



Leveraging Social Media Marketing for Real Estate Sales: The Role of TikTok and Instagram in Building Customer Engagement and Trust

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Abstract. This study examines how social media marketing is leveraged to support real estate sales through TikTok and Instagram, focusing on the case of Dea Shanta Realtor. Real estate is a high-involvement product that requires trust, transparency, and repeated interaction before consumers move toward purchase decisions. Using a qualitative descriptive case study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and documentation of TikTok and Instagram content, audience responses, and sales-related interactions. The findings show that TikTok serves as a top-funnel channel for expanding reach, attracting new audiences, and driving traffic through short-form storytelling and algorithmic visibility. Instagram complements this role by serving as a visual catalog, a credibility-building space, and a platform for relationship maintenance through feeds, reels, stories, testimonials, and property updates. Customer engagement appears through comments, shares, saves, direct messages, WhatsApp inquiries, and requests for property details or site visits. Trust is built through transparent information, personal branding, fast responses, testimonials, and consistent communication. The study concludes that TikTok and Instagram contribute to real estate sales not directly as closing channels, but as strategic platforms for awareness, engagement, trust, and lead generation for property businesses seeking stronger, sustainable market competitiveness online.

Keywords: Customer Engagement; Real Estate Sales; Social Media Marketing; TikTok and Instagram; Trust.

1. BACKGROUND

Real estate marketing is increasingly shaped by digital platforms, as prospective buyers gather information, compare alternatives, and evaluate agent credibility before engaging in direct contact. This shift is particularly significant for property, which is a high-value, high-decipherable, and risky purchase. Unlike low-cost products, buying a house or apartment requires trust in the location, price, legality, payment terms, developer's reputation, and the real estate agent's credibility. Digital marketing and social media have shifted from one-way promotions to content-driven, data-driven, and interactive communications that integrate information, entertainment, electronic word-of-mouth marketing, and mobile interactions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Social media can drive digital traffic, although conversion into sales depends on campaign quality, product characteristics, and strategic execution (Dolega et al., 2021).

Instagram provides a structured visual catalog through feeds, reels, stories, highlights, captions, testimonials, and saved content, while TikTok offers short-form video storytelling, algorithmic reach, trend-driven content, and viral visibility (Shen & Wang, 2024; Ngo et al., 2023). For property agents, these platforms can serve as the first point of contact for potential buyers, where they discover property listings, learn about prices and locations, and assess the

agent's professionalism. They also influence consumer behavior through customer experience and relationship quality (Wibowo et al., 2021; Majeed et al., 2021; Hanaysha, 2022). These findings suggest that social media effectiveness is measured not only by direct closings but also by awareness, traffic, engagement, leads, and consultation behavior.

Customer engagement is crucial in this study because marketing properties on TikTok and Instagram relies on audience responses that demonstrate interest and trust. Engagement can manifest as likes, comments, shares, saves, direct messages, link clicks, WhatsApp inquiries, price list requests, and survey appointments. Customer engagement in social media marketing is a higher-order construct linked to customer-brand relationships and loyalty (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). In the context of Instagram, marketing activities such as entertainment, interaction, customization, and trends can strengthen customer-based brand equity (Park & Namkung, 2022). On TikTok, personalization enhances perceptions of creativity and authenticity, thus stimulating users' intention to engage in viral behavior (Chu et al., 2024). Furthermore, trends, electronic word of mouth, influencers, entertainment, interaction, and storytelling influence brand awareness among TikTok users (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Short-form video marketing has become crucial because TikTok and Instagram Reels enable property marketers to condense complex information into visually appealing, shareable content. Property tours, price highlights, location explanations, mortgage education, testimonials, and behind-the-scenes insights from real estate agents can reduce perceived uncertainty and make the buying process more understandable. In social commerce, trust and privacy also shape purchasing behavior on TikTok Shop (Putri et al., 2024). While real estate is not an impulse product, these studies suggest that short videos can help move audiences from attention to interest and from interest to inquiry when the content is credible, helpful, and human. Visual content in social media communities can influence consumer trust (Karpenka et al., 2021; Haudi et al., 2022). Word-of-mouth marketing on social media is also important because user comments, testimonials, sharing, and recommendations create social proof (Park et al., 2021). Therefore, content that builds trust may be more influential than purely persuasive, direct sales content.

