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MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL SPACE, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY: A VISUAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In an era dominated by digital visual culture, architectural space is increasingly experienced through media representations rather than direct physical engagement. Image-based platforms now play a critical role in shaping how architecture is perceived, interpreted, and culturally positioned. This study investigates how media representations of architectural space contribute to the construction of cultural meanings and identity narratives through visual and linguistic framing. Employing a qualitative visual sociolinguistic approach, the research examines architectural imagery circulating within digital media environments to identify dominant representational patterns and their socio-cultural implications. The analysis focuses on visual framing strategies, cultural narratives, and identity positioning mechanisms embedded in media-based architectural representations. The findings indicate that architectural space is predominantly framed through aesthetic prioritization, spatial abstraction, and selective visibility, emphasizing symbolic value and visual coherence over everyday social use. Media imagery consistently associates architecture with narratives of modernity, lifestyle orientation, and cultural capital, positioning space as a curated cultural artifact. The study further

reveals that identity is actively constructed through media representation, with architectural imagery reinforcing aspirational and exclusive spatial identities while marginalizing representations of everyday inclusion. Media mediation emerges as a decisive force in transforming architectural perception, reshaping space into an image-first experience governed by circulation logic and symbolic legibility. The study highlights the importance of critically engaging with media representation in architectural research and underscores its implications for cultural visibility, identity formation, and the evolving relationship between architecture and visual culture.

KEYWORDS: Architecture; Media Representation; Visual Culture; Cultural Identity; Digital Imagery.

1. INTRODUCTION

The practice and perception of architecture in modern architectural discourse is being informed by visual media to a greater extent than by physical experience. The digital platforms, especially social media that uses images as the main form of communication, have taken center stage as spaces whereby architectural space is experienced, perceived and framed in a cultural manner. Images of architecture become viral and spread widely across the online communities, forming an impression of space by engaging in selective visual attention, time compression, and visual editing. This means that the current architecture is mediated by a visual culture where representation may come before physical experience and plays a substantial role in the manner of production and expression of architectural meaning and value (Wagiri et al., 2024). Media representations do not only register architectural space; instead, they create it as a visual and cultural object. The aesthetics of platforms, algorithms of visibility, and engagement modalities are what make certain architectural spaces to dominate and how they are experienced by viewers. Symmetry, curvature, and compositional balance have also been found to have visual effects on user interaction with architectural imagery, supporting specific visual conventions and expectations (Thommes and Huebner, 2018). Simultaneously, the increasingly high popularity of smartphones and digital photography has further boosted the circulation of architectural images and made architecture a part of the global visual economy of tourism, lifestyle consumption, and digital attention (Lindsay and Sawyer, 2025). Such processes make the distinction between architectural space as a physical space and architecture as a mediated visual space to be more blurred.

Architectural space is not only a functional and physical space, but also a cultural and symbolic space in which social values, identities and shared meanings are expressed. An identity of space is not intrinsic to it, but it is created socially through interaction, representation, and interpretation (Peng et al., 2020). The importance of media imagery within this process is that it promotes managed images that form collective conceptualizations of belonging, community and cultural meaning. It has been proven that the use of architectural images on social media does affect the visual perception of urban environments and helps users to feel the sense of place and social belonging, which indicates that media representations are also involved in the process of creating spatial meaning (Gatti and

Procentese, 2021). Simultaneously, the rising adoption of digital technologies in architecture and representation also changes the concept of expressing and experiencing culture and identity in the built environment (Hadjadji et al., 2024).

In theoretical terms, visual culture scholarship puts an emphasis on the fact that images cannot be seen as a neutral reflection of reality, but rather as a participant in the processes of making meanings. Visual approaches emphasize the role of composition, framing, perspective, and contextual presentation in the interpretation and the way viewers perceive the architectural space (Rose, 2022). The mediation of spatial experience through architectural graphics and photography, in particular, is the creating of visual narratives that affect perception and emotional. These visual stories are seldom presented alone in the digital space; they are integrated into multimodal communicative systems in which pictures are intertwined with captions, hashtags and descriptive text. These kinds of interactions create stratified discourses that appropriate architecture space in a culturally and ideologically particular manner (Rathnayake and Suthers, 2025).

