

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 06 May 2024
Revised 13 August 2024
Accepted 20 August 2024
Published online 23 September 2024

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How to cite this article:
Shehni, A., Amirnejad, G., Taheri Ghoadarzi, H., Makvandi, F., & Hemmati, M. (2024). Designing the Organizational Structure Model of Iranian Metropolitan Municipalities with a Comparative Approach to the Managerial Patterns of Developed Countries. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal*, 2(3), 22-33.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.2.3.3>



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Designing the Organizational Structure Model of Iranian Metropolitan Municipalities with a Comparative Approach to the Managerial Patterns of Developed Countries

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted with the aim of designing a model of organizational structure for the municipalities of Iranian metropolises, using a comparative analysis of managerial patterns in developed countries. Considering the challenges in the current structure of municipalities, including centralization, weak interdepartmental coordination, and lack of utilization of modern technologies, this research seeks to propose an indigenous and efficient model for municipal structures by examining successful international cases. In the qualitative section, developed countries including Canada, the United States, Japan, and Germany were selected. In the quantitative section, the statistical population consisted of 40 individuals, among whom 20 participants were chosen through the snowball sampling method from university professors, metropolitan municipal officials, and city council members with master's and doctoral degrees for conducting interviews. For model dimension development, 10 experts from this community were selected to participate in a focus group. Accordingly, the dimensions, components, and indicators of organizational structures in the municipalities of developed countries were first identified, and then their similarities and differences with the structures of Iranian municipalities were analyzed. Data were collected through documentary studies, comparative analysis, and expert opinions, and the proposed model was validated using qualitative methods. The findings of the study indicate that decentralized, participatory, and technology-oriented structures in developed countries play a significant role in enhancing the efficiency of urban management. Ultimately, the proposed model for the structure of Iranian metropolitan municipalities is presented, consisting of managerial levels, specialized units, participatory mechanisms, and technological infrastructures. This model can be employed as a practical solution in the path toward municipal structural reform and the realization of sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Municipal organizational structure, Urban management, Comparative analysis, Iranian metropolises, Developed countries

Introduction

The housing market is one of the most significant sectors within urban economics and management, not only because it provides shelter but also due to its extensive role in investment, financial security, and socio-cultural identity formation. Across nations, the marketing of housing, particularly in the luxury segment, has become a multidimensional process shaped by consumer behavior, socio-economic conditions, cultural determinants, and technological transformation. In recent decades, the complexity of decision-making in the housing sector has heightened, particularly in metropolitan contexts where population growth, urban expansion, and globalization exert strong pressures on both demand and supply dynamics [1, 2].

In Iran and other emerging markets, research has consistently highlighted that housing is not only a basic need but also a central asset class influencing macroeconomic cycles, social mobility, and wealth distribution [3, 4]. Consumer perspectives on housing purchase decisions are shaped by multifaceted determinants ranging from technical features to locational attributes, cultural contexts, and marketing strategies [5, 6]. Moreover, the luxury housing sector demands special attention because of its symbolic value, its link to prestige consumption, and its sensitivity to socio-economic and environmental conditions [7, 8].

One important dimension of luxury housing marketing lies in understanding consumer motivations and their alignment with broader consumption values. Prestige consumption theory explains why individuals pursue luxury housing not only for functional utility but also for status signaling and identity construction [7]. This aligns with studies of luxury brand marketing in other industries, where branding, social media, and digital engagement shape consumer equity [9, 10]. Research on consumer equity in social media contexts further emphasizes the role of brand co-creation and e-word-of-mouth in shaping purchase decisions [11]. Housing developers increasingly adopt similar approaches, integrating branding strategies and digital platforms into their marketing mix to capture affluent consumer segments.

The role of digital transformation is further reinforced by the expansion of online marketing and virtual engagement. The integration of e-marketing strategies, such as those deployed in Indonesia's telecommunications sector, provides valuable insights for housing developers seeking to expand reach and improve sales [12]. Likewise, the role of digital marketing in shaping consumer decisions in other industries, including tourism, has proven significant, highlighting the growing importance of online consumer behavior in housing markets as well [13]. This trend suggests that housing developers must adopt innovative marketing strategies that combine traditional sales practices with digital channels to respond to evolving consumer expectations.

