Experiencing architecture as a social media content

Mimarlığı bir sosyal medya içeriği olarak deneyimleme

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Abstract

This paper discusses the changing role of media in the experience of architecture. The purpose of the discussion is to emphasize that buildings are mainly seen and experienced through their visual aspects in the media, and that social media, with its mediatic effects, is now determining the new ways of seeing and experiencing buildings. The paper, therefore, defines it as social media architecture. However, social media has the capacity to be used as an environment through which buildings are experienced not only through their images, but also through their social, spatial, functional and environmental relations. The discussion of the paper is supported by Google Trends graphics illustrating the frequency of the use of terms "digital media" and "social media". One of the graphics also illustrates the frequency of the use of term "Hamburg Elbphilharmonie". The images of this building were designed by star architects Herzog & de Meuron in the early 2000s, but its construction took decades. As a result, the building has been criticized by newspapers, magazines and journals throughout its construction. The architects even exhibited critical texts and images of the building published in the media at the 2012 Venice Biennale, a major architectural media event. So, the building, its spectacular images and the long-term construction process have had an interesting appearance in the media, which is worth discussing in the paper as a star architectural project. In this context, the paper discusses with the help of Google Trends graphics that the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie becomes a popular building as soon as its construction is completed. But it becomes even more popular because of the images of the building that dominate social media after its completion. This building is the case study of the paper because it establishes a critical ground for star architecture projects built in the 2000s that are discussed in terms of their transformative effects on the cities in which they are located, as in the case of the Guggenheim Museum project built in Bilbao in the 1990s. The paper argues that as buildings become more critical in terms of their large scales and spectacular images, architecture needs and demands to be experienced in its critical dimensions more than ever.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Social media architecture, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, media, digital media, social media.

Özet

Bu makale, mimarlığın deneyimlenmesinde medyanın değişen rolünü tartışmaktadır. Tartışmanın amacı, mimari yapıların medyada genellikle görsel özellikleriyle öne çıktığını vurgulamak; sosyal medyanın ise mimarlığın görülmesi ve deneyimlenmesi açısından kullanıcılarına yeni bir ortam sunduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Sosyal medya kullanımının yaygınlaştığı son günlerde mimarlık artık sosyal medya mimarlığı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Oysa sosyal medya, mimarlık alanında binaların yalnızca imgeleriyle değil aynı zamanda sosyal, mekânsal, işlevsel ve çevresel ilişkileriyle de deneyimlenebileceği bir ortam olma potansiyelini taşımaktadır. Bugün dijital medyanın yerini almakta olan sosyal medya, makale kapsamında, Google Trends grafikleriyle tartışmaya açılmakta; dijital medya ve sosyal medya terimlerinin uluslararası alandaki kullanım sıklığı ortaya konulmaktadır. Ayrıca uzun süren inşa sürecinin tamamlanmasının ve bina imgelerinin sosyal medyada dolaşıma çıkarılmasının ardından günümüzün en popüler binalarından biri haline gelmiş olan Hamburg Elbphilharmonie'nin medyatik değeri Google Trends grafikleri üzerinden tartışılmaktadır. Bu bina, star

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mimarlar arasında sayılan Herzog & de Meuron tarafından 2000li yılların başında tasarlanmıştır. Ancak binanın inşası uzun yıllar boyunca tamamlanamamıştır. Dolayısıyla Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, gösterişli bina imgesi ve uzun süren inşa süreci nedeniyle medyada sıklıkla eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Hatta mimarlar, 2012 yılında düzenlenen ve önemli bir mimarlık ortamı olan Uluslararası Venedik Bienali'nde binaya yönelik eleştirileri ve medya görüntülerini sergileyerek büyük ilgi toplamıştır. İmgesi, eleştirileri ve uzun süren inşa süreciyle medyada ilginç bir görünürlüğü olan Hamburg Elbphilharmonie'ye, makalede, 2000'li yıllarda inşa edilmiş olan star mimarlık projelerinden biri olduğu ve binanın 1990'lı yılların popüler yapılarından olan Guggenheim Müzesi'nin Bilbao kenti üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkisine benzer bir kentsel ve kültürel etkiyi Hamburg kentinde yaratabileceği savunulduğu için yer verilmektedir. Gösterişli imgeleriyle ve ölçekleriyle mimarlık medyasında öne çıkan binaları yalnızca görsel etkileriyle değil eleştirel yönleriyle de ele almanın önemine değinilmektedir.

Keywords: Sosyal medya mimarlığı, Hamburg Filarmoni, medya, dijital medya, sosyal medya.

1. Introduction

We use various concepts to define this century, but it seems that the most relevant one is the social media age; since social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok (and now X), Twitter, Facebook, etc. increase the speed of producing and sharing information between cultures and social and professional environments all around the world. Social media, which is spreading information through images, becomes one of the most commonly used tools and platforms of this age. Therefore, there is a constant flow of images and information in the world today [1].

Colomina argues the current status of producing and sharing information by pointing out to the fact that we are now surrounded by the arrays of multiple, simultaneous images in the streets, airports, shopping centers, and gyms, but also on our televisions and computers. According to her, the idea of a single image that commands our attention fades away. It seems as if we need to be distracted in order to concentrate, as if all of us are living in a new kind of space, the space of information, are diagnosed with the attention deficit disorder. It is a new form of distraction and a new form of attention. It is also a new form of perception [2].

Besides, there is now a constant need for attention. When we consider Instagram to be a popular social media platform in the world, powered by attention and accessible to all within milliseconds, we can understand why people take it so seriously [3]. Social media leads us to share and spread information by mediatic images, and it creates a common platform for us to attribute a value to these images through the signs of "like" or "dislike" only by looking at their visual qualities [4].

These highly visual and superficial attributions determine the mediatic value of the images. However, mediatic value is usually independent from the realistic value. Social media has its own criteria that mostly depends on the visual characteristics, and lacks a deeper understanding of the realities and dynamics behind the images. Architectural images are also disposed to these superficial considerations and determinations as the other images representing the daily life routines and practices, social activities or professional studies of the people who share them on the social media platforms. Furthermore, architecture becomes the background image of the touristic visits and selfies of people. Thus, we can say that the built environment is now seen and experienced as a social media content by people.