The mediated spaces like the architecture exhibition also show how architecture is now being experienced as a story whose narrative has been created through visual communication instead of direct spatial experience. Exhibitions are designed as artificial spaces in which architectural meaning is created by way of curatorial decisions, visual arrangement, and representational method, and the mediation is reaffirmed in the context of architectural interpretation (Iacovou and Artopoulos, 2024). In all these scenarios, the architectural space is seen as a visual-discursive piece of space where meaning is negotiated within the play between image and language.

Although there is an increasing scholarly interest on the topic of architectural representation and digital media, the current studies lack cohesion. The literature is dominated by aesthetic qualities, technological mediation or perceptual outcome alone without a sufficient consideration on how visual representation and linguistic framing work together in order to form cultural and identity meaning.

This gap requires being filled to further the study of architectural images and to formulate the idea of architecture as a form of cultural, communicative, and representational practice in the new conditions of contemporary media. The analyses of the visual framing of architectural space and linguistic contextualization of architecture in the media are

aimed at making the research of this study a more integrated analytical approach, corresponding to the broadening of the horizons of architectural research in the digital era. The objectives of the study are to:

1. To examine dominant visual strategies used in media representations of architectural space and their role in shaping spatial perception.
2. To analyze how visual imagery and linguistic framing interact to construct cultural and identity meanings in architectural representations.
3. To advance a visual sociolinguistic approach to architectural representation that strengthens interdisciplinary research within architectural image studies.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted in the study is qualitative and interpretive in order to focus on ways in which architectural space as portrayed by media serves to create cultural and identity meanings. It is based on the methodological approach of the concept of architecture as socially produced and culturally mediated phenomenon when spatial meaning is created not by physical form only but with the help of representation, interpretation, and discourse. It is therefore the approach of architecture as communicative medium in which the narratives of cultural values and identity are negotiated in a visual form and socially negotiated.

The research approach that would best be suited to the study is the use of qualitative methodology since the research is centered on the symbolic meaning, representation, and interpretation embedded in architectural images propagated through the media. The cultural, social, and identity-based aspects of the architectural representation that function in terms of the visual framing and storytelling require quantitative methods.

2.1 Research Design

The study is both exploratory and interpretive, relying on sociological approaches to architecture to find out the correlation between space, society, and identity. The architectural space is perceived to be a dynamic element in the social existence, which is defined by cultural norms, collective memory, and identity creation instead of technical or aesthetic factors. This view is congruent with the sociological methods that focus on the reflection of architecture and its influence on the social framework and the identity narratives (Kumar, 2024).

The media platforms are also identified as the modern place where architectural meanings are created, distributed, and also evaluated informally in

the study. The aspect of media representation is considered a critical strata of architectural discourse, which allows one to frame, interpret and discuss architectural space beyond the boundaries of any profession.

2.2 Data Sources

The research is based on the secondary visual and written data only, which involves the digital media setting. The main data is designed around the images of architecture distributed via the social network where architecture is becoming more and more engaged, perceived and discussed publicly. The images are perceived as representational artifacts that are influenced by the architectural purpose and framing by the media.

The attention toward social media images is based on the study on viral architecture which has proven that digital platforms are spaces of unintentional but significant architectural criticism. Architectural images get a cultural meaning and vehicle of collective interpretation through circulation, public engagement, and visibility (Essen, 2024).

2.3 Selection Criteria

The visual content that is examined in this paper was chosen on purposive criteria so that the content can be analytically relevant and conceptually consistent. To start with, the photographs have a clear geographical representation of architectural or urban areas that serve as recognizable built environments. Second, the images are the results of the digital media context situation, in which representation and circulation are the key factors of forming interpretation. Third, the pictures express communicative purpose using framing, perspective or focus on building elements that are related to cultural meaning or communication of identity.