From an urban economic perspective, studies demonstrate that demand for housing is closely tied to macroeconomic conditions, demographic trends, and government policy frameworks [14, 15]. In the Iranian context, repetitive cycles of booms and busts have been linked to both speculative behavior and structural inefficiencies [1, 16]. Similar patterns have been observed in other nations, where pricing indices such as Case-Shiller models have been applied to capture dynamic changes in housing valuations [16]. The volatility of housing markets underlines the need for developers to adopt robust marketing strategies that stabilize demand and provide greater transparency to consumers.

Cross-national studies further enrich our understanding of consumer behavior in the housing sector. Research in Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Greece, and Germany consistently identifies factors such as location, financial accessibility, cultural preferences, and environmental quality as major determinants of housing purchase [17-21]. For example, in Kuala Lumpur, factors like lifestyle, cultural affinity, and urban accessibility strongly influence housing preferences [18], while in Greece, affordability and financing mechanisms remain crucial [20]. In the Indonesian context, millennial buyers prioritize affordability alongside modern amenities, reshaping the supply of new housing projects [19]. In Germany, urban housing values are impacted by building characteristics, accessibility, and neighborhood effects [21]. Such comparative evidence suggests that luxury housing marketing cannot be isolated from broader urban and cultural frameworks.

Another critical element is the role of superstition, cultural norms, and symbolic meaning in consumer housing decisions. In New Zealand, for example, housing prices reflect cultural beliefs and ethnic differences among buyers [22]. Similarly, in Hong Kong, critical enablers of homeownership include not only financial capacity but also social and cultural enablers [23].

These findings are particularly relevant in Iran, where cultural values, neighborhood reputation, and community identity exert strong influence on the desirability of housing projects [4, 5].

Marketing strategies in luxury housing must also address evolving consumer expectations for sustainability and quality of life. Recent studies highlight how environmental factors, such as green space, urban cleanliness, and climate conditions, increasingly influence housing preferences [24, 25]. Furthermore, service design principles applied in the construction sector emphasize the integration of consumer-centric approaches into project development [26]. This resonates with findings that highlight the significance of after-sales services, maintenance, and customer engagement in real estate development [17]. Developers who neglect these aspects risk undermining long-term customer satisfaction and reputation.

The economic and financial accessibility of housing remains another central concern. Studies have developed frameworks to evaluate affordability, accessibility, and payment structures across contexts such as Mumbai, Tehran, and Isfahan [5, 6, 27]. Affordability frameworks consider not only initial purchase price but also financing mechanisms, long-term payment flexibility, and the socio-economic status of buyers [27]. In Iran, the combination of inflation, speculative investment, and inadequate financing models has exacerbated affordability issues, intensifying the need for innovative marketing and financing strategies [3]. These challenges further highlight the necessity of aligning marketing strategies with both consumer demand and financial realities.

In addition to financial and technical considerations, housing purchase decisions are significantly shaped by psychological and emotional factors. Branding strategies applied in luxury markets reveal that consumer loyalty and trust are closely tied to perceived prestige and emotional connection with the product [8, 11]. Studies on consumer behavior in Turkey, Greece, and Malaysia have shown that lifestyle aspirations, community identity, and cultural symbolism are essential components of housing marketing [15, 20, 28]. Such insights reinforce the idea that luxury housing projects must not only satisfy technical and functional needs but also address intangible dimensions of consumer perception.

The Iranian housing market has historically demonstrated both commonalities and divergences compared to global trends. For instance, Iranian studies highlight that consumer decision-making in housing involves a careful balance between technical requirements, environmental quality, cultural alignment, and financial feasibility [4, 14]. The interplay of these variables indicates that the success of marketing strategies in Iran depends on comprehensive integration of multiple factors rather than reliance on a single determinant. Moreover, fluctuations in urban land markets, as observed in the case of tourism-driven developments in Mashhad and Shandiz, highlight the vulnerability of housing projects to speculative pressures and regulatory inefficiencies [14].