This paper discusses the changing role of media in experiencing architecture as a "critical" and "non-critical" (or "new critical") content. It argues that printed media such as newspapers and magazines, and non-printed media such as television news and interviews mostly deal with the critical aspects of buildings in architecture. In this context, the social, environmental, political and financial aspects and characteristics of buildings are deeply and critically discussed on the non-digital media. These discussions are not only limited to the visual characteristics of buildings; they also provide a critical basis for discussing the non-visual characteristics, such as the public benefit or the budget of buildings.

The paper illustrates these discussions with the images of Hamburg Elbphilharmonie; since this building, as a star architecture project, has spectacular images which are commonly criticized by the city-dwellers, commissioners and politicians on the non-digital media. However, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie became one of the most popular buildings due to the circulation of its images on the digital and social media, particularly after its completion in 2016. These images are mediatically circulated apart from its unique construction history which lasted for 16 years. So, they are discussed in the paper as the non-critical but highly visual images that lead the building to be exposed just as a new and visually stunning structure in the city. On the other hand, digital media and social media have the capacity to turn building images into critical texts, only if we see and use them as the platforms also to share the background story of buildings critically.

The discussion of the paper is supported by the graphics of Google Trends that reveal the frequency regarding the usage of the terms "digital media" and "social media" in the world today. One of these graphics illustrates the frequency of using the term "Hamburg Elbphilharmonie" as well. It is discussed through the graphics that Hamburg Elbphilharmonie becomes a popular building whenever its long construction process is completed. It even becomes much more popular due to the building images that particularly dominate the social media platforms after its completion.

Nonetheless, Herzog & de Meuron, as the star architects of the building, exhibit the newspapers, magazines and television news, which are criticizing the building, since it exceeds its time and budget limitations within the main theme of Common Ground in the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012. For the architects, media establishes a common ground exhibiting the critical aspects of the building as a high-budget project. They present in the exhibition that the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is commonly discussed as a critical content on the non-digital media [5].

However, the paper emphasizes that this building is usually represented by its photogenic images rather than its critical aspects or characteristics in the digital media. The building is even served as an aesthetic background in the social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, etc. When an architectural image is reduced to an aesthetic or photogenic image, not only its social, political, environmental or financial aspects are ignored, but also its spatial and functional aspects. Thus, it becomes impossible to criticize the building with its non-visual aspects in architecture. Because criticism has been limited to the visual aspects that we only see by looking at the architectural images. It is a fact that images generally present a limited point of view about buildings. We cannot fully grasp the visual characteristics of buildings from their images. In addition, architecture cannot only be experienced through images. It needs to be experienced through our bodily presence.

As McLuhan suggests, media transforms and transmits experience [6]. But it seems that digital media and especially social media reduce buildings to be the aesthetically pleasing images apart from their experiential dimensions. Social media not only affects the look of our built environment, but it also models our lives and affects how we plan our days and look at our surroundings [7]. In other words, social media has a determinative effect on our daily lives. It dominates and determines our experiences in the architectural spaces. Social media even leads architecture to be a background for the visual constructions of our selfies and self-documentaries. So, criticism is eventually reduced to these mediatic visualizations in architecture. It is a non-critical but highly visual architecture. However, the paper discusses the potential role of social media in experiencing architecture as a "new critical" content. In this context, it attempts to fill an important gap in the literature of architecture by promoting the use of social media as one of the new critical platforms in architecture.

2. Experiencing architecture through media

Until the 2000s, architecture was usually represented by non-digital media such as newspapers, magazines and television news; whereas, after the 2000s, the phenomenon of digital media, which became functionalized in the computer environment, and then social media, which enabled its daily use on the mobile phones, became widespread and dominant in the world [4]. Whether digital or non-digital, media represents architecture in its own way, and it often constructs its own reality that is independent from the real lives, deficits and dynamics in the built environment.

Rattenbury suggests that architecture can be represented through photographs, exhibitions, articles, books, newspapers or magazines, but this is not architecture. This is not the same as the substance of architecture itself as it is usually understood. Yet, even in the most physical understanding of architecture, the media that represents it shape what we understand it to be, and the way we design and build it. This constructed representation defines what we consider good, what we consider fashionable, and what we consider popular. Media affects how we interpret and value architecture [8].

There is a strong argument that architecture, as distinct from building, is always that which is represented, and particularly that which is represented in the media [8]. Colomina promotes this argument by emphasizing that building is conceived and transformed through media rather than simply represented on the media. Furthermore, she argues that architecture is itself, from the beginning, a form of media [9]. We often fail to distinguish architecture from its representations, or in other words, its mediatic constructions. As with Magritte's painting This is not a Pipe, it is hard to accept the construct that what we are looking at is a representation and not the thing itself, Because the representation is almost more definitive than the thing itself [8]. In this regard, we can say that media makes buildings appear more real within the alternative reality that it creates. In addition, media features some buildings, and it makes them more visible and accessible as if they are representing the canons of contemporary architecture [4].

We generally see and recognize the buildings with their famous pictures on the media. These pictures even seem more satisfyingly architectural than the buildings themselves. They are not only the pictures of architecture, but architecture itself [8]. As such, buildings become images and images become buildings in architecture [9]. When we see the images of Hamburg Elbphilharmonie on the digital media platforms of architecture such as ArchDaily and Dezeen, we recognize the building from its famous and glamorous pictures even if we have never been in Hamburg and have never seen the building in person before. We even realize that these pictures are more seductive when we have the opportunity to visit and experience the building.

On the other hand, McLuhan underlines the flattening effect of digital media which reduces buildings to their images that we see on the screen [6]. Besides, digital media accelerates the speed of sharing and consuming these architectural images [10]. We see the same images of the same buildings on the digital media over and over again, and we gain a visual experience of the buildings that eventually leads us to consume them through their images. The Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is one of these buildings which is designed and built with the intention of attracting people from all around the world to

the city of Hamburg, or at least of arousing curiosity in people to see and experience the images of the building, for example through the most popular photographs taken by Iwan Baan that are published on the most popular digital media platforms of architecture (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Hamburg Elbphilharmonie photographed by Iwan Baan [11].