The interpretation of the selection strategy is based on the strength of interpretation rather than higher representativeness, and permitting of the deeper study of ways in which architectural space is image-constructed and culturally framed in the media depictions. This methodology is in line with the qualitative architectural research, which deals with the meaning-making processes and not generalization.

2.4 Analytical Framework

The analytical model combines the visual analysis and the sociocultural interpretation, and it is identified that the architectural meaning within the media landscapes is created by means of the representational strategies. Visual analysis deals

with compositional aspects of perspective, spatial hierarchy, scale, and emphasis on the representational aspects to comprehend the visual framing of architectural space.

This visual reading is supported by the research into architectural graphics, which concludes that drawings and photographs are communicational mechanisms that influence spatial perception and experience as opposed to depersonalized presentation (Lopez-Chao and Rodriguez-Grela, 2023). The architectural imagery is thus discussed as a visual language under which cultural and identity meanings are expressed.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the data is carried out in a systematic way of interpretation. The individual analysis of selected images is conducted to find the prevailing visual strategies and symbolic indicating use in the context of architectural space, culture, and identity. This is followed by comparative study on images in order to establish recurring patterns of representational patterns and common narrative tendencies.

The interpretation is informed by the fact that architecture is a representation of cultural identity in form, symbolism and representation. The means of analysis of architectural imagery is the redefinition, reinforcement, or struggle of cultural identity within the context of present-day media spaces (Garg, 2020).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Patterns of Architectural Representation

The analysis has determined the application of a coherent series of visual strategies presenting the architectural space in a media environment. These plans place much emphasis on aesthetic consistency, formal clarity, and visual detachment of architectural objects. The architectural space is often visualized as an object as opposed to a socially embedded space, which leads to visual representations as the ones that focus on the form, surface and spatial spectacle. Table 1 demonstrates that architectural space in the media images is mainly presented by the wide-angle shots, central composition and a lower level of surrounding visibility supporting the spatial abstraction and aesthetic priority.

Table 1. Visual Framing Strategies Identified in Media Representations

Visual Attribute	Operational Description	Occurrence Pattern
Perspective selection	Use of wide-angle or elevated viewpoints that enhance spatial depth	Present in majority of images
Compositional focus	Centralized or symmetrical framing of architectural elements	Dominant pattern
Human presence	Presence of figures primarily as scale indicators	Limited and secondary
Contextual visibility	Degree to which surrounding urban or social context is shown	Often reduced or cropped
Spatial abstraction	Architecture presented as a standalone visual object	Recurrent

3.2 Cultural Meanings of Architectural Space

The media architecture as an image has been used as a symbolic means of conveying cultural meanings. There has always been a correlation between architectural space and certain cultural discourse which places buildings and urban space as markers of modernity, historicism or orientation towards a lifestyle. Such meanings are expressed through the

visual messages of the choice of materials, the references to style and spatial ambiance. Table 2 shows how media portrayals of architectural space convey various cultural discourses such as modernity, continuity of heritage, lifestyle orientation and symbolism value by using repetitive visual cues which condition the collective cultural discourse.

Table 2. Cultural Narratives Communicated Through Architectural Imagery

Cultural Narrative	Visual Indicators	Representational Role
Modernity	Minimalist forms, glass facades, neutral color palettes	Signals progress and innovation
Heritage continuity	Traditional materials, historical references, contextual alignment	Reinforces cultural memory
Lifestyle orientation	Curated environments, leisure-focused spatial cues	Frames architecture as experience
Symbolic value	Landmark forms, iconic composition	Positions space as cultural capital

3.3 Identity Construction Through Media Imagery

The findings suggest that identity has been made through a conscious visual and verbal construction of architectural space. Media representations are selective in what they select or omit, how they are perceived as to whom the space is aimed at and how it is to be occupied. The aspirational identity narratives are often backed up with images of

architecture, which makes space to be desirable, exclusive, or symbolic of particular social values. Table 3 indicates that the media images of architectural space create the identity construction through prioritizing the aspirational and exclusive spatial discourses, whereas everyday inclusion is minimized, strengthening the selective identity positioning.