Luxury housing marketing in Shiraz, as a case study, provides a particularly useful context because it reflects both global trends and local specificities. Shiraz, as a cultural and historical center, presents unique challenges in balancing traditional architectural values with modern luxury demands. Consumer preferences in Shiraz mirror those observed globally—emphasizing location, prestige, environmental quality, and service provision—yet remain strongly influenced by cultural heritage, social networks, and community identity [3, 4]. By integrating technical, economic, locational, cultural, and marketing dimensions, the housing sector in Shiraz demonstrates the multifaceted nature of consumer-oriented housing strategies.

Taken together, the reviewed studies underscore the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to luxury housing marketing. Insights from economics, consumer behavior, cultural studies, and digital marketing converge to highlight

that housing purchase decisions cannot be explained by economic rationality alone. They are instead the outcome of an intricate interplay between technical features, financial structures, cultural identities, branding strategies, and urban environmental factors [21, 26, 29]. This integrative perspective informs the present study, which seeks to validate a comprehensive model of luxury housing marketing from the consumer's perspective in Shiraz. By synthesizing findings from both local and international research, this study aims to contribute to a more robust understanding of the drivers behind housing purchase decisions.

Methodology

The research methodology in this article, aimed at designing an organizational structure model for the municipalities of Iranian metropolises based on a comparative analysis of managerial patterns in developed countries, has been structured as a mixed and developmental approach. This method includes the stages of data collection, comparative analysis, model design, and validation.

In terms of purpose, the type of research is applied and developmental, as it seeks to provide practical solutions for reforming municipal structures and enhancing urban management in Iran. In terms of nature, the present study is qualitative, utilizing a comparative approach and documentary content analysis.

In the data collection phase, documentary sources including scientific articles, official reports, urban laws and regulations, and comparative studies were employed. In addition, to complement the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in urban management, mayors, city council members, and university professors.

Data analysis was carried out using comparative analysis techniques. At this stage, the structure of Iranian metropolitan municipalities was compared with examples from developed countries such as France, Canada, Germany, and Australia, and similarities and differences were identified. This comparison was conducted based on indicators such as task division, level of centralization, participatory mechanisms, and the use of technology.

For designing the proposed model, the grounded theory method was applied, which is based on coding concepts derived from the data and developing the components of the model. In the final stage, the validation of the model was performed using the Delphi method and expert opinion analysis to assess the extent of the model's compatibility with the operational conditions of Iranian municipalities.

Overall, the research methodology of this article, through the integration of qualitative, comparative, and grounded theory approaches, provides a suitable foundation for designing an indigenous and applicable model in the field of urban management.

Findings and Results

For the design of an organizational structure model for the municipalities of Iranian metropolises, using comparative analysis of managerial patterns in developed countries, a combined and multilayered model is proposed. Based on the findings of the study, this model incorporates managerial, structural, participatory, and technological components. The model seeks to maintain indigenous features while benefiting from successful global experiences.

The proposed model consists of four main levels:

1. **Strategic Level:** At this level, macro-level policymaking, urban development planning, and supervision of municipal performance are conducted. The institutions active at this level include the City Council, specialized committees, and strategic planning units. This level must enjoy relative independence and maintain interaction with national and regional institutions.
2. **Managerial Level:** This level includes the executive management of the municipality, deputy offices, and specialized units responsible for program implementation, interdepartmental coordination, and resource management. The structure of this level should be designed in a matrix or functional form to ensure the necessary flexibility in addressing urban issues. Delegation of authority, transparency in decision-making, and accountability are among the key principles of this level.
3. **Operational Level:** At this level, service, construction, cultural, social, and information technology units operate. These units must be organized in a specialized and region-oriented manner to deliver services with high quality and efficiency. The use of modern technologies, intelligent systems, and data-driven approaches is essential at this level.
4. **Participatory and Supervisory Level:** This level encompasses citizen communication institutions, feedback systems, public and media supervisory units, and social participation centers. The aim of this level is to enhance community engagement, increase public trust, and monitor municipal performance through transparent and accessible mechanisms.