However, Herzog & de Meuron exhibit excerpts from non-digital media platforms such as newspapers, magazines and television news as the common ground of architecture within the main theme of Common Ground in the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012 (Figure 2, 3). In the biennale, which is also a media platform for exhibiting architecture, the architects argue that the public opinion on the long construction process of this concert hall constitutes a critical ground as well as a common ground in architecture. The exhibited local newspapers of the city of Hamburg report that the public is criticizing the high cost of the building. Lindsay and Sawyer suggest that local newspapers are a site and means by which cities have historically addressed self-identity through public discursive practices; they are also the medium through which public discourse is inscribed and circulated [12]. Therefore, Herzog & de Meuron exhibit local newspapers in the architecture biennale to reveal the public opinion on the design and construction process of Hamburg Elbphilharmonie. For the architects, it is so important to criticize both the problems and potentials of architecture with the diverging interests. In this context, they explain the biennale exhibition as follows: "This concert hall project becomes a crucible of political, budgetary and ideological debate in Hamburg, and the project is presented here in the form of large-scale models, against the background of the many column inches the project has generated in German newspapers from its inception to today." [5].

Figure 2. Herzog & de Meuron, Elbphilharmonie: The Construction Site as a Common Ground of Diverging Interests, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2012 [5].

Figure 3. Herzog & de Meuron, Elbphilharmonie: The Construction Site as a Common Ground of Diverging Interests, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2012 [5].

This exhibition, supported by the non-digital media news on the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, is highly critical; whereas, the digital media news and images of the building are highly visual. We rather see and experience this building mostly with its iconic, or at least photogenic images published as a non-critical content on the digital media platforms of architecture during the 2010s. Platforms such as Archdaily, Dezeen or Divirase become even more visual, since they are now simultaneously working with their social media platforms intended to attract their followers by using less words but more images. However, images shared on digital or social media have the potential to be used as the new critical content in architecture. It is a fact that image now becomes the content, and this content is accessible at our fingertips within seconds. Digital and social media accelerate the speed of the consumption of architecture more than ever, but it is still possible to use these media platforms without restricting them to be a visual environment for seeing and experiencing architecture.

Digital and social media can also be a critical environment, just as the non-digital media such as newspapers and magazines presented in the biennale exhibition of the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie. This exhibition reveals that media and architecture are closely engaged with each other. Media plays an important role to shape the public opinion on the built environment. Thus, the paper focuses on the critical role of media, particularly social media, which has the potential to turn the building into a critical debate in architecture.

3. Experiencing architecture through social media

In order for an application or a website to be defined as social media, it needs to have users independent of the publisher, create and store content from user sources, have interaction between users, and have no time and space limitations [13]. With millions of users in the world today, social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, X, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. have become part of people's daily activities. Social media is not a trend that will soon fade away; conversely, indicators show that access to information on the Internet is increasing worldwide [14].

This is also visible in the rising number of social media users, along with the rise in the number of social media applications that help us connect with other people in the world. The impact of social media on architecture and architects are especially phenomenal. There is an increasing demand for buildings and spaces that is popular online. Digitalization has changed the way people view and interact with architecture, providing architects with new insights into how to design their structures [15].

Hence, a change has occurred from printed medium to non-printed and speeding images, moving away from linework and conventional architectural drawings towards saturated, atmospheric and graphically rich, sometimes complex, composited, hybridized images. They pave the way for further changes in projections from orthography and the fixity of the picture plane to dynamic, processed, scripted and machine-learned visualizations [16]. As many other new designs in architecture, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie also has a non-conventional image designed in the computer environment. But, even before the computer drawings and renders of the building design appeared, the first sketches of the building that Herzog & de Meuron publicly presented in 2003 (Figure 4, 5), caused an enormous public appreciation [17].
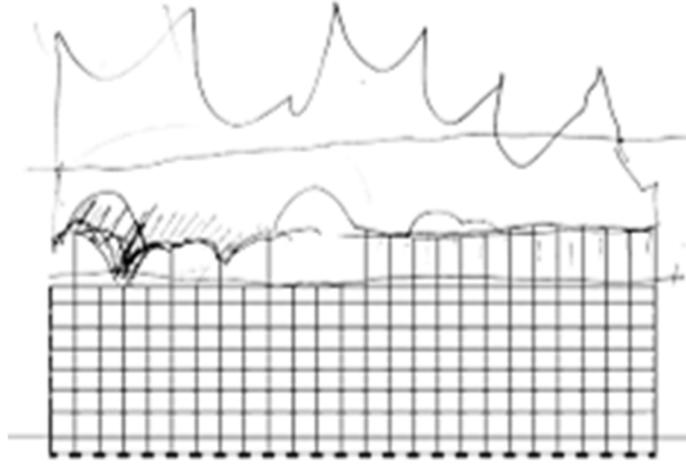
Figure 4. The first sketch of the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [18].

Figure 5. The render of the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie which is hard to distinguish it from the real photograph of the building [19].

The image of its dynamic facade, which is inspired by the waves of the nearby Elbe River, is very different from the image of the existing brick structure that used to be a warehouse located beneath the building of the new concert hall. The building image of this concert hall becomes even more attractive and seductive, since it is in a contradiction with the image of the brick structure. This contradiction is enhanced by the openings that resemble eyes on the transparent facade of the building. Just like the façade, the roof of the building is also designed as a dynamic and photogenic surface that turns it into an attractive building image in the cityscape (Figure 6, 7, 8).

Figure 6. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [20].

Figure 7. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [20].

Figure 8. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [21].

It is a fact that contemporary architects design more dynamic and photogenic building images in the social media age, in which almost everything is in a state of flux. Architecture is therefore called social media architecture. However, there have been many problems and potentials that architects have to deal with at the background of what we see as the final design both on the digital and social media platforms of architecture. Especially big and iconic building designs, such as the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, have many more problems than we imagine. One such problem for the concert hall building is the acoustics. The location of the building turns the issue of acoustics into a challenging problem to overcome, since this hall is located next to the Elbe River, which is full of boats with whistles and fog-horns. So, everything has to be completely sound-proof. For the great hall, this is achieved by enclosing everything in a double skin (Figure 9). The

inner skin comes into contact with the outer skin only by resting on hundreds of unique steel spring capsules that absorb all sound energy from the outside [22].