The real estate context makes this study both academically and practically significant. International real estate studies have shown that social media marketing efforts influence brand awareness in the real estate industry (Thuy & Cuu, 2023), while visual social media marketing influences purchase intentions in the real estate market through electronic word-of-mouth and credibility (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2023). In Indonesia, Widjaja and Santoso (2024) demonstrated

that social media platforms are crucial for modern real estate marketing. Furthermore, Moslehpour et al. (2022) and Vo Minh et al. (2022) have also demonstrated that social media platforms are crucial for modern real estate marketing. (2022) asserted that social media marketing, trust, brand image, engagement, and brand equity can contribute to purchase intention across various digital service and fashion contexts. Based on these arguments, this study positions TikTok and Instagram as top-funnel and trust-building channels for real estate sales: they attract attention, generate engagement, build credibility, and guide potential buyers toward consultations, surveys, and ultimately purchase decisions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a single case study design. Rather than measuring consumer behavior statistically, this research focuses on interpreting communication practices, content strategies, audience interactions, customer engagement, and trust-building processes in the context of digital marketing. Qualitative design allows researchers to explore meanings, experiences, and social practices in depth, particularly when these phenomena are closely linked to communication, interpretation, and interactions between actors (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The object of this research is Dea Shanta Realtor's social media marketing practices, specifically on TikTok and Instagram. These two platforms were chosen because they have distinct yet complementary communication characteristics. Therefore, this study examines how these two platforms are used to display property listings, communicate prices and locations, provide educational content, build agent credibility, respond to audience inquiries, and direct potential buyers to further actions such as WhatsApp consultations or site visits.

As a case study, this research seeks to understand this phenomenon holistically by linking digital communication strategies to the broader sales process in the real estate business (Yin, 2018). Informants were selected purposively. They comprised four categories: Dea Shanta Realtor owners, social media administrators, potential customers who had interacted through TikTok or Instagram, and sales or marketing team members involved in follow-up with prospects.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow informants to describe their experiences while adhering to the research focus. Digital observation was conducted by analyzing TikTok and Instagram content, including video format, captions, hashtags, visual style, audience comments, likes, shares, saves, and call-to-action patterns. Documentation included

screenshots of content, audience responses, platform insights, direct questions, and other supporting materials related to digital marketing performance.

Data management and analysis were conducted using thematic analysis supported by NVivo. Thematic analysis was used because it allows researchers to systematically identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo served as a tool for organizing data, tracking coding patterns, comparing informant statements, and enhancing transparency in the analytical process. This study employed source triangulation, technical triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the owner, the administrator, the customer, and the sales team. An audit trail was maintained by documenting the research process, including interview notes, coding decisions, category development, and thematic interpretation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Informant Profile and Analytical Orientation

The study involved four informants, selected purposively to represent different positions within Dea Shanta Realtor's social media marketing ecosystem. The owner explained the business's strategic orientation, the administrator explained technical management of content and interactions, the prospective customer explained audience reception, and the sales or marketing team explained lead follow-up and conversion. This composition allowed the study to compare internal strategic narratives with audience experience and sales-process realities.



Figure 1. Word cloud of interview data coding outputs.

Source: NVivo analysis, 2026.