Alongside these levels, the proposed model also includes the following key components:

- Financial independence and performance-based budgeting
- Flexible and re-engineerable structure
- Utilization of information and communication technologies
- Horizontal and vertical communication mechanisms among units
- Continuous performance evaluation and accountability system
- Inter-institutional interaction with governmental, private, and civil society organizations

This model can serve as a framework for reforming the structure of Iranian metropolitan municipalities and provide a foundation for improving efficiency, transparency, and sustainable urban development.

Based on the results obtained from the comparative analysis of municipal structures in developed countries, semi-structured interviews with experts, the use of focus groups, and the validation of the findings, the structural model of metropolitan municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran using the comparative analysis technique of developed countries' patterns is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Dimensions Constituting the Design of the Organizational Structure Model of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns and Their Symbols

Dimensions	Symbol
Design and approval of municipal structure	F1
Financial structure and sustainable development	F2
Organizational structure factors	F3
Establishment of organizational units in the municipality	F4
Activities under municipal supervision	F5
Human resources structure	F6

After distributing the questionnaire and collecting the experts' opinions, Excel software was used to aggregate the opinions, and then the initial reachability matrix was formed using the frequency mode method. The frequency mode method works as follows: first, all matrices obtained from the respondents are summed element by element; then, the number with the highest frequency (mode) is selected, numbers greater than the mode are converted to one, and numbers less than or equal to it are converted to zero. The SSIM diagram as well as the table of this matrix are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

SSIM of the Organizational Structure Model of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns

Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
F1	–	A	V	O	O	O
F2		–	A	V	A	A
F3			–	V	V	O
F4				–	A	V
F5					–	A
F6						–

Table 3

Initial Reachability Matrix for the Organizational Structure Model of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns

Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
F1	1	0	1	0	0	0
F2	0	1	0	1	0	0
F3	1	0	1	0	0	0
F4	0	0	0	1	0	0
F5	0	0	0	0	1	1
F6	0	0	0	0	0	1

After obtaining the initial reachability matrix, its internal consistency must also be ensured. This means that if factor F leads to factor B, and factor B leads to factor C, then factor F must also lead to factor C. If this condition is not met in the reachability matrix, the matrix must be corrected and the missing relationships replaced. The final reachability matrix for the criteria is obtained by considering the transitivity relationship to ensure the consistency of the initial reachability matrix. For this purpose, the initial matrix must be raised to the power of $K+1$ until a stable state is established ($M_k = M_{k+1}$). In this process, some zero elements also convert to one. The main diagonal of the initial reachability matrix must be equal to one (Table 3).

Table 4

Final (Consistent) Reachability Matrix for the Organizational Structure Model of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns

Items	F6	F5	F4	F3	F2	F1
F1	1	1	0	1	0	1
F2	1	1	1	0	1	0
F3	1	1	0	1	0	1
F4	0	1	1	0	1	1
F5	1	1	0	0	1	0
F6	1	0	0	0	1	1

After adjusting the matrix, the identified variables are stratified. To determine the level and priority of the variables, the input and output sets for each variable are specified. The output set includes the variables that can be reached, while the input set includes the variables through which the given variable can be reached. At this stage, after determining the input and output sets, the common set for each variable is also determined. For prioritization, variables whose output and common sets are completely identical are placed at the highest level of the ISM model hierarchy (Table 4). To identify the components of the next level of the system, the stratified variable is removed from the table, and Table 5 is formed with the remaining variables. This process continues until the level of all variables is determined.