Figure 9. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [23].

Besides, the inner skin of the great hall is made of a mixture of ground stone and paper to create an effective atmosphere in terms of acoustics and aesthetics issues. The spatial atmosphere is enhanced by the heavy globes, ensuring enough light for the concert hall (Figure 10, 11). But there is still a challenging issue about how to erect the steel beams to support the roof of the building. Since the calculations of the architects and the builders do not overlap, the building project is halted for over a year. All these spatial, structural and technical challenges not only lead to the extension of the construction process, but they also lead the cost of the building to increase 10-fold from 77 to 789 million euros, driving the final design costs even higher. This is probably the most expensive building project of Germany [22]. In this context, Brott argues that such star architecture projects are only made possible by giant debt arrangements, and their primary purpose is to solve financial crises. According to Brott, the conflict between these two clauses has never been more apparent. The financial emergencies are what the unreality of the digital image, and its unearthly promises, seeks to obscure [24].
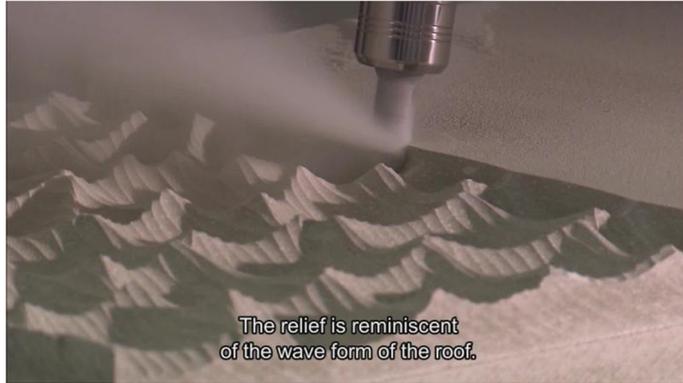

Figure 10. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [23].

Figure 11. Herzog & de Meuron, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie [23].

On the other hand, it will be an oversimplification to discuss these star architecture projects as buildings that respond exclusively to the hegemonic forces of neoliberalism, because the full story of these projects is more nuanced, more local, and potentially more interesting than such a view allows for [12]. But, despite the unique and interesting story behind its construction process, social media currently reduces Hamburg Elbphilharmonie into a building image (Figure 12, 13). Social media even turns the building into a background and ultimately flattens the world into a giant selfie stage [7]. Instagram in particular, as the most popular social media platform in the world today, has changed the ways of seeing and experiencing architecture. There is an ongoing debate about this dramatic change; critics underline the fact that quality is now compromised in the pursuit of a striking selfie in architecture, but social media has become an influential force in the way our environments are being shaped [25].
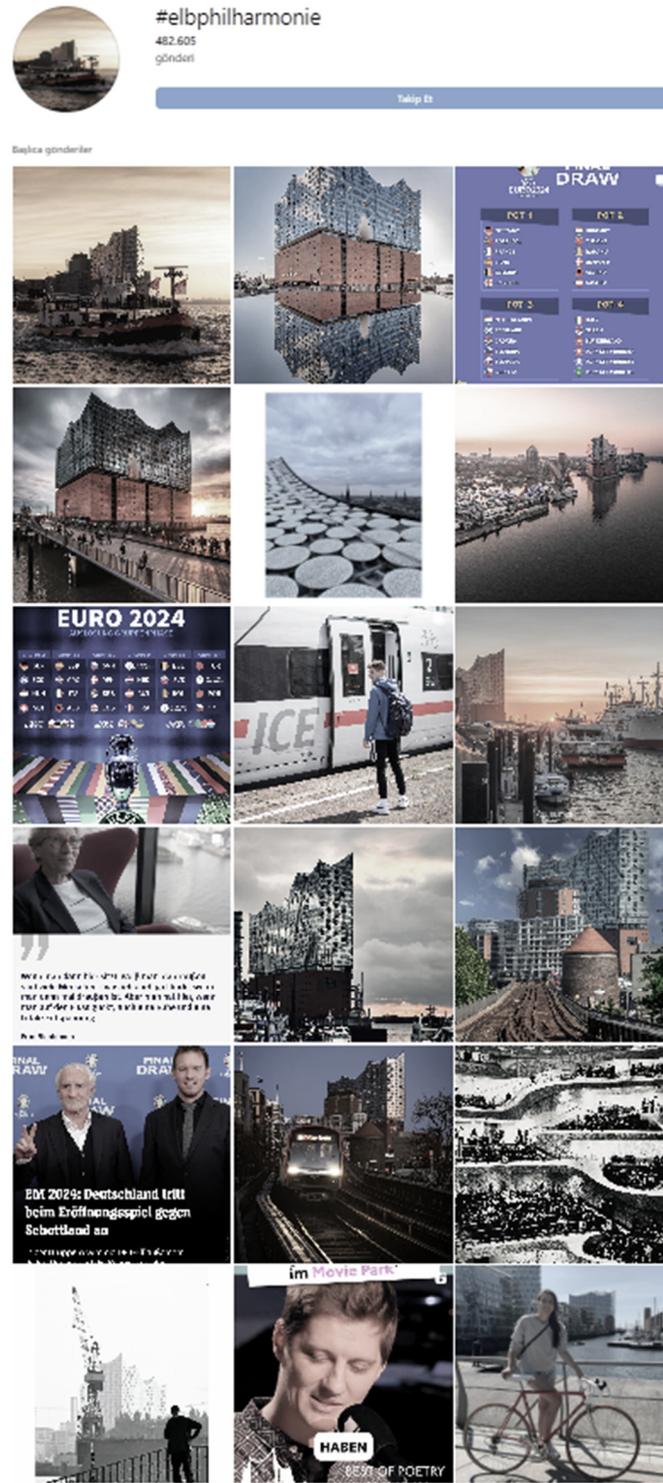