Table 3. Identity Positioning Mechanisms in Media-Based Architectural Representation

Identity Dimension	Visual and Linguistic Indicators	Interpretive Outcome
Aspirational identity	Stylized environments, controlled spatial order	Architecture framed as desirable
Social exclusivity	Limited access cues, absence of everyday users	Selective belonging implied
Cultural affiliation	Symbolic references, contextual markers	Reinforcement of identity ties
Everyday inclusion	Visible social interaction and use	Infrequently represented

3.4 Media Mediation and the Transformation of Spatial Experience

The findings reveal that media plays the role of an active mediator in the construction of the perception of architectural space. The space in the architecture is not merely reflected in the media but it is being changed by the process of image choice, framing recurrence, platform-based visual conventions. These mechanisms shape the spatial properties that come into view and cultural significance in the realm of the mass discourse.

The media spaces favour imaginatively instantaneous and symbolically obvious forms, promoting an image-first experience of architecture. This has led to the

perception of architecture space in terms of edited encounters as opposed to the prolonged interaction of space. The complexity of space in everyday life and casual utilization are minimized with an emphasis on strengthening abstraction and aestheticization. Architectural space through this mediation is created as a visual narrative, constructed with circulation logic as opposed to experience. Media mediation, as demonstrated with Table 4, affects architectural perception in terms of giving priority to moments of visual visibility, repetition of framing, and platform viewing conventions leading to the spatial abstraction and strengthening of symbolic value over common use.

Table 4. Media Mediation Effects on the Perception of Architectural Space

Mediation Aspect	Representational Mechanism	Observed Effect on Spatial Perception
Image selection	Preference for visually striking moments	Emphasis on spectacle over use
Framing repetition	Recurring visual angles and compositions	Standardization of spatial interpretation
Platform conventions	Image-oriented and scroll-based viewing	Reduction of spatial depth and duration
Circulation dynamics	Rapid dissemination and visibility metrics	Reinforcement of symbolic value
Context filtering	Exclusion of everyday spatial conditions	Abstraction of architectural experience

The results prove that the media images of architectural space are organized with the focus on aesthetic prioritization, symbolic framing, and selectivity of their visibility. The focus of architectural imagery is always on visual consistency and cultural iconography and reduces the complexity of everyday social life. Such cultural connotations that are accompanied by architecture are conveyed via repetitive visual discourses which position space as contemporary, edited, and symbolically significant. The construction of identity becomes possible in the process of strategic inclusion and exclusion of social cues and makes architectural space aspirational and selectively available.

4. DISCUSSION

Media representations form one of the pivotal processes in the manner in which architectural space is viewed, appreciated and placed in the cultural context. Instead of being a dispassionate documentation of the built environment, the images in the media has an active role of restructuring the meaning of architecture through selective framing, aesthetic prioritization, and symbolic highlighting. The findings reveal that architectural space is often ridiculed of its social and contextual existence and

reconstructions as a visual coherent object that is maximized in circulation and consumption. This helps in leading to the argument that nowadays architecture is more often than not consumed through representation with images overtaking physical exploration and dictating spatial cognition through the focus on form, surface, and spectacle, rather than lived experience (Colomina, 2019).

The visual tactics which are found in the findings expose the way in which the media defines architectural perception by giving preference to particular spatial accounts. The broad shots, symmetrical framing and low contextualization of imagery are some of the elements that lead to a restrained visual language that stabilizes the architectural meaning. These representational practices lead to the way space is read and interpreted contributing to particular forms of spatial interaction and marginalizing others. This is in accordance with the realization that spatial meaning is created via systems of controlling visibility and movement, which creates meaning by focusing selectively instead of representing everything neutrally (Dovey and Pafka, 2020). Media representations, therefore, serve as a spatial ordering

system which affects the cognitively and culturally mapped architecture.