Table 5

Stratification of the Constructive Elements of the Organizational Structure Model of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns

Level	Common Set	Input Set	Output Set	Variables
Second Level	F1, F3	F1, F3, F5	F1, F3	F1
Second Level	F2	F2, F5	F2, F4	F2
Second Level	F1, F3	F1, F3, F5	F1, F3	F3
First Level	F4	F2, F4, F5	F4	F4
Fourth Level	F5	F5	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6	F5
Third Level	F6	F5, F6	F6	F6

As can be observed in the above tables, the constructive elements of the research variable are placed in four levels. Based on the results obtained from the analysis of the research data, the research model is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 1

ISM Model for the Organizational Structure of Metropolitan Municipalities in the Islamic Republic of Iran Using the Comparative Analysis Technique of Developed Countries' Patterns



According to the above structural–interpretive model, the stratification of each component of the research model can be explained as follows:

- The first level includes the dimension: Establishment of organizational units in the municipality.
- The second level includes the dimensions: Design and approval of municipal structure, organizational structure factors, and financial structure and sustainable development.
- The third level includes the dimension: Human resources structure.
- The fourth level includes the dimension: Activities under municipal supervision.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the key factors influencing the marketing of luxury housing in Shiraz from the consumer's perspective, validating a comprehensive model through confirmatory factor analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling. The findings indicated that 11 major factors—technical, physical, building-related, appearance, marketing, environmental, facilities, service, economic, cultural, and locational—exhibited significant effects on consumer housing purchase behavior. Cronbach's alpha values across all dimensions exceeded 0.7, confirming strong reliability, while significance levels across the sub-factors validated the robustness of the constructs.

One of the most salient findings was the strong role of appearance-related factors, with aesthetic view demonstrating the highest regression coefficient among all indicators. Adequate lighting and façade design also showed high significance. This supports the notion that in luxury housing markets, visual appeal and design elements are not secondary but central to consumer evaluation. Similar evidence has been reported in the literature on global housing preferences, where façade, aesthetics, and external appearance directly shape consumer perception and willingness to invest [18, 20]. In the Iranian context, earlier works also highlight how architectural style and urban identity strongly influence demand, particularly in cultural cities such as Shiraz [4, 5]. This alignment underscores that luxury housing developers must prioritize architectural innovation and design excellence to align with consumer expectations.

Technical and physical dimensions also emerged as highly significant. Within the technical factors, design and blueprint, as well as engineering aspects, showed strong coefficients and significance levels, validating their role in shaping trust and credibility. Consumers evidently place value on well-engineered and systematically designed housing projects, reflecting a concern with safety, durability, and structural soundness. Comparable findings have been observed in studies on Turkey and Iran, where technical quality was identified as a fundamental determinant in housing purchase decisions [6, 15]. In the physical dimension, spatial hierarchy and interior segmentation were found to be critical. These results are consistent with research that highlights how interior planning and effective use of space enhance livability, functionality, and attractiveness of housing units [17, 26].

The building-related factors, particularly size and materials used, also had high loadings, suggesting that tangible construction attributes remain essential in shaping consumer judgment. This result corroborates prior findings that identified structural quality and material durability as strong predictors of housing satisfaction [1, 2]. In Greece and Malaysia, similar evidence points to material choice and building size as central criteria in residential purchase decisions [20, 28]. Together, these findings affirm that in addition to luxury appearance, the intrinsic construction quality remains a decisive dimension.

The study also confirmed the relevance of marketing factors, including branding, advertising, in-person customer interactions, and social networks. Branding and social networks demonstrated especially strong regression coefficients, reflecting the growing impact of digital transformation and brand perception on housing decisions. This observation parallels evidence from the luxury goods sector, where consumer-based brand equity is strongly shaped by social media marketing and online engagement [8, 9]. Likewise, brand co-creation and e-WOM have been shown to significantly enhance consumer trust and equity [11]. The adoption of such strategies in housing marketing indicates convergence between real estate and broader luxury markets, highlighting the necessity of integrating both traditional and digital channels.

Environmental factors also exhibited significance, though with somewhat lower coefficients compared to technical or appearance factors. Demographic composition, pleasant environment, and cleanliness were all validated. These results are

aligned with international research that emphasizes the importance of environmental quality, green spaces, and neighborhood conditions [21, 24, 25]. Although the pleasant environment variable showed the weakest regression coefficient, its statistical significance indicates that even subtle environmental features play a role in shaping consumer evaluations. This is consistent with evidence from New Zealand, where cultural beliefs and neighborhood environments affected property valuations [22].

