjective, and we often expect others to share this belief. The third moment, the form of purposiveness, corresponds with relation; specifically, he focuses on the relation of an end, or purpose. The fourth and last moment, necessary pleasure, corresponds with modality—the beautiful object is *exemplary*. Edmund Burke's (1729–1797) notion of taste has three components: primary pleasures of sense, secondary pleasures of the imagination, and conclusions of the reasoning faculty.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) gives the term *habitus*. People belong to different aesthetic spheres, and their preferences are very similar within the sphere. He concludes that there is no value that guides one's aesthetic taste; it is developed within a person's class. He discovered, for instance, that people from the working class believe that objects should serve a function—even aesthetic objects. However, those from the upper classes believe that an object can be valuable for

its own sake. Thus, for Bourdieu, taste is developed within one's social context, but one can move to a different class by acquiring cultural capital. "To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class'" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 1). In home design as well, people try to keep up with prevailing trends and want to appear to be in line with fashion. "The fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world" (Blumer, 1969, p. 282).

Housing in Kuwait

The government of Kuwait has taken responsibility for providing housing for its citizens in accordance with law No 15 of 1974 for the establishment of the Public Authority of Housing. This law enacts government responsibility for the construction of homes for low-income people and the construction of private houses. In 1993, the Public Authority of Housing Welfare (PAHW) was established in accordance with law No 47 of 1993. The PAHW is a public institution with an independent budget that works under the Minister of Housing; it is in charge of planning, construction, and distribution of residential houses within residential neighborhoods.

The Kuwaiti government gives eligible households various options, including:

- (1) A government-built house on a minimum 400 m² plot, provided by the PAHW at a nominal cost, plus a monthly rent allowance of KWD 150 during the waiting period between filing for the home and receiving the unit.
- (2) A minimum of 400 m² plot of land provided by PAHW at a nominal cost and a KWD 70,000 long-term, interest-free loan from the Savings and Credit Bank for the construction, plus a monthly rent allowance of KWD 150 during the waiting period.
- (3) A KWD 70,000 long-term, interest-free loan from the Savings and Credit Bank to buy or build a house (with a minimum number of square meters specified).

Accordingly, every year, a large number of newly married couples register with PAHW to register for the Housing Welfare program and consequently receive their plot of land to build their home. Once the land is allocated, the landowners seek the help of professional designers, architects, and engineers to design their future home and commence the building. (It should be noted that the average price of a house is 200,000-300,000 KWD, and couples wait an average of 15-20 years before receiving the house.)

Most landowners do not have knowledge or expertise in the design and construction of homes. Like all homeowners, they strive to achieve the best possible solution that fits with their needs and aspiration. Due to the widespread use of the internet and accessibility to various smartphone applications, landowners can easily find a great

deal of information regarding house design and construction. This affects the way clients deal with the professional designer because they come to design meetings with many ideas and requirements. This may change the traditional process of design and pose many challenges to contemporary designers.

Social Media Use in Kuwait

In order to understand the influence of social media on the design of homes in Kuwait, the authors sought to highlight the level of internet usage in Kuwait. This trend is evident worldwide and in Kuwait as well. It has been reported that emerging adults (aged 18-22) in the US spend approximately six hours on social media platforms (Hruska & Maresova, 2020, p. 1). Further studies indicate that people using the internet in 2020 rose to 90.1% from 85.8% the previous year. Social media is thus the most convenient tool for customer communications, marketing, and networking. People also rely on social media for social interactions and entertainment.

Global statistics indicate that the number of social media users increases by millions each year. As of January 2022, there were 4.55 billion users of social media, which is an increase of 400 million individuals compared to 2021 (Hines, 2022). Most brands have realized the instrumental value of social media and employ influencers to market their products, and creatives also use social media platforms to share content. Since half the world uses social media, businesses and individuals have the potential to reach billions of people at once

(Hines). Social media use is bound to grow even larger in the next decade.

