

**Designing identities in the digital age:  
The Role of the Architect–Influencer in Shaping Culture, Aspirations & Youth  
Perception and a thought for Sustaining Zoroastrian-Parsi Identity in the  
Contemporary World through digital and social media**

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**Abstract**

In the 21st century, identity is shaped as much by digital media as by culture, education, architecture, or religion. The rise of social media influencers—particularly those with professional training in design—has created a new category of identity shapers: the Architect–Influencer. This paper examines how digital storytelling by trained architects impacts societal values, youth aspirations, urban perception, cultural belonging, and lifestyle identities.

Drawing from the author’s experience as an architect, educator, travel & food blogger, and social media influencer with a large youth following, the study investigates how platforms such as Instagram and YouTube democratize design knowledge, promote cultural preservation, revitalize local economies, and shape aesthetic judgement. The paper uses qualitative self-reflection, case-based analysis, and observational insights to explore how visual narratives around travel, food, built environments, and cultural experiences function as identity-making tools.

The paper argues that architect–influencers occupy a unique socio-cultural space: they translate design literacy into accessible narratives, influence youth career choices, revive heritage awareness, promote sustainability, and construct aspirational yet culturally rooted lifestyle identities. The study contributes to the broader conference discourse on “Designing Identities” by demonstrating how digital media constitutes one of the most dynamic and powerful identity making ecosystems of contemporary society.

Keywords: Identity, Social Media, Architecture, Influencer Culture, Digital Storytelling

**1. Introduction: Identity in Transition**

Throughout history, identity has been shaped by geography, faith, culture, education, and the built environment. Architecture, settlements, rituals, and institutions played a decisive role in defining who we are—individually and collectively.

In the 21st century, identity formation has entered a profound transition. While geography and culture remain influential, digital media has emerged as one of the most powerful contemporary identity-makers. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and other visual media increasingly shape how people perceive cities, lifestyles, aesthetics, food, travel, professions, and aspirations.

This paper explores how the rise of the “Architect–Influencer” creates new forms of identity design—where professional expertise blends with digital storytelling to influence public opinion, youth culture, design awareness, and socio-cultural behaviour. Drawing from the author’s own experience as an architect, academician, and social media content creator with a strong youth following, the paper illustrates how social media shapes

values, desires, urban imaginations, cultural belonging, and lifestyle identities in contemporary society.

This paper argues that identity today is not only inherited or taught—it is designed, curated, circulated, and consumed digitally.

### **1.1 Identity in the Digital Civilization**

**For centuries, identities were shaped by:**

- where we are born
- what we believe
- what we study
- what we build
- What we see repeatedly
- What we scroll through daily
- What we share publicly
- Who we follow and admire

In a digitally networked world, Instagram has become the new gallery, YouTube the new classroom, and TikTok the new cultural theatre.

## **2. Expanding the Role of the Architect**

The architect's role has expanded from designing buildings to designing meaning, perception, aesthetics, and lifestyle narratives.

Traditionally, architecture communicated through:

- Buildings
- Masterplans
- Drawings
- Academic texts
- Public discourse

Today, architecture also communicates through:

- Reels and short videos
- Blogs and vlogs
- Travel narratives
- Food and cultural documentation

Lifestyle storytelling

- Relatable design discussions

The architect's role has expanded from designing buildings to designing meaning, perception, aesthetics, and aspiration.

### **2.1 Why Architects Make Powerful Influencers**

Architects possess unique competencies that make them powerful digital communicators:

1. Visual Intelligence – mastery over composition, space, color, and form
2. Design Literacy – ability to translate complexity into relatable language
3. Cultural Sensitivity – respect for heritage, craft, and community
4. Ethical Training – sustainability, responsibility, empathy
5. Urban Awareness – understanding human behaviour in cities

When these competencies meet digital platforms, a new identity emerges: The Architect–Influencer

The architect–influencer is a new emerging identity who:

- a) democratizes design knowledge  
Complex design ideas become relatable and understandable through storytelling.
- b) reaches audiences far beyond classrooms & conferences  
A lecture hall = 60 people.  
A social post = 60,000 people.  
Identity spreads faster.
- c) shapes cultural behaviour through visibility  
People travel to places they see online.  
They eat what they see online.  
They design homes inspired by influencers.  
Culture today is shaped by what goes viral.

### **3. Storytelling as Identity Design**

Every content creator is a storyteller.

Every storyteller is an identity-shaper.

- A travel reel teaches what beauty looks like
- A food post communicates tradition, memory, and belonging
- A lifestyle post defines what is aspirational

Thus, content becomes identity architecture.

### **4. Social Media as a Space of Identity Construction**

#### **4.1 Aesthetic Identity (What looks “good”)**

Young people today say:

- “I want a café like the ones I saw on Instagram.” — let’s go.”
- “This hotel looks aesthetic — let’s stay here.”
- “This city looks Instagram able.”

Visual consumption becomes aesthetic education..... Curated imagery becomes everyday aspiration.....

This is design influence at a mass scale.

#### **4.2 Cultural Identity (What we belong to)**

Food bloggers revive:

- Forgotten Dishes
- Regional Recipes
- Local Ingredients

Travel bloggers revive:

- Heritage Towns
- Cultural Traditions
- Rural Crafts

Digital media becomes a modern-day museum of living culture. .... This creates pride-based identities.

#### **4.3 Lifestyle Identity (How we live)**

Influencers shape:

- how people dress
  - where they travel
  - what they buy
  - how they celebrate
- This is the new aspirational identity.

