



WE BUY LOCAL WE BUY SAUDI

Purchasing & patronage decision-making mindsets
& trends of established buyers & collectors of local
design in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

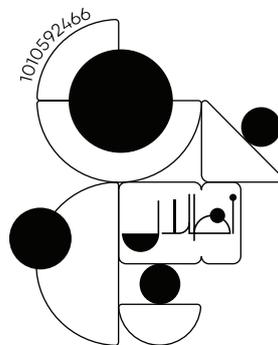
WHITE PAPER
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About Adhlal

Adhlal is a venture founded by Nourah Alfaisal in 2018 to serve and champion the local design industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Design, in the world of Adhlal, ranges, for example, from architecture and interior design, to visual graphics, fashion, and products.

Our impact mission is to enable a thriving local community of designers, supply chains, mentors, buyers, and patrons. We aim to invest in research, share knowledge, build capacity, and host marketplaces that serve as a true meeting point for supply and demand.

Adhlal endeavors to grow with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Throughout this journey, we pledge to support our local industry, not only as a mentor to homegrown talent and an advisor to government, but also as an investor in an authentic industry that stands for *Made in Saudi Arabia*.



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Letter by the founder

September 23, 2020

Dear readers,

We published the first edition of this white paper during Saudi Design Week, in November 2019, and discovered how essential conducting scientific research and sharing data and findings were to our design community. As investing in research is key, we have dedicated ourselves to publishing an expanded second edition of the first white paper on the occasion of Saudi National Day!

This white paper is a call-out to our local designers to extend a vote of confidence in the name of impact and potential. As we buy local, the demand for innovative design and creations grows, and comes the responsibility to uplift our own abilities and capacities as designers and businesses. This first paper shares the desires, interests, and excitement of buyers, collectors, and patrons of local design in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I would really like to thank our focus group discussion participants for joining us in a truly immersive experience of deep learning! We would not be here without you, and I am grateful and humbled by your generosity of wisdom and critical thought. I am honored to be sharing your many voices with our local design industry, in the spirit of open source knowledge and community.

I also must thank my amazing team at Adhlal for making so much happen, with still more to come! Thank you for making our offices a second home to our growing circle of friends. I believe in you, and I know that you will always make all our partners in knowledge and industry-building feel right at home.

I would also like to thank the research team at The Zovighian Partnership for your deep listening research methodologies, and for demonstrating the true value of information power.

I am truly a believer in the power of investing in data, and I can only hope that all our readers will see and feel the value of this evidence-based analysis. May this white paper offer you an asset of knowledge that you can re-invest into your creations, businesses, teams, and our local design industry.

Yours sincerely,



Nourah Alfaisal
Founder,
Adhlal for design

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Framing local design as industry:

Background & key terms

We live today in a Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that is investing with full force in culture, heritage, and art, enabling new economies of domestic and international tourism. Our investments into infrastructure, construction, and real estate are an open-air laboratory for design innovation. With Vision 2030 creating a nurturing and cathartic space for us to create and innovate, we have the privilege of building a society that is intentional in its impactful outcomes.

Design is at the core of this potential. Design is first and foremost a means to meet socio-cultural and economic needs. It is a tool to enable productivity and a conduit for feasibility and expression. It necessitates the use of critical thinking to develop new ideas, problem-solve, create, test, and innovate functional solutions for society, businesses, and the environment. Without design, communities and economies cannot connect, engage, and generate value. In so many ways, it is a value creator that we take for granted!

At Adhlal, we are believers in the potential of design, and are advocates of not just utilizing design, but transforming it from the ecosystem it is today into a full-fledged local industry. This industry has already been seeded and bears important roots. Our heritage is testament of its bearings. The design industry of tomorrow can be one that sustainably diversifies our economy from oil and contributes greatly to our society and national brand on the global stage.

For the purposes of this white paper, design is defined as an all-encompassing industry of multiple sectors, ranging from architecture and interior design, to visual graphics, fashion, and products.