Figure 1 shows that the dominant words in the coded data include content, property, TikTok, Instagram, customer, realtor, social media, price, visit, listing, and portal. The dominance of these words indicates that the core of Dea Shanta Realtor's social media

marketing is packaging property information into content that attracts attention and encourages further action. The word "portal" is also important because it confirms that TikTok and Instagram are not isolated channels. Social media attracts and educates audiences, but more formal channels, such as property portals and WhatsApp, remain essential for validating information and moving audiences toward consultation or site visits. This finding supports Dolega et al. (2021), who argue that social media can drive traffic and orders, but conversion rates depend on strategic execution and the characteristics of the product being marketed.

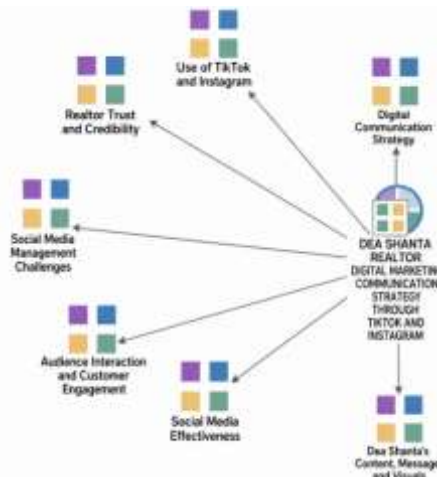


Figure 2. Thematic classification.

Source: NVivo analysis, 2026.

The first major finding is that TikTok and Instagram have complementary roles in the real estate marketing process. TikTok is primarily used to reach new audiences through the For You Page, short-video visibility, and content discoverability. Its strength lies in attention generation. The platform allows short property content to reach audiences who may not yet follow the realtor, thereby expanding exposure beyond existing networks. In this sense, TikTok functions as a traffic generator and awareness builder.

Instagram performs a different function. It works as a more organized visual catalog and relationship-maintenance platform. Feed posts, reels, stories, highlights, and captions help prospective buyers review listings, compare property options, revisit previous information, and evaluate the realtor's professional identity. Instagram stories are used to update listings, while feeds and reels help maintain consistency in visual identity. This distinction is important because real estate buyers usually need time to compare options and return to information repeatedly. Therefore, Instagram's archival and catalog-like structure is useful for maintaining credibility and assisting buyers' information searches.

The complementary use of TikTok and Instagram reflects the logic of integrated social media marketing. TikTok creates discovery and reach, while Instagram strengthens

information structure and brand credibility. The two platforms are then connected with WhatsApp and property portals as action-oriented channels. This integration illustrates that social media marketing in property sales should not be viewed as a single-platform strategy. Rather, it should be understood as a connected digital ecosystem in which each platform has a different role in the customer journey. The finding extends Instagram marketing research that highlights interaction, customization, entertainment, and trendiness as sources of brand equity (Park & Namkung, 2022), and aligns with short-video marketing studies showing the role of perceived social presence and shared value in shaping purchase intention (Shen & Wang, 2024).

Content, Message, and Visual Strategy: From Hard Selling to Informative Soft Selling

The second finding concerns content strategy. The analysis shows that Dea Shanta Realtor relies on property content that combines visual attractiveness, practical information, and soft-selling narration. The most frequent forms include slide photos, carousels, apartment listings, facility information, price highlights, down payment and installment simulations, location information, legal status, testimonials, and handover documentation. This strategy indicates that content is not merely used to show property objects; it is used to reduce uncertainty and answer questions that commonly appear in buyers' decision-making processes.

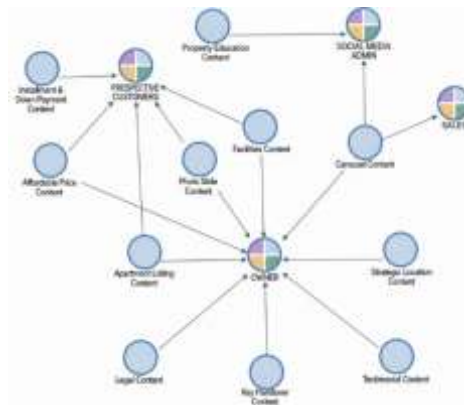


Figure 3. Content, message, and visual forms in Dea Shanta Realtor's social media marketing.