Figure 12. A visual search on Instagram with the hashtag of #elbphilharmonie
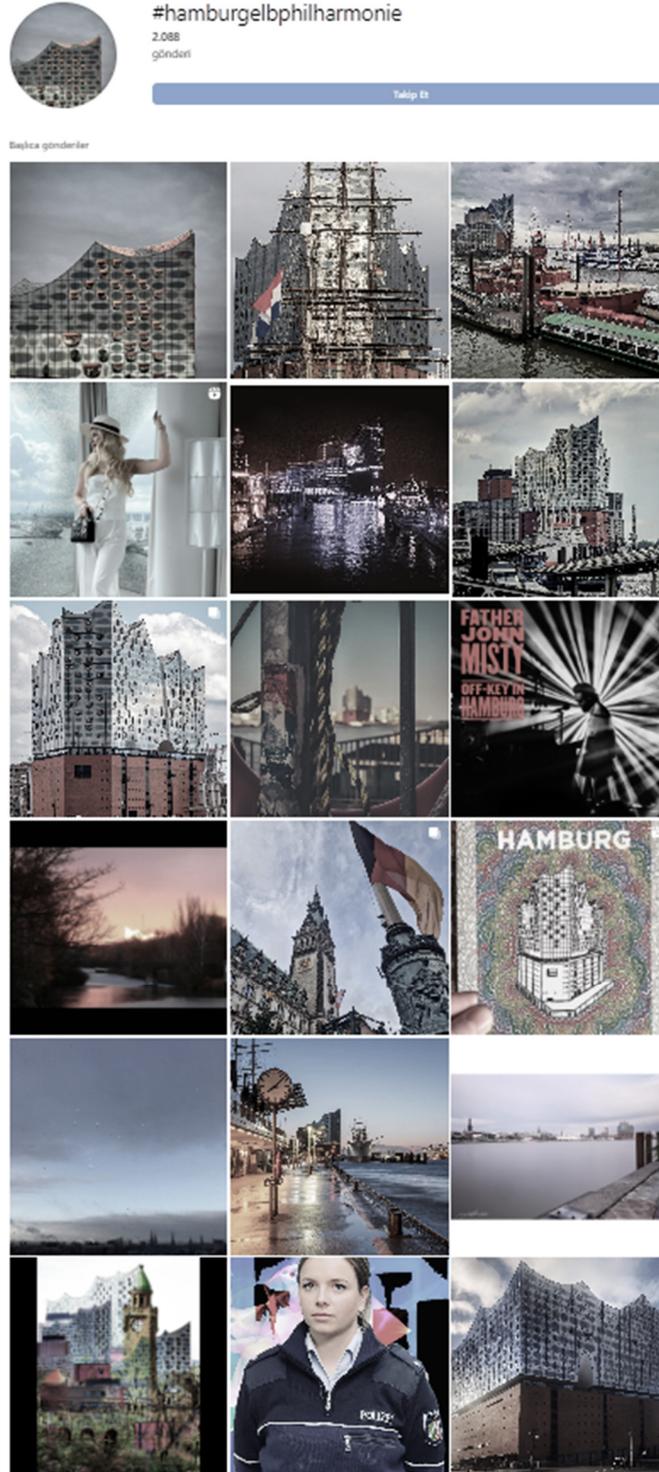
8 December 2023.

Figure 13. A visual search on Instagram with the hashtag of #hamburgelbphilharmonie, 8 December 2023.

Instagram, as a popular social media platform, is forever transforming and setting up the next gravities for architectural, spatial and cultural influence [18]. We can say that it is encouraging more people to go to art exhibitions and pay attention to their surroundings. When people go somewhere with the intention of posting about it on Instagram, the social media is controlling how they plan their day, even down to their outfit or makeup, and how they will interact with the chosen physical space. Our interactions become less spontaneous and our experiences become more homogeneous as we plan our outings for "good content" [7].

There are numerous posts in which the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is used as the background of selfies for creating a visually and aesthetically pleasing content on social media platforms. It means that the concert hall is perceived as an aesthetic object (and almost as a sculpture) rather than a building with spatial, functional and environmental relations by the social media users. They mostly prefer to see and experience the building from its exterior spaces and only by looking at its stunning structure. But architecture also needs to be experienced by its interior spaces, and its spatial and functional relations. However, the exterior images of the building are on the forefront on the social media platforms of architecture. They unfortunately reduce architecture to a series of popular images that seem to have no context. We do not care about the contextual relations of the buildings, nor do we care about the critical dimensions of the buildings, because we do not see these buildings as the spaces in which people live, work or dwell. They are like any kind of structure (or even sculpture) that we use as the background of our Instagram images.

We all become users of social media by producing, sharing and consuming aesthetically pleasing images. We do not need to be a critic, an expert, a professional or a specialist as users of social media. Apart from our characteristics and identities, we can easily share our opinions on all sorts of subjects. When the subject is architecture, we criticize an architectural design through the signs of "like" or "dislike" only by looking at its visual aspects. This is the new way of architectural criticism that is highly visual and superficial, and is deprived of any deeper research on the contextual background of design including its spatial and environmental relations, tectonics, functions or materials [4].

Nonetheless, architecture is now spreading through social media. Designers and architects have more access to inspiring images and essential insights into global trends [15]. Social media becomes the primary source for architectural inspirations [3]. Architects get inspirations also from digital media platforms such as ArchDaily, Dezeen, Divirase, DesignBoom, Architectural Digest or Architects Journal, but Instagram remains the most popular social media platform for architects today. They often use this visual platform as a showcase for their projects as well as a source for getting inspirations from other design projects. Instagram becomes a platform for constructing a perfect version of our daily life practices and architectures. In this regard, Lange suggests that we get enough better-than-reality images of buildings on the digital media platforms such as Dezeen. We see the same building images over and over again also on the social media platforms. We wonder the rest of the building: the construction process, the life in the building after this process, or the lacks and deficiencies of the building… in other words, the critical dimensions of the building. We expect the images of the buildings to be critical [26].

But even architects seem to ignore the critical dimensions of buildings. According to Colomina, they act as if their buildings are only images. They do not have any deep interest in how his or her buildings are occupied [9]. On the other hand, social media platforms can be used to get feedback during the design process of buildings. Social media can also become a tool to see how buildings are experienced by their occupants after the construction process. Thus, architects can explore people's experiences in the spaces and develop the way they design these spaces in line with people's daily life practices [7]. This is an advantage of using social media in architecture. If we share our spatial experiences on the social media, not by reducing the space, or the building to the background of our selfies, then we can see and experience the building in terms of its critical aspects. Yet, we see that Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is also a building experienced as a visually stunning background as the other popular buildings shared on social media platforms.