Like any industry, it is structured with the economic dynamics of supply and demand, driven by social and regulatory dynamics. The supply-side of this industry is defined as local designers and businesses that are based in and growing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. That includes designers

of Saudi nationality, as well as all nationalities who are committed to designing in the Kingdom as their base. The supply-side includes not only freelancers, employed designers, design businesses, and charities dedicated to design, but also an entire supply chain that allows designers to achieve the complete value chain of creative journeys and product development.

The demand-side is characterized as buyers, clients, collectors, and patrons of local design creations, products, and services from all walks of life. Not only does our supply-side include individuals and households, but also enterprises and government entities who also have demands and needs for local design.

The glue that brings both our supply and demand-sides together includes our regulatory environment and infrastructure, education services and mentors, all which are crucial enablers to elevating and providing for this industry.

It is our privilege to give you an insider view into the ins and outs of our local design industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, beginning with the pages of this white paper.

Executive overview

INTRODUCTION

Design is a means to meet socio-cultural and economic needs; a tool to enable expression and productivity. It is a process of generating new ideas, problem-solving, creating, prototyping, and innovating functional solutions. For the purposes of this white paper, design is defined as an all-encompassing industry of multiple sectors, ranging from architecture and interior design, to visual graphics, fashion, and products. Without design, communities and economies cannot connect, engage, and generate value.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS WHITE PAPER

We have written this white paper especially for our audience of local designers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This paper sheds light on the decision-making factors and dynamics that compel buyers and patrons to buy local. We particularly examined an established segment of the demand-side, defined as buyers, clients, and collectors, as well as donors, patrons, and mentors of local design products and services in KSA who have an established track record of patronage and supporting designers in the country. Starting with this segment will allow us to then explore the broader dynamics of supply and demand in the local design industry.

This second edition paper sets the tone for the rest of this white paper volume, which is detailed in the *Objectives of this paper and white paper series* section.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the paucity of information about the design industry in KSA, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative research methods were specifically chosen to ensure deep listening to fully capture the opinions and views of 18 research participants during three focus group discussions (FGDs). Questions were designed in a meticulous and iterative manner to answer key research questions, supplemented by short intake

forms to capture the demographic information of our participants. Participation in our FGDs was completely voluntary and no financial incentive was offered in return for participation. Respondents were assured complete privacy and anonymity. Consent forms were distributed and signed to permit recording during each FGD.

All raw data collected was respectively transcribed, translated, anonymized, and coded following the Boyatzis thematic analysis technique and open coding. A codebook was developed to guide the documentation of key findings and emerging themes. Albeit the limited number of respondents recruited, the findings and recommendations proposed in this paper can inform the creative journeys of designers in Saudi Arabia. It is also a testbed to encourage and initiate future research inquiries.

You can turn to our *Methodology* section to learn more about the research design, data collection, limitations of our study, research ethics, data analysis, and opportunities for further research.

KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

Respondents amenable expressed what drives them to buy from and support local designers in the Kingdom. While this vote of confidence to buy local often had strong consensus, our FGDs also included much heated debate about the needs and requirements of our demand-side participants to continue to buy and advance local design.

Our research participants taught us a lot, and helped shape our understanding of five decision-making parameters that inform purchasing and patronage decisions of local design:

1. Consumer mindset, with an evolved desire to engage with the industry as consumers rather than as donors;
2. Patriotism and a sense of obligation to support the community of local talent and their needs and demands;
3. Trust in the designer;

4. Product development, from originality and exclusivity, to quality and aesthetic appeal; and
5. Purchasing experiences, from access to fair pricing of local products.

Our *Key findings* section offers fuller details and analysis of the below overview.

1. Consumer mindset: From donor to buyer

A recurrent theme throughout our FGDs, respondents taught us how imperative it was for them to shift from supporting designers as a donor and patron, and to instead develop a relationship as a buyer and client. Research participants explained that they wish to do so while continuing to be deeply vested in the sustainability and success of local designers.