Mobile and Internet Usage in Kuwait

Kuwait is among the countries that have embraced social media extensively. It is considered the hub of online public relations compared to other Middle Eastern countries (AlAjeel, 2018, p. 73). A report by the International Data Portal Corporation shows that 99% of Kuwait's population uses the internet (Kemp, 2022). Therefore, Kuwait's internet usage is nearly 100%, meaning that almost everyone in Kuwait has an online presence. Further reports show that between 2021 and 2022, internet users in Kuwait increased by 1.3%. The number is estimated to be slightly higher since COVID-19 has affected research done on internet use. Kuwait's mobile phone usage is also widespread. According to GSMA intelligence, Kuwait had 6.51 million mobile cellular connections at the beginning of 2022, which makes up 149.5% of Kuwait's population; however, GSMA intelligence reports indicate that this number decreased by 7.4% 2021 and 2022. Mobile internet connection speed shot up by over 112% (44.26 Mbps) between 2019 and early 2022, and the speed of fixed internet connections rose by 67% (35.89 Mbps) during the same period (Kemp).

Social media is available everywhere in Kuwait and is intertwined with people's everyday lives. About 4.05 million Kuwaitis are social media users (Kemp, 2022); this is equivalent to 93% of the population. Kuwait represents 6.9% of social media users in the Gulf Cooperation Council states (Times Kuwait, 2022). The country's small

and medium-sized enterprises rely on social media for brand promotion, customer attraction, and marketing, and they enrol influencers to help them reach an audience (AlAjeel, 2018, p. 74). The most commonly used social media platforms in Kuwait are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat (AlAjeel, p. 74).

Facebook allows people to connect with acquaintances, family, and friends by posting photos and status updates. Since its creation in 2004, it has garnered billions of active users (Alhabash & Ma, 2017, p. 2). Surveys show that a quarter of internet users have a Facebook account, and about 7 out of 10 users admit to logging into the site daily to post or connect with friends. Similarly, Kuwait has many active Facebook users. In early 2022, users of Facebook in the country stood at 2.05 million (Kemp, 2022). The percentage of eligible people (defined as those aged 13 and above) using Facebook in Kuwait was 57.2%; statistics indicate that Facebook's ad reach in January 2022 totaled 47.6% of the Kuwaiti population regardless of age (Kemp).

Instagram is a platform that enables people to share photos and videos with other users, and on other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In 2016, the global site recorded that 80 billion photos were shared daily, and active users amounted to 400 million per month (Alhabash & Ma, 2017, p. 2). The site is mainly used by young adults aged 18 and 29. In Kuwait, the number of Instagram users as of January 2022 was 2.4 million (Kemp, 2022). Instagram's ad reach in the country equaled 55.1% of the Kuwaiti population, and females use the app more than males did (Kemp).

YouTube is a platform for sharing videos with various types of material including educational, lifestyle, and entertainment content. Like most platforms, it has millions of subscribers and active users, and 3.62 million individuals in Kuwait were YouTube users as of January 2022 (Kemp, 2022). Ad reach is equally high and is equivalent to 83.1% of Kuwait's population.

Twitter is a platform that enables users to communicate in real-time, using hashtags, mentions, and replies. In 2016, it had 320 million active global users (Alhabash and Ma, 2). In Kuwait, it is used mostly by males (AlAjeel, 2018). About 40.5 % of Kuwait's population are eligible Twitter users, as per the age restrictions, and by early 2022, Twitter had 1.45 million users in Kuwait (Kemp, 2022).

Snapchat enables users to receive and send time-sensitive videos and pictures; the content posted expires after 24 hours. Studies show that Snapchat is the most popular app for Kuwaiti locals (AlAjeel, 2018), and Kuwait had 1.95 million users as of January 2022 (Kemp, 2022). Many Kuwaiti businesses rely on the Snapchat ad platform to market and target a wide audience.

Kuwaiti businesses have recognized the usefulness of social media platforms for promoting brands and marketing. Accordingly, the researchers noticed the reliance of the general public on social media to gain insights and information on the design and construction of their homes.