Although, social media has many advantages such as causing a communication revolution and becoming a catalyst to innovation and change, we rarely discuss its advantages and positive effects [3]. In that, our obsession with capturing and sharing photogenic images on the social media platforms represents an opportunity for innovation, because these platforms encourage us to look more closely at our surroundings. In this regard, Wainwright refers to the words of Sam Jacob: "Architects have always designed their buildings to be photogenic. As for our selfie obsession, architecture has a long tradition of being specifically designed to frame people. And it's a good challenge: Instagram culture moves so fast and gets exhausted so quickly that you have to keep evolving your architectural language, whether in drawings, models or actual buildings." [25].

For Mutha, one of the impacts of social media is that it shows architects the possibilities to design and build dynamic and futuristic structures which are structurally difficult. Besides, social media motivates architects to design more open floor plans and spaces that can be rearranged to handle different functions. Since nowadays social media became a must, architects think about the style and composition of the data they put on sheets to present it on the social media platforms for the world to see [15].

These platforms increase the public awareness especially on public architecture. While the average public architecture project takes years, thousands of man-hours, and typically hundreds of millions of dollars, it significantly impacts the community it occupies. Public architecture can change people's lives for better or worse; therefore, it is necessary to ensure these structures socially, economically, and emotionally. However, it is impossible for architects to correctly anticipate every potential or problem during the design and construction process. However, increased public awareness can shed light on the problems that our buildings can be solving. As Dabbs reveals, this is where social media comes into play. Thanks to the feedback we get from the likes, dislikes and comments on the social media, it has never been easier to gather and analyze the opinions of critical masses of people [27].

According to Dabbs, Iwan Baan, one of the most popular architectural photographers, uses social media in a critical way. His photos are instantly dispensed to the most popular magazines and newspapers that fight for the exclusive, but his Instagram account reveals the other side of architecture. His photos take us behind the scenes: footage of the places he visits, the people he meets during his travels, and the buildings he shoots… In these stolen moments, we connect with architecture. This is how we will build our surroundings. We will let the public in, connect them with buildings before they are built, and take them on the design journey with us. We will use it to uncover the best solutions. Social media is undoubtedly going to play a major role in the progression of architecture. It can even democratize design in architecture [27].

It is difficult to claim that architecture is a democratic field of design, as it mostly serves a certain group of people who have the financial or political power to realize a building project as the client of architecture. However, Instagram seems to be a more democratic space, as it is open to contribution from everyone. The democratic space of Instagram presents diverse content which is superseding the old strategies of knowledge construction [16]. Nevertheless, each social media platform, including Instagram, facilitates the shift from a functional understanding of design into a formal and commercial one. The built environment turns into an attraction, populated not by citizens but rather by users who feel the need to self-document their daily lives [7].

Therefore, an architectural studio called Vale Architects creates an "Instagram Design Guide" that can be purchased from its website. Their strategy involves designing spaces that are appealing for a specific customer target, who would consequently want to share the design with their friends. For them, both interior and exterior spaces should be set up to provoke a visual sense of amazement, creativity, and fun [7]. As people start posting pictures of some specific spaces where they travel to or where an event is happening, these spaces instantly become famous on the social media platforms. As a result, more visitors are drawn to these spaces; many of them have the intention to take a photo there. This is actually a great benefit for public spaces, since urban interactions are an important part of their functioning [14]. It is also what is happening in the case of the concert hall building. This building eventually becomes a very popular space for the touristic visits of people who see and share its images on social media platforms such as Instagram.

The building itself seems as if it is constructed as an Instagrammable design. In fact, Herzog & de Meuron design it as the new landmark of the city that will attract people to the social and cultural events in Hamburg (Figure 14). But the building, just like many other popular buildings in the world, is perceived as an Instagrammable design and location for the tourists' checklists [15]. On the other hand, Instagrammable designs are often criticized because of the materials used, which are being chosen on the basis of their colors and feel rather than on how they will age or whether if they will be functional at all. Cladding that easily stains or peels, reflective surfaces that result in blinding spots, and shiny floors that become dangerously slippery with the tiniest drops of water are only some of the issues standing as testimony of what happens when architects prioritize photographability over functionality [7].
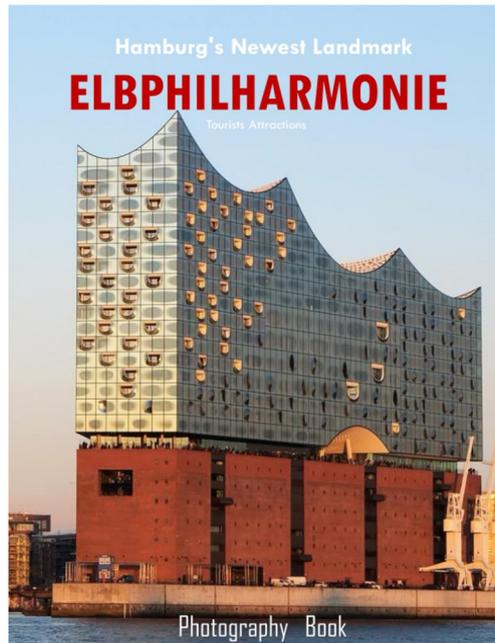

Figure 14. A new photography book of the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie printed in 2023 [28].

The search for an Instagrammable building can seriously compromise the quality of architectural design. If one of the main concerns is to build an architectural design that will look good on Instagram pictures; the social, spatial, functional and environmental relations of the building can be set aside, not receiving the attention they deserve. Instagrammable

should not be the concept or the top goal of any architectural design, otherwise, buildings will function as a simulator or simply scenery [14].

Architecture is neither restricted to the architects nor to the clients. That's why it has become one of the main contents of the social media. Social media shapes the public opinion on the built environment and enables this opinion to be shared with other people. So, architects should be aware of the fact that social media platforms are not limited to be a showcase for their design projects. They are not limited to be a source for design inspirations as well. These platforms are social environments in which public opinion is shaped. In this context, architects can use the social media platforms to get feedbacks about their projects both during the design and construction process. It is also significantly important to collect data from these platforms after the construction process of the building projects, because we can only see and understand the real architectural value of the buildings after life begins in these buildings. Only then it becomes possible for us to recognize the difference between mediatic and realistic value of buildings in architecture.