2. Patriotism and the sense of obligation

We learned that the decision of buyers to purchase local design products is often driven by patriotic purchasing habits. Indeed, purchasing locally-made products helps represent identity and reflect personal patriotic beliefs. Several respondents iterated that their local purchases are driven mainly by a sense of obligation towards their country. Some also presented their strong sense of charitable duty to serve local designers by buying their Made in KSA products.

However, we also learned that many desire to shift their patronage habits and move away from being a donor for local talent to becoming a buyer of local design. Our research participants spoke to the rise of consumer-based purchasing factors that are increasingly governing their relationships with local design, such as the competence of the designer, to the utility and appreciation of the product, to even the sales experience.

3. Trust in the designer

The majority of our respondents expressed their interest in supporting the creative journeys of local talent in the Kingdom with vested interest. Trust was at the core of choosing to buy from a local designer.

4. Product development

In line with their patriotic purchasing behaviors,

participants exhibited a strong interest in Made in KSA products. However, our respondents also spoke to the characteristics and features of locally-made products that are gaining more importance in their choices to buy and not to buy. Speaking with a lens of mentorship and patronage, some laid out constructive criticism aimed at challenging designers to thrive in a competitive and technical design industry.

Although our research participants argued that product attractiveness is imperative, a studied and authentic concept was gaining precedence in the market. For instance, there was general consensus that authenticity, uniqueness, and exclusivity were important factors that could make or break the decision to buy local. Many expressed the importance of nurturing local creativity to satisfy their strong and still unmet demand for unique and authentic pieces. They also highlighted the importance of protecting the intellectual property of local design especially against imitations of original works.

Craftsmanship of local products was another interesting area of focus during our FGDs. Respondents shed light on the need to strengthen the craftsmanship of local Saudi design concepts and described the challenges of finding high quality products that are made with consistent standards of quality assurance. Indeed, quality was especially recognized as a major area for improvement that requires significant investment in KSA. Last but not least, designing with product aesthetic appeal was a relevant theme during some of our FGDs.

5. Purchasing experiences

There was much debate on the availability of and access to local products, with some of our respondents suggesting that there is pent-up demand for local products, with no clarity on how to find seek out local designers. Respondents also strongly emphasized their concerns towards the pricing of local design products. Many criticized the high prices of local design products and highlighted the need for new pricing strategies that are more affordable and are not taking advantage of charitable patronage mindsets. We learned about signs of growing price sensitivity in the

market that are affecting the willingness to pay for local design. Some, however, still expressed their willingness to purchase local design, albeit high market prices.

OUR OUTLOOK ON LOCAL DESIGN

We believe in the potential of a thriving local design industry in KSA. It is key to re-frame the resources and innate opportunities of our local ecosystem into an industry governed by supply and demand. Only with such a mindset can we begin to action and deliver, together, measurable and consistent value-add to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and socio-economic fabric of KSA.

Market-making necessitates a demand-side of buyers and collectors that effectively support a supply-side of talent, and a supply-side that is responsive to the needs and desires of a demand-side of potential long-term clients. It is also instrumental to build an industry that is demand-centric and governed by strong economic fundamentals. This necessitates a demand-side that positions itself as desirable and nurturing clients to build and enforce market accountability. This also requires giving the tools to our supply-side of local talent to effectively build their capacities and capabilities to serve an empowered market. At Adhlal, we recognize how crucial mentorship and a rich repository of knowledge and tools is to enabling a sustainable and thriving local design industry, and look forward to publishing more on this important subject.

Details of our outlook and recommended actions are presented in our *Looking Forward: Our outlook on local Saudi Design* section.

It is our strong desire that this paper and white paper series set the stage for broader investments into data and information power, so that we may become a go-to resource for the many forces that make up our local design industry. We are excited to see how our newly presented insights positively impact local designers and buyers alike.

The Adhlal offices are always open to our readers to come and debate the many topics we present in these pages. The floor is yours.

Objectives of this paper & white paper series

This expanded second edition paper of our inaugural white paper series is written for the local design community in Saudi Arabia. It speaks to local designers, private sector players and investors, as well as civil society, academia, and key public stakeholders.