Method

Digital Questionnaires as a Research Tool

The researcher developed a digital questionnaire and distributed it through emails and telephone messages using google form platform. The questionnaire was first written in Arabic language in order to facilitate communication with the general targeted population. After all the responses were gathered, the author translated the results for the sake of publication. The researcher tested the questionnaire several times through a brief pilot study that was distributed among a smaller population of ten people. After doing the final refinements a final questionnaire was sent to the sample population. Technology is considered one of the most fundamental developments of our age, and researchers are always finding new and innovative processes to collect information. Currently, numerous research design options are available at the disposal of researchers in all fields (AlAjeel, 2018; Alhabash & Mengyan, 2017; Hines, 2022; Hruska & Maresova, 2020; Kemp, 2022).

Digital questionnaires are research tools utilized to gather information in quantitative studies. They are the most widely used online tools because they enable researchers to gather a wide range of data from dense research populations. According to Sue and Ritter, online surveys are an effortless way to collect a large amount of information in a short period of time (p. 107). They are cost-effective data collection tools that allow the researcher to collect data without incurring extensive financial expenses (Ball, 2019, p. 415). Different

studies use digital questionnaires for various purposes, but they mainly focus on measuring client satisfaction and opinions. They are typically composed of closed-ended and open-ended questions targeting a specific audience to answer particular research questions. The main target of the digital questionnaires are people with access to the internet who are willing to share personal opinions or information that can be useful to the researcher to come to a conclusion related to the research (Jamsen and Corley, 2007, p. 2). As such, the researchers sought to utilize this valuable tool to gather information that serves the objectives of this paper.

There are different advantages to digital questionnaires, and one of the main advantages that has had a vast impact on research methodology is that digital questionnaires are timely and cost-efficient. The researcher can gather information in real-time situations, with greater reach and participation from the selected population. The advantages of digital questionnaires are increasing every day, and with the development of technology, this process is constantly evolving. Because of this development, research can be more precise and affordable for researchers. This study sought to utilize this valuable tool to gather information that serves the objectives of this paper.

Digital questionnaires are both useful and transparent, but they also have some disadvantages that may affect the research. One of the main disadvantages is that they can lead to bias, as participants must have internet access or the necessary technology to participate in the questionnaire. Other disadvantages of digital questionnaires are that

participants may not have the required skills to answer the questions in the questionnaire, or it may be hard to obtain information from some groups of respondents that may not be very responsive (Bryman, 2016, p. 235). The authors are aware of these advantages and disadvantages and have ensured that this research utilized the advantages and found ways to avoid the disadvantages that may arise from using digital questionnaires. The questionnaire developed for this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*The Questionnaire Form*

House Design and Social Media Platforms in the State of Kuwait

A questionnaire about the reliance of Kuwaiti citizens who plan to build their future homes to obtain information from social media platforms

This Questionnaire seeks to gather information on the level of influence of various social media platforms on the choices of Kuwaiti citizens who are planning to build their homes only.

This Question are shall be used for academic research only. There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is to know your point of view on the subject. All answers will be treated confidentially, without any reference to individual response. It is estimated that this Questionnaire will only take you five minutes to complete.

Q	Gender:			
	Male		Female	
Q	Age Group:			
	Less than 30		31 – 40	
	41 -50		50 and Above	
Q 1	Do you use the various Social Media Platforms? (In general)			
	Yes		No	Sometimes
Q 2	Which is your favorite social media app? (generally)			
	Twitter		Instagram	Snapchat
	Facebook		Pinterest	Other
Q 3	Do you rely on social media platforms to obtain information about the design and construction of homes?			
Q 4	Which social media platform do you prefer to gain information about house design and construction?			
	Twitter		Instagram	Snapchat
	Facebook		Pinterest	Other
Q 5	When designing and building your home, who had the most influence?			
	Professional Designer		Social Media Platforms	Personal Opinion
	Family and Friends		Others	

Sample Size

The main aim of the sampling technique is to select a sample group of participants that represents the whole population intended for

the research. It is not always possible to choose the entire population for a study, which is why researchers choose a diverse and valid sample size that will represent the population. The number of participants may vary based on the study and the researcher, but the higher the number of participants, the lower the margin of error. For this study, the researchers elected to limit the sample size to 100; it is believed that this size was suitable to form a picture of the required subject.