4. Concluding remarks

Architecture is not just about designing buildings. It is also about designing the images of buildings. The images are a means of communication between the city, the architecture and the people. But when architecture is reduced to images, it becomes a flattened design practice. On the other hand, architecture relies on the recognition of a mass of famous images. Sometimes these images are more iconically famous and even more satisfyingly architectural than the buildings themselves. They are indeed iconic, not only as images of architecture, but asarchitecture itself. Images are media constructions that allow buildings to exist even when they are not constructed [8]. Images also allow constructed buildings to continue to exist even after they have been damaged or demolished. Thus, architecture has a virtual existence due to its images. With the advancements in the communication tools and technologies of the 20th century, images are usually produced, reproduced and consumed through newspapers, magazines or journals. The advent of photography has expanded the audience for architecture enormously. So, the audience is not only the user, but also the tourist in front of a building, the reader of a magazine, the viewer of an exhibition, etc., who sees the building (or the image of the building), gives it meaning, and consumes it [10]. Throughout the 20th century, architectural photography is largely confined to the printed media. In the 21st century, however, and particularly in the 2010s and 20s, it is being (re)produced and consumed by masses of people who are not necessarily professionals, but who use computers, tablets, phones and other smart devices, through the proliferation of non-print media, namely digital media and social media. Social media, as an accessible platform for everyone, enables images to be published and shared instantly around the world.

As mentioned above, social media enables buildings to communicate with people through screens and other media technologies. This recalls Virilio's theory on the aesthetics of disappearance, as the screen replaces space, or space hides behind the screen and disappears. According to Virilio, media architecture refers to buildings with facades made entirely of screens. The screens that display images become the walls of buildings. Real space is thus replaced by virtual space in architecture. These transformations of space make architecture disappear [29]. Today, we perceive not only architecture but the world through screens, or the ephemerality of the images on screens. As Mcluhan says, media changes the way we perceive the world [30]. Media changes our everyday routines, desires, behaviors, clothing, buildings, cities, and so on. Architecture also changes and evolves, and uses media as construction material such as wood, glass or steel [31]. And architects design and disseminate images, whether constructed or not, especially through social media.

We mostly use social media not only to show our lives, but also to advertise things, goods, other people and their work, and spaces that we (or they) experience. The tendency to share, advertise, use and consume almost everything in our daily lives is changing the way we perceive and experience architecture, in that the architectural object (building, space, structure, etc.) seems to be replaced by the architectural image. Rather than experiencing the object, we now experience the image of the object. We see and use the image to experience space, to share it with our colleagues, friends and other people, and finally to consume it without actually seeing it. This is why we call it "media architecture", to refer to the new reality of buildings and spaces that do not even need to be built to be experienced. Our memories of built environments are created by the images of those environments that are shared in the media.

In conclusion, the paper argues that there is a remarkable shift from non-digital and digital media to social media in today's architecture. This shift implies that conventional media platforms such as newspapers or magazines are no longer the determinants of success for architects. Furthermore, it refers to the fact that the age of star architects (or starchitects) is now ending, and the age of architectural influencers is emerging [3]. In the informational graphics of Google Trends below, we explicitly see the decline in the usage frequency of the term "digital media" since the year 2004 (Table 1). On the other hand, there has been an increase in the usage frequency of the term "social media" since the year 2004 (Table 2). We can say that this is also relevant for architecture in which buildings are mostly represented by their photogenic and mediatic images on the digital media platforms in the first decade of the century. However, after the year 2010, these photogenic representations even become more mediatic images with the emergence and dominance of the social media platforms in architecture.

Table 1. The usage frequency of the term "digital media" in Google Trends graphics (2004 is the year that Google Trends selects as the starting point of the search. The search is not restricted to a specific location. The term is searched throughout the whole world by Google Trends).
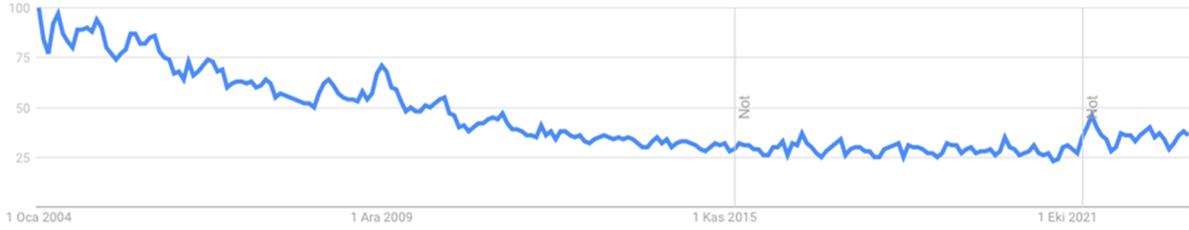

Table 2. The usage frequency of the term "social media" in Google Trends graphics (2004 is the year that Google Trends selects as the starting point of the search. The search is not restricted to a specific location. The term is searched throughout the whole world by Google Trends).
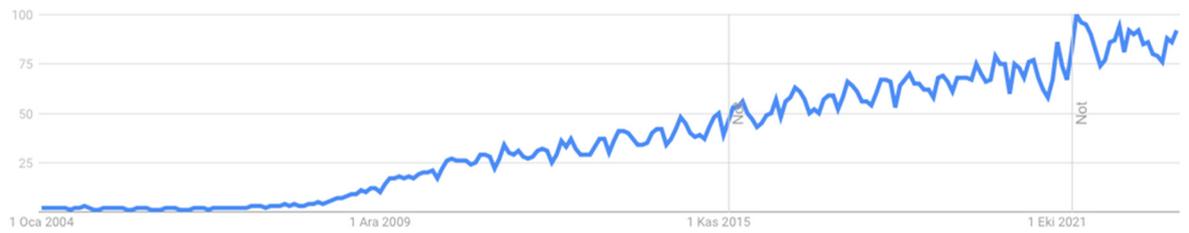

Social media seems to be lacking in critical content, since it is rather used as a visually attractive but critically reductive platform in architecture. As such, architects treat social media platforms as extensions of their marketing strategy. They treat social media platforms as alternative ways of letting people know where their partners are speaking, that their projects are being built, and that the critics like them. However, we need a more critical and conversational use of social media that can promote interpretations [26]. Social media has the capacity to be used as a critical platform through which architecture is not only interpreted by its visual aspects and characterizations.