The data collected for this white paper series comes from the findings and insights of the first Adhlal scientific research mission. We commissioned this research to understand the current state and potential of design as an industry in KSA.

Focus group discussions were conducted in October and November 2018 with both high liquidity and strong purchasing power demand-side industry participants. The demand-side is defined as buyers, clients, and collectors, as well as donors, patrons, and mentors of local design products and services in Saudi Arabia. Our decision to start with the demand-side of the industry is described in the Methodology section of this white paper.

Our research objectives with our demand-side participants were to:

1. Understand local market demands, particularly their needs, requirements, desires, and priorities;
2. Identify market challenges and opportunities, especially dynamics, enablers and disablers, growth drivers, and expected trends; and
3. Explore the capacity of the local industry to serve as a meaningful socio-economic contributor to GDP, economic diversification, and society-at-large.

This paper examines the rationale and mindsets of our research participants to buy local from the current market offering available to them. Accordingly, it can inform creative journeys and product development, helping designers deliver more demand-centric products and services to the market. These insights can also inform pricing,

marketing, and sales strategies. Our paper clarifies the need for a regulatory infrastructure and ease of doing business opportunities for local designers and buyers. This is essential for an audience of government and public stakeholders to understand. Furthermore, it recommends homegrown standards for KSA to breed, sponsor, and promote, allowing us to export and showcase our local talent to the world. We hope this is of strong interest to private and public cultural diplomacy actors mandated to bring the international community closer to the Kingdom and to all we have to offer.

We hope this evidence-based series, a gateway to an upcoming industry report, serves as a contribution to the data and literature on the design industry in KSA. We desire that this series brings to light the opportunities for a thriving economic sector, calling on the private sector, investors, academia, civil society, and the government to strategically support the local design ecosystem.

Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN

Beginning with a demand-side analysis

Adhlal commissioned The Zovighian Partnership to design and conduct our first research mission, focused on understanding the demand-side of the local design industry.

Starting with a demand-side examination allowed us to investigate the extent to which industry dynamics are driven by demand fundamentals. The spirit of this methodological decision was to explore local design from an industry lens, meaning there can be no supply without demand. It enabled us to gain a detailed understanding of economic potential, willingness to pay, and desire to invest in the local offering of design products, services, and talent.

Key research questions

To achieve our research objectives explained in the *Objectives of this paper & white paper series section*, we defined the following research questions:

1. How does the demand-side perceive the design industry in Saudi Arabia today, and how does it interact with the industry at large?
2. Looking at the design industry in KSA today, what are the challenges and opportunities facing clients, investors, and donors when engaging with local designers, manufacturers, and sales teams?
3. What does the local design industry need today in terms of support — regulatory, ecosystem infrastructure, capacity-building, financial, and other — to enable the industry to thrive and become a formally-recognized, high contributing socio-economic force to the GDP of the Kingdom?

Adopting a qualitative research method

Due to the paucity of information on the design industry in KSA, an exploratory, deep listening qualitative approach needed to be adopted. To fully portray the opinions and views of our research participants, focus group discussions (FGDs) were deemed the most appropriate form of inquiry to ensure the collection of valid, reliable, and insightful data.

Each FGD was designed to include six to eight participants, allowing for 90 minutes of rich and open discussion. FGD questions were meticulously and iteratively designed to answer our research questions. Experienced facilitators and notetakers were also rigorously custom-trained for this investigative effort.

To complement the FGD data, short intake forms were also designed and supplied to our research participants at the start of each FGD, in an effort to capture more personal and demographic information.

Study limitations

Given the early-stage interest in studying and researching the local design industry in KSA, one principle limitation in our research was its nature as being the first scientific assessment of the industry. As such, an exploratory research direction was adopted. Despite the limited number of respondents recruited, the insights generated serve as a testbed for future research inquiries.

Our *Committing to further research* section of this *Methodology* section sheds light on the opportunities to further build much-needed local research content and literature on the industry, its dynamics, key market players, and emerging trends.