Analysis of Data

After the process of data collection is complete, the researchers then need to analyze the data to reach conclusions, and this is the hardest part because it is easy to misinterpret the data that was collected. There are different types of interpretation, depending on whether the data is quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative data is presented in the form of numerical values, which can be easily exhibited in charts and tables. In contrast to the previous method, quantitative data is now presented in the form of numerical values, but it is only described and discussed by the researcher (Hai-Jew, 2019, p. 10). When it comes to the data analysis methods for online digital questionnaires, there are many programs that can help researchers analyze those values; some of the most popular tools in the research field are SPSS and Google Forms.

Results

One hundred respondents completed the digital questionnaire, which is shown in Table 1. They represented a sample of male and

female Kuwaiti citizens who were in the process of designing and building their homes (Figure 1). The pie charts in Figure 2 give a visual representation of the overall answers to each of the five questions.

Figure 1

Pie Chart description of the sample

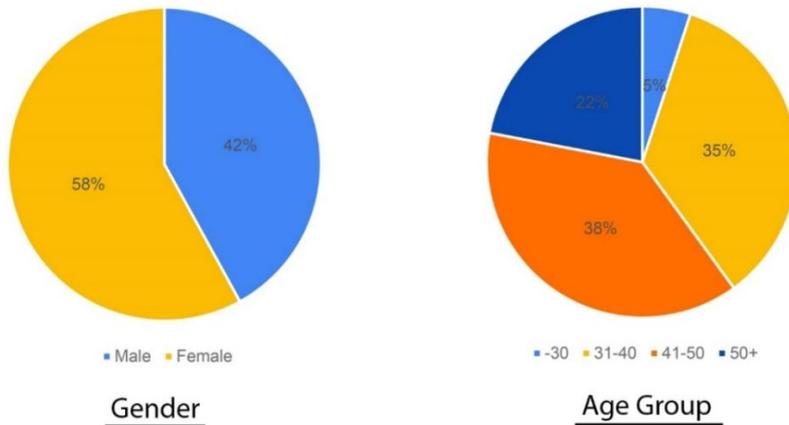
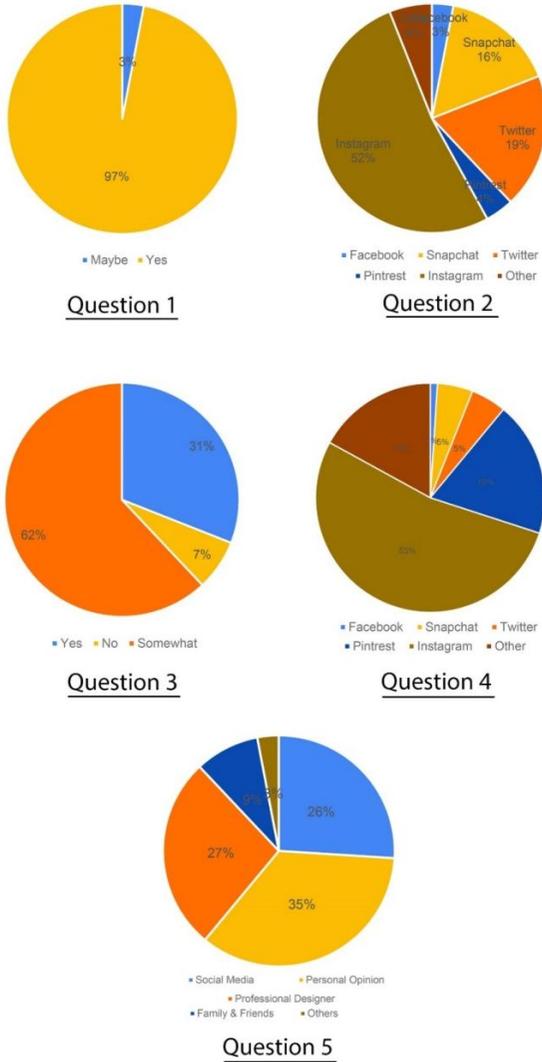


Figure 2

Pie chart representation of the total responses to the questions



Question 1: Do You Use Any of the Various Social Media Platforms?

The responses showed that all the participants used various social media platforms (Table 2).