Criticism usually leads one to look beyond the visual characteristics of buildings in architecture. It leads to analyze the buildings by their visual and non-visual qualities, and create a critical basis for discussing. Social media reduces architectural criticism to the images and the visual qualities of buildings such as their facade designs, materials, or colors. Despite these factors, it also introduces an interactive and communicative environment for people to create a public opinion on architecture [4]. However, we can use this effective, interactive and communicative environment as a platform through which we can interpret buildings critically in terms of their social, spatial, structural, functional and environmental relations. We can even change the course of the building projects thanks to the public opinion created on social media platforms.

Social media platforms have the power to popularize buildings more than any other media platform in architecture. Another informational graphic from Google Trends below reveals that Hamburg Elbphilharmonie becomes a frequently used term after its long-construction process was finally completed in 2017 (Table 3). But this is not the only reason for the building to become popular. It became even more popular due to the fact that its images dominated social media platforms after its completion.

Table 3. The usage frequency of the term " Hamburg Elbphilharmonie " in Google Trends graphics (2004 is the year that Google Trends selects as the starting point of the search. The search is not restricted to a specific location. The term is searched throughout the whole world by Google Trends).
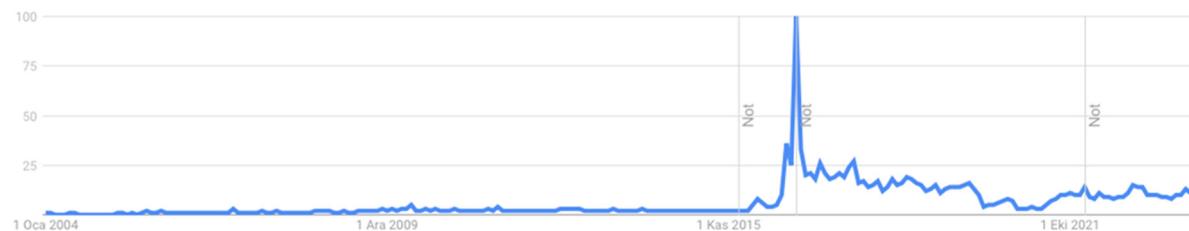
Nevertheless, social media becomes an environment where buildings are seen nothing more than images. We mostly use this environment as a showcase on which we share our daily lives and routines through some aesthetic but not realistic images. In this non-realistic environment, we unfortunately turn the buildings into aesthetic and photogenic backgrounds to support our pseudo-identities as explorers. In fact, we neither explore nor experience these buildings. We rather exhibit them only as the visually stunning backgrounds on the social media platforms.

We all live in the age of social media today. We can use digital and social media as critical platforms, just as the non-digital media platforms of the newspapers and magazines on the long construction process of Hamburg Elbphilharmonie exhibited by the architects of the building in the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale. These media platforms are used to represent the critical opinion of the public on the star architecture projects. Foster suggests that star architecture projects cannot be read at the ground level; they can instead be read and represented on the media [32]. The media representations of these projects speak directly to the city-dwellers about what their city is and might become [12]. However, star architecture projects generally fall short of triggering a sustained change in the national or international media profile of the respective cities, except the Guggenheim Museum project designed by Gehry, who is also known as a star architect. This project is probably the first star architecture project in contemporary architecture. The project caused an enormous effect on the city of Bilbao by transforming it from being an industrial city into a cultural city. It is therefore called "the Bilbao effect" to describe the transformative urban effect generated by a star architecture project [33].

It is a fact that Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is also a star architecture project, and its designers Herzog & de Meuron are the star architects, but we do not know how this building project will affect the identity of the city of Hamburg in which it is located. It is a new project that is intended to revitalize the social and cultural life of the city with the activities located in and around the building. Furthermore, it is designed as the new landmark of the city. But maybe this building will not have a Bilbao Effect on the city, as the dynamics, routines and realities of the city of Hamburg in Germany are very different from the city of Bilbao in Spain, which used to be relativelyunknown industrial city before the transformative effects of the Guggenheim Museum on the city's identity. Hamburg is already a well-known city characterized with itssocial and cultural activities. Thus, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie will probably enhance the existing unique character of the city.

Apart from the possible scenarios about the future of the city of Hamburg and the role of Hamburg Elbphilharmonie in the cultural life of the city, the changing city image with this new landmark have been frequently shared on the social media platforms. As Lindsay asserts for the iconic building projects, we can also suggest that Hamburg Elbphilharmonie fosters civic pride in the city [34]. These projects actually have many positive effects such as improving the city image, strengthening different sectors of the local economy, helping to reposition the city in global networks, or acting as social engines and thereby strengthening the identification of citizens. They also have negative effects such as increasing the socio-spatial polarization, and overburdening the municipal budgets [17]. As it is discussed throughout the paper, the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is one of these projects that is criticized especially on the non-digital media platforms in terms of its long construction process and high-budget. These platforms represent the critical opinion of the public on the spectacular image of the building.

However, digital and social media platforms shape and represent the public opinion on architecture more easily and rapidly as these are commonly used platforms that allow people to share the building images with others in milliseconds. But when architecture is reduced to be only an image independent of its relations and realities, it becomes impossible to discuss its critical and contextual dimensions. Since today's buildings become even more critical due to their large scales and spectacular images, architecture needs and demands to be experienced in its critical dimensions more than ever. Social media, which is a much more participative, interactive and attractive environment than digital media, has the potential of turning images into critical texts in architecture. But only if architecture is experienced as a social and spatial reality, not just as an aesthetically pleasing scenery on the media.

5. Author contribution statement

The literature review, manuscript writing, and editing in the study were carried out by Gulsah GULEC.

6. Ethics committee approval and conflict of interest statement

There is no need for ethics committee approval, and there is no conflict of interest for this paper.

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