Source: NVivo analysis, 2026.

Figure 3 indicates that the content most closely linked to prospective customers includes low-price information, installment and down payment content, apartment listings, slide photos, facilities, and legal information. These content categories show that prospective buyers are not only attracted to aesthetic visuals but also to information that helps them assess affordability, suitability, and transaction safety. In real estate, the purchase decision is both rational and emotional. A visually appealing property may attract attention, but audiences require clear

information about location, price, payment terms, legal certainty, and facilities before moving to the inquiry stage.

Soft selling becomes important because property is a high-involvement product. Aggressive sales messages can generate curiosity, but they may not be sufficient to build trust. The data show that property education, such as tips for understanding mortgage schemes, legal documents, site survey considerations, and property investment prospects, can position the realtor as a consultant rather than merely a salesperson. This role is strategically valuable because audiences perceive the realtor as a source of assistance and guidance. In line with Hanaysha (2022), the informativeness, relevance, and interactivity of social media marketing can influence purchase decisions through trust. Therefore, content that is transparent and educational may be more effective than content that only emphasizes promotional urgency.

The visual dimension is also significant. Slide photos and carousels enable the realtor to showcase multiple aspects of a property, including exterior appearance, interior layout, room sizes, amenities, and the surrounding environment. However, the findings also reveal that visual quality remains a managerial challenge. Some photos taken by the owner were considered less attractive due to the angle, lighting, or unstable camera movement. This finding suggests that real estate social media marketing requires a minimum visual production standard. The credibility of property content is shaped not only by what is communicated, but also by how clearly and professionally the object is represented.

Customer Engagement as a Bridge from Attention to Qualified Leads

The third finding shows that customer engagement functions as a bridge between audience attention and qualified leads. In this study, engagement appears in several forms: likes, comments, shares, saves, direct messages, link clicks, WhatsApp leads, price questions, location questions, requests for available units, and requests for site visits. These activities represent different levels of seriousness. Likes and views indicate low-intensity exposure, while saves, shares, direct messages, and WhatsApp inquiries indicate higher interest. In property marketing, such engagement cannot be reduced to popularity; it should be read as a signal of the audience's movement through the decision-making process.

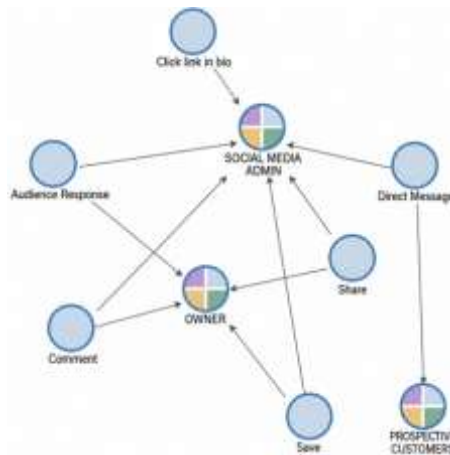


Figure 4. Audience interaction and customer engagement.

Source: NVivo analysis, 2026.

Figure 4 shows that audience engagement is connected to the owner, social media administrator, and potential customers. The social media administrator plays an operational role by responding to comments, monitoring direct messages, and directing inquiries to follow-up channels. The owner remains central because their personal branding and communication tone are tied to the property agent's identity. Direct messages are crucial because they allow the audience to ask more personal and specific questions about pricing, availability, location, and payment options.

This shift from public engagement to private communication represents a significant transition in real estate marketing. These findings also indicate that not all engagement is equally valuable. Many social media audiences are still in the browsing phase. They may like or save content without immediate purchase intent. However, these low-intensity interactions remain valuable because they build familiarity and can lead to future leads as the audience's financial readiness increases.