#### 4.4 Professional Identity

Young designers follow:

- Architects
- Illustrators
- Interior Stylists
- Content Creators

They learn:

- Trends
- Opportunities
- Best Practices
- Professional Behavior
- Digital mentorship is real mentorship

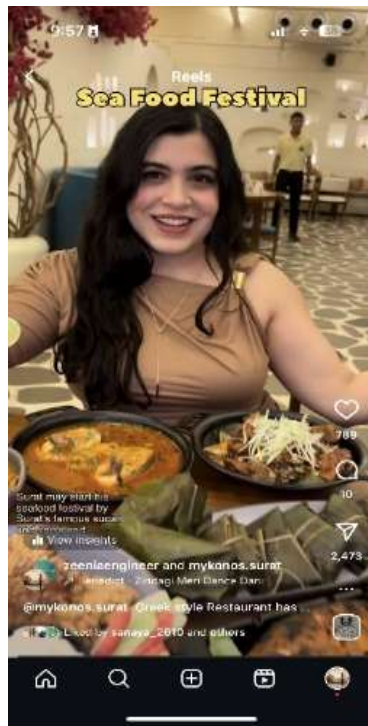


Figure 1: Presenting the local cuisine



Figure 2: Presenting the academic works

#### 5. When an Architect Becomes an Influencer: A Unique Cultural Role

As an architect, I bring:

- Spatial Understanding
- Cultural Sensitivity

- Aesthetic Discipline
- Design Ethics
- Critical Thinking
- Urban Awareness

When these merge with digital influence, the impact becomes extraordinary. Architect + Influencer = Cultural Designer

We don't just show places....

We narrate how people experience places.

We don't just show food..... We narrate:

- The cultural history behind it
- The community making it
- The value system it represents

And Documenting Parsi, Gujarati or regional cuisines helps preserve:

- Memory
- Ritual
- Family identity
- Community belonging

This is not entertainment.....

this is identity-building.

## **6. Case Reflections from Digital Practice (Case Examples from the Author's Own Digital Influence)**

### **Case 1: Revival of heritage cafés & towns**

Posting about small cafés or heritage streets increased local tourism & community pride.

### **Case 2: Cultural preservation through food**

Documenting Parsi, Gujarati, and regional cuisine creates a digital archive of culinary identity.

### **Case 3: Awareness and Promotion of sustainable travel**

Posts about rural crafts, artisan homes, eco-stays influence conscious travel choices.

### **Case 4: Youth inspiration toward architecture and culture**

Students frequently communicate how content ignites their curiosity for architecture, travel, culture.

Messages such as: "I chose architecture because your videos inspired me"

demonstrate how storytelling designs professional identity.

## **7. The Politics & Risks of Digital Identity**

Identity is no longer only personal - It is algorithmic.

What we see is shaped by:

- Trending content
- Sponsored content
- Algorithm priorities
- Social capital
- The aspiration economy

Influencers therefore carry responsibility.

## 7.1 The Challenges & Risks: The Dark Side: Identity Risks

The paper also addresses challenges:

- curated perfection → i unrealistic expectations → insecurity
- over-commercialization or commercialization of authenticity
- performative travel
- algorithmic biases
- misinformation
- loss of authenticity
- cultural appropriation
- mental health pressures
- short attention spans

These too influence identity - negatively if unchecked... This paper argues that architects, due to ethical and cultural grounding, can counter these dangers.

## 8. Conclusion: Designing Identities Today in the Digital Civilization

Architect–influencers are not just entertainers.... They are not just trendsetters... They are identity architects.

- Every post shapes:
- what people value
- what they aspire to
- how they travel
- how they eat
- how they see cities
- how they design their lives

Every post is not decoration.... It is:

- culture expressed
- psychology shaped
- aspiration constructed
- learning transmitted
- value formed

Architect–Influencers like Zeenia hold a unique responsibility:

They create the visual vocabulary through which a generation learns to see the world.

They are not just posting content —

they are designing identities. Identity is no longer carved in stone or written in scripture.

It is designed through stories — visual, digital, and cultural.

This paper positions the architect–influencer as one of the most powerful contributors to identity construction in contemporary society.

so.... Finally ...

## 9. Implications for Design Education

1. Social media must be included in design pedagogy
2. Students should be trained in digital storytelling
3. Influencers can be invited as guest educators
4. Content creation is a design skill
5. Youth identity formation must be studied as a design outcome
6. Visual culture literacy should be a compulsory subject

Design schools must teach students not only to design spaces but also to design cultural narratives and identities.

And so obviously.... From Built Heritage to Digital Presence: Sustaining Parsi Identity in the Contemporary World.

As an architect, educator, and digital content creator, the author envisions using social media as an active instrument in the proposed Zoroastrian Cultural and Architectural Centre at Udwada as Zeenia's PhD research.

In parallel with architectural and institutional interventions proposed for the rejuvenation of Parsi identity at Udwada, digital media emerges as a critical contemporary tool for cultural stewardship. Social media platforms enable the creation of a living, accessible, and participatory archive of Zoroastrian faith, rituals, cuisine, architecture, oral histories, and everyday community life. Through curated storytelling—reels, visual essays, food narratives, travel documentation, and intergenerational conversations—an Architect-Influencer can transform the proposed Zoroastrian Cultural and Architectural Centre at Udwada into a globally visible cultural anchor.



*Figure 3: Presenting the city for tourists*

Such digital engagement not only strengthens internal community pride among Parsis, especially younger generations, but also fosters external understanding, empathy, and support. In this way, social media functions as an extension of built space—designing cultural continuity, attracting scholars, students, cultural tourists, and philanthropic partnerships, generating livelihood opportunities, and re-positioning Zoroastrian heritage within the global imagination. thereby supporting the Centre's sustainability,

Digital storytelling thus becomes an act of preservation, revival, and identity design, ensuring that a living faith and culture does not fade into archival silence but evolves with dignity in the contemporary world and ensures the cultural survival of a historically significant yet demographically vulnerable community.