The cultural connotations of these patterns of representation are on the one hand. The findings suggest that architectural imagery always conveys the messages of modernity, the lifestyle orientation, the continuity of the heritage, and the symbolic value. By repetition, these discourses have become normalized, and the architectural space is perceived as a cultural resource that comes with the concept of advancement, exclusiveness, and identity differentiation. These framing processes represent larger city-wide trends where architecture is getting absorbed more into the innovation-based economies and image-driven branding efforts. In this regard, architectural space turns into an instrument of symbolic capital, and it strengthens the economic and cultural hierarchies, instead of acting as a socially inclusive environment (Zukin, 2020). Media images play a role in this change because they make architecture aligned with aspirational values and delights that prioritize visibility and desirability.

One such deliberate result of such representational practices is identity construction. The findings demonstrate that media imagery has a selective involvement and exclusion of social actors to develop an understanding of who and how architectural space is constructed to be used. It is dominated by aspirational identity discourses, where architecture is represented as ordered, controlled and idealized. Conversely, informal use and everyday social practices are peripheral to the representation of the media. This partial visibility represents a larger difference between hegemonic forms of representation of space and the practices of lived place through which space is produced and experienced. The dominance of representation blurs the daily spatial life, which supports identity stories that believe in the superiority of symbolic unity over social diversity (Brewer and Werts, 2016).

This process is further enhanced by the affective dimensions. The visual hierarchy, stillness, and visual clarity reflected in architectural visual are emotional stimulating factors that help to position identity and status in the image. These affective signs influence the connections to the architectural space and prestige, desirability, and cultural value that strengthens aspirational hierarchies in visual culture (Witkower et al., 2020). The media spaces enhance these affective impacts by repetition and fast diffusion, enhancing the links between architecture and specific emotional and identify solutions.

Media experience is also characterized by the time conditions that are critical in changing the experience

of architecture. The spatial experience in architecture is also being met out in visual snatches as opposed to a more spatial experience. This fragmented form of interaction changes the form of meaning production, as the priority of meaning-making is now those aspects that are the most immediate and recognizable instead of rich and sustained. These circumstances are mirrored in the larger patterns of cultural consumption, in which interpretation is influenced by interactions of short durations and images instead of long durations (Novitz, 2020). Consequently, architectural space is perceived as a series of managed impressions as opposed to an intricate social setting.

These conclusions echo criticisms of culture-based urbanization, in which architecture is a form of image to be consumed in line with life story and symbolic differentiation. The media representations play a role in this process because they socialize the architectural space as an aesthetic good but not a communal social good by restricting the exposure of the democratic and ordinary spatial experiences (Miles, 2020). Combined, these processes underscore the involvement of the media as a dynamic actor in the making of the architectural meaning, culture and identity.

5. CONCLUSION

Media images are not only a medium of visual distribution, they are processes that restructure architectural meaning by being selective, abstract, and symbolic. With the more abstract circulation of architectural space in imagery, its own culture will be influenced by the representational logic of circulation instead of direct involvement with space, changing the way architecture is perceived in the mass consciousness. It turns out that architectural imagery, mediated by media, gives precedence to aesthetic unity and idealizing symbolism, usually to the detriment of social mundanity. Architecture is shifted into line with nurtured identities and symbolic capital through repeated visual narrative, which strengthens selective modes of visibility and affiliation. This process is subject to intense inquiries concerning whose experiences and spatial procedures are recorded and whose every last detail is shadowed in the prevalent visual cultures. In this context, media is not merely a reflection of architectural reality, but it is actively involved in the establishment of cultural norms and institutional identity boundaries that the built environment is related to. Through the analysis of the interaction of visual framing and cultural meaning in the media representations, the research aids in the understanding of architecture as a communicative

and ideological construction. Such a view promotes the trend of the architectural scholarship to go beyond formal analysis and take a critical look at the cultural implications of representation. The media

representation will be a critical engagement that will be crucial in developing more socially responsive and culturally reflective understandings of architecture.

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