More valuable engagement occurs when the audience asks specific questions, requests a price list, clicks a link in the bio, or engages in a WhatsApp consultation. For Dea Shanta, a property agent, the challenge is differentiating passive engagement from potential buying interest. This can be achieved through clearer call-to-action structures, lead qualification questions, and integrated lead tracking.

Trust and Realtor Credibility as the Core Mechanism of Real Estate Social Media Marketing

The fourth finding reveals that trust is a core mechanism linking social media marketing and property sales. In this case, trust is built through price transparency, legal information, testimonials, handover documentation, personal branding, prompt responses, and a

communication style that combines professionalism with a relaxed approach. This finding is important because property transactions involve high financial risks and long-term consequences. Prospective buyers not only evaluate the property but also assess whether the property agent is credible, responsive, and trustworthy.

The perspective of prospective customers confirms that trust is shaped by the clarity of information and the responsiveness of the property administrator or agent. Transparent information about price and location reduces uncertainty, while prompt responses make the property agent appear accessible and reliable. Testimonial content and key handover documentation strengthen social proof by demonstrating that previous customers have completed transactions. In this case, electronic word of mouth is not limited to written reviews. It can also appear in comments, shared content, testimonials, reposts, and tangible evidence of completed transactions.

This finding supports previous research that visual content in social media communities can influence consumer trust (Karpenka et al., 2021). It is also consistent with Park et al. (2021), who demonstrated the influence of social media word of mouth on purchase intentions. In the real estate context, trust is even more important because the product is expensive, complex, and carries legal and financial risks.

Personal branding also plays a central role. Owners aren't hidden behind property listings; instead, the real estate agent's identity becomes part of the value proposition. Through personal branding, Dea Shanta Realtor communicates herself as a consultant who understands the market and can guide potential buyers. This human communication is crucial because social media audiences often rely on perceived authenticity before taking action. In property marketing, authenticity must be linked to expertise and responsibility, not simply entertainment.

Sales Effectiveness: Social Media as a Top-Funnel and Trust-Building Channel

The fifth finding relates to the effectiveness of social media in supporting property sales. This study shows that TikTok and Instagram are effective in expanding reach, increasing awareness, generating inquiries, and directing audiences to WhatsApp, consultations, site visits, property portals, and potential reservations. However, the findings also indicate that social media does not automatically lead to transaction closures. Transaction closures still depend on the quality of follow-up, property suitability, buyer readiness, financial capability, site visit experience, and the credibility of more formal channels such as property portals.

Figure 5 below shows that effectiveness is distributed across several stages: reach, impressions, traffic, engagement, inquiries, WhatsApp leads, consultations, reservations, visits,

and transaction closures. This pattern suggests that social media should be assessed through a funnel logic. At the top of the funnel, TikTok and Instagram help introduce properties and attract attention. In the middle of the funnel, they build interest, trust, and engagement. At the bottom, they direct potential buyers to WhatsApp, sales follow-ups, property portals, site visits, and the reservation process. Therefore, the effectiveness of TikTok and Instagram is better understood as a process of lead generation and trust-building rather than as direct transaction generation.

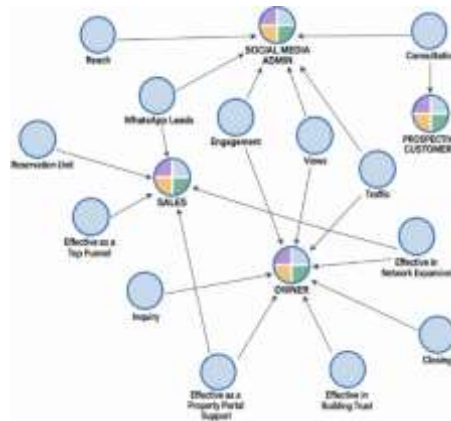


Figure 5. Social media effectiveness map.

Source: NVivo analysis, 2026.