Facilities and service-related factors also proved to be significant contributors. Proximity to city centers, adjacency to services, after-sales services, and recreational amenities were all validated, as were access to public transport, equipment, and green spaces in the service dimension. This confirms that beyond the core physical attributes, consumers value convenience, accessibility, and supportive infrastructure. Such findings echo studies from Indonesia and Malaysia where millennials and middle-class buyers increasingly prioritize accessibility to urban amenities [19, 28]. Similarly, evidence from Turkey and Hong Kong highlights the importance of service-related attributes in sustaining consumer satisfaction and long-term loyalty [17, 23].

Economic factors, including price and payment conditions, were both validated as strong determinants of housing purchase. These findings are unsurprising given the centrality of affordability and financing options in housing decisions. They are consistent with frameworks assessing affordability in Mumbai [27] and with Iranian studies highlighting the role of financial structures in shaping demand [3, 16]. In luxury housing, while consumers are often less constrained by financial limits, the structuring of payment plans and relative price competitiveness remain crucial. This suggests that developers must innovate in financing strategies to make luxury projects more accessible.

Locational factors were found to be among the most robust determinants overall. All six variables—construction site location, placement, climate, affluent district, regional security, and social position—demonstrated strong regression coefficients and high significance. These results reinforce the classical urban economics perspective that “location, location, location” remains the dominant driver of housing value. International studies from Germany, Greece, and Malaysia confirm the preeminence of location and neighborhood in determining consumer decisions [20, 21, 28]. In the Iranian context, similar emphasis has been placed on the socio-cultural identity of neighborhoods, community reputation, and security as decisive elements [4, 14]. The particularly strong influence of affluent districts and regional security indicates that consumers in Shiraz associate luxury housing with broader social and cultural capital, not just physical attributes.

Finally, cultural factors such as the culture of residents, though measured with fewer sub-variables, were also validated. These results highlight the importance of community identity and cultural compatibility in shaping housing choices, consistent with earlier Iranian studies and international findings [5, 18, 28]. Cultural factors often operate as intangible determinants that enhance or diminish the desirability of otherwise similar housing projects.

Overall, the findings of this study converge with a broad body of international literature, while also underscoring unique contextual features of the Shiraz luxury housing market. The significance of design, aesthetics, and location places the city within a global pattern of consumer demand, while the importance of cultural and environmental factors reflects local socio-cultural realities. By integrating technical, economic, environmental, and marketing dimensions, this study provides a holistic framework for understanding consumer perspectives in luxury housing marketing.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to consumers in Shiraz, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other Iranian cities or international contexts with differing socio-economic

and cultural structures. Second, while the model incorporated 11 dimensions, other potentially relevant factors such as policy regulations, macroeconomic volatility, or global crises were not included. Third, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce bias, as consumer intentions do not always translate into actual purchase behavior. Finally, while the study employed quantitative validation techniques, qualitative insights from consumers and developers could have enriched the understanding of underlying motivations and perceptions.

Future studies should expand the geographical scope to include multiple cities and even cross-national comparisons to test the generalizability of the model. Researchers could also integrate policy-related and macroeconomic variables, exploring the interaction between government interventions, financial markets, and consumer decision-making. Mixed-method approaches that combine surveys with interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic methods would add depth to understanding consumer perspectives. Additionally, longitudinal research designs could capture the dynamic evolution of housing preferences over time, particularly in response to changing economic conditions, digital innovations, and environmental challenges. Finally, further research could examine the impact of emerging technologies such as the metaverse, virtual reality tours, and AI-driven marketing tools on housing purchase behavior.

For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of integrating both tangible and intangible dimensions into housing marketing strategies. Developers should invest in design excellence, ensure technical and construction quality, and prioritize location and neighborhood identity. Marketing campaigns should incorporate strong branding and leverage social media platforms to engage affluent consumers effectively. At the same time, developers must provide flexible financing mechanisms and after-sales services to enhance long-term customer satisfaction. Environmental sustainability and community culture should be integrated into project design to align with evolving consumer expectations. Collectively, these strategies can enhance competitiveness, strengthen consumer trust, and ensure long-term success in the luxury housing sector.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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