Table 3

Responses to Question 1

	Often	Never	Sometimes
Gender			
Female	29%	31%	29%
Male	47%	22%	60%
Age			
Below 30 yrs	20%	20%	40%
31-40 yrs	29%	34%	29%
41-50 yrs	24%	24%	39%
Over 50 yrs	32%	18%	36%
Total	27%	26%	35%

Question 2: Which is Your Favorite Social Media App? (Generally)**Table 3****Responses to Question 2**

	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat	Facebook	Pinterest	Other
Gender						
Female	12%	47%	21%	5%	5%	10%
Male	24%	48%	12%	2%	3%	10%
Age						
Below 30 yrs	20%	40%	40%	-	-	-
31-40 yrs	11%	66%	14%	3%	3%	3%
Over 40 yrs?	26%	50%	11%	3%	5%	5%
Over 50 yrs	18%	36%	23%	5%	5%	14%
Total	19%	52%	16%	3%	4%	6%

Question 3: Do You Rely on Social Media Platforms to Obtain Information about the Design and Construction of Homes?

This result shows that social media platforms play a major role in spreading awareness regarding design and construction of homes in Kuwait (Table 4).

Table 4

Responses to Question 3

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Gender			
Female	38%	57%	5%
Male	26%	66%	9%
Age			
Below 30 yrs	80%	0%	20%
31-40 yrs	34%	66%	0%
41-50 yrs	37%	55%	8%
Over 50 yrs	23%	64%	14%
Total	31%	62%	7%

Question 4: Which Social Media Platform Do You Prefer to Gain Information about House Design and Construction?

This question sought to obtain insight about the favorite social media platform for gaining information about home design and construction. It is evident from the responses that people in Kuwait

depend overwhelmingly on Instagram as a source of information about design and construction of homes. This might be due to the nature of the application as an image-sharing platform (Table 5).

Table 5 Responses to Question 4

	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat	Facebook	Pinterest	Other
Gender						
Female	-	50%	7%	2%	29%	12%
Male	9%	55%	2%	-	12%	21%
Age						
Below 30 yrs	-	60%	20%	-	20%	-
31-40 yrs	6%	60%	6%	-	17%	11%
41-50 yrs	5%	55%	5%	-	24%	13%
Over 50 yrs	5%	41%	-	5%	14%	36%
Total	5%	53%	5%	1%	19%	17%

Question 5: When Designing and Building Your Home, Who Had the Most Influence?

In the responses to this question, the participants were asked to name who had the major influence on the design of their home and their main sources of information about home design and construction (Table 6).

Table 6 Responses to Question 5

	Professional Designer	Social Media	Personal Opinion	Family and Friends	Other
Gender					
Female	29%	31%	29%	10%	2%
Male	47%	22%	60%	16%	5%
Age					
Below 30 yrs	20%	20%	40%	20%	-
31-40 yrs	29%	34%	29%	6%	3%
41-50 yrs	24%	24%	39%	11%	3%
Over 50 yrs	32%	18%	36%	9%	5%
Total	27%	26%	35%	9%	3%

Discussion

This research confirms the heavy usage of social media platforms by the general public in the State of Kuwait. Overall, it was found that Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat are the three most used social media platforms in Kuwait. The research shows that social media

platforms play a major role in the awareness surrounding the design and construction of homes in Kuwait. The results confirm that those in younger age groups have higher levels of dependency on social media platforms. When it comes to obtaining information about house design and construction, the results indicate that users resort to Instagram most often, followed by Pinterest. It is clear from the comments that a large majority of Kuwaitis rely on Instagram as a source of knowledge regarding home design and building, perhaps due to its image-sharing function. Most participants stated that they relied on their personal knowledge and opinions to form views about house design and construction. The process of forming personal opinions about intricate subjects like the design and construction of houses is complicated, and individuals might not even be aware that their personal views have been influenced heavily by their exposure to social media and other sources. The research also shows that their reliance on the advice of professional designers and engineer is *almost equal* to their reliance on social media platforms. This clearly shows the importance of social media applications as a contemporary source of real-world information.

Finally, the research aims to alert professional designers and engineers to the changing nature of the house design industry and calls upon them to develop new skills and tools to respond to this trend. Further research could be conducted on the opinions of professional designers, engineers, and builders on the influence of social media platforms on the behavior of their clients, and to find ways to adapt to this upcoming trend.

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