These findings add nuance to social media marketing research by demonstrating that platform effectiveness should be evaluated according to product type. For low-risk consumer goods, social media can directly stimulate purchases. For real estate, social media is more powerful as a credibility infrastructure and lead generator. These findings are consistent with Dolega et al. (2021), who emphasized that social media outcomes depend on product characteristics and campaign execution. This finding also aligns with research in the real estate sector showing that visual social media marketing can influence purchase intentions through credibility and electronic word-of-mouth (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2023), and that social media marketing efforts can support real estate brand awareness (Thuy & Cuu, 2023).

Managerial Challenges in Social Media Marketing Implementation

The sixth finding concerns the challenges of social media management. The data indicate several recurring constraints: inconsistent content schedules, dependence on available listings, changes in platform algorithms, limited quality of owner-generated photos, unstable camera movement, and the difficulty of converting high engagement into serious buying interest. These challenges show that digital marketing performance is not determined only by creativity. It also depends on operational discipline, production capacity, platform literacy, and lead-management systems.

Content inconsistency appears when new listings are limited or when the team waits for property materials before posting. This can reduce account visibility because both TikTok and Instagram reward consistency and user interaction. To overcome this challenge, the realtor can develop a weekly educational content bank covering topics such as property legality, mortgage preparation, down payment planning, site survey tips, negotiation tips, property investment risks, and frequently asked questions. Such content is not dependent on new listings and can maintain the account's relevance while reinforcing the realtor's authority.

The second challenge concerns lead management. At present, many leads are managed personally through direct communication. This approach is useful for building closeness, but it should be supported by a simple database or CRM system that records lead source, property interest, main questions, follow-up status, site visit schedule, and final outcome. Without structured lead recording, it is difficult to evaluate whether TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, or property portals produce more serious prospects. A simple lead-tracking system would allow Dea Shanta Realtor to calculate conversions from views to direct messages, from direct messages to WhatsApp, from WhatsApp to site visits, and from site visits to reservations or closings.

The third challenge is integrating platform content with more formal information channels. Because property portals are perceived as more credible by serious buyers, TikTok and Instagram content should direct audiences more clearly to validated catalog links, WhatsApp Business, and official listing pages. This will help separate casual audiences from serious buyers and reduce repetitive basic questions. The integration of social media with portal-based information also supports transparency because audiences can verify property details across channels.

4. DISCUSSION

This research shows that TikTok and Instagram have distinct yet complementary roles in real estate marketing. TikTok is stronger as a platform for reach and discovery, while Instagram is stronger for cataloging, credibility, and relationship nurturing. This emphasizes that platform selection should be based on communication functionality, not just platform popularity. Second, these findings suggest that customer engagement in real estate marketing should be interpreted as a gradual signal of purchase readiness. Impressions and likes indicate exposure, but saves, shares, direct messages, link clicks, and WhatsApp inquiries indicate stronger movement toward decision-making. This layered view of engagement helps avoid

overestimating vanity metrics. For real estate businesses, the most useful engagement indicators are those related to information searches, consultations, and site visit intent.

Third, these findings highlight trust as the most important mediator between social media marketing and sales effectiveness. In real estate, audiences don't buy immediately after viewing content. They proceed when they believe property information is transparent and that the real estate agent is trustworthy. Therefore, social media marketers should prioritize credibility cues, including testimonials, legal clarity, transparent pricing, consistent personal branding, and responsive communication. These findings support the view that social media marketing activities can influence purchase intent through trust, brand equity, and customer experience (Wibowo et al., 2021; Hanaysha, 2022; Moslehpour et al., 2022). Practically, Dea Shanta Realtor must strengthen three areas. First, the content strategy must balance property listings, education, testimonials, and personal branding. Second, the call-to-action system must be more consistent, directing audiences to WhatsApp, the property portal, and the scheduling site visits. Third, lead tracking should be formalized using spreadsheets or a lightweight CRM to monitor the conversion path from platform exposure to sales. These improvements will make the social media strategy not only more engaging but also more measurable and commercially actionable.

5. CONCLUSION

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