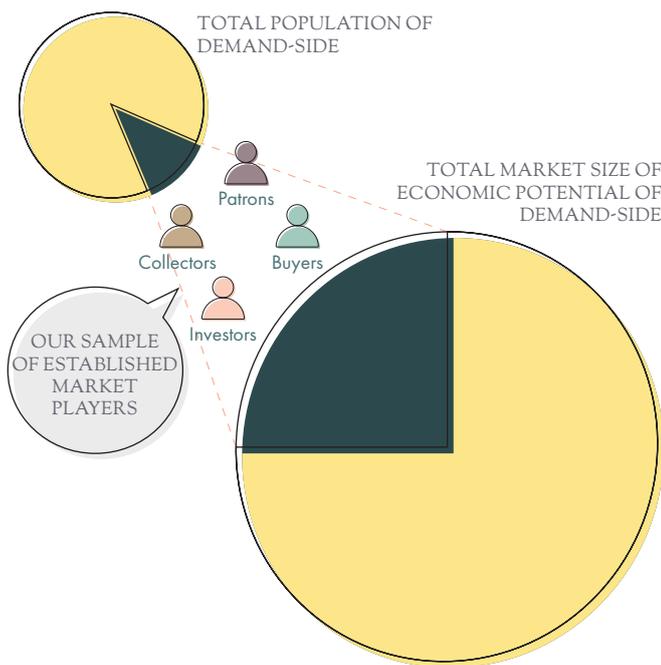
DATA COLLECTION

Research participants

Given our demand-side focus, our FGDs were designed for buyers, clients, and collectors, as well as donors, patrons, and mentors with both high liquidity and strong purchasing power. Participants were invited to self-identify as one or more of these market segments. They were also asked to specify the number of years they have served in such a capacity.

Each research respondent was selectively recruited by Nourah Alfaisal, as opposed to random sampling. This ensured a similar and calibrated level of expertise amongst all our research participants.

EXHIBIT 1: EXPLORED MARKET SEGMENTS: SAMPLE POOL OF OUR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



Sources: Adhlal analysis; ZP analysis

Fieldwork

FGDs were conducted between October and November 2018 at the Adhlal offices in Riyadh. Our strict participation selection criteria allowed us to host and conduct three focus groups, with a total of 18 participants.

Language

While all FGDs were conducted in the English language, the facilitator welcomed responses and participation in the language respondents were most comfortable speaking in, either English and / or Arabic, to maximize inclusivity. Similarly, all formal procedures of communication prior to and following data collection, including recruitment, consent forms, information briefs, as well as intake and outtake forms, were available in both languages.

Research ethics

Participation during data collection was completely voluntary. In line with strict ethical research standards, no financial incentive was offered to participate in an FGD. All research participants were promised complete anonymity; therefore, our research results have been fully anonymized to respect the identity and privacy of all participants. Consent forms detailing a confidentiality agreement and permitting the research team to audio-record and anonymously quote the data collected during the FGD were signed by all participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data management & coding

All raw data was meticulously transcribed and / or translated, anonymized, and then coded following the Boyatzis thematic analysis method of qualitative analysis and open coding.

Following the development of a codebook and selective coding, our researchers extracted quotes that represented group sentiments to inform key findings and initial themes. More extensive thematic analysis was conducted via axial coding and memoing for strategic implications. All data collected and coded was presented in a proprietary *Collected Raw Data* compilation to facilitate strategic analysis.

This specific white paper required a critical review of the findings posited by our demand-side research respondents, making sure that all data collected be carefully contextualized. Any biases, potential for misinformation, and ambiguous remarks were not heavily weighted to ensure our findings and analysis would not be influenced by non-specific or misplaced answers to FGD questions.

Findings & insights

Strategy workshops were then conducted with the Adhlal team, facilitated by The Zovighian Partnership. These workshops examined the final *Collected Raw Data* compilation from a multi-stakeholder perspective to ensure that all analysis conducted would be inclusive in its design and not exclusive in its potential for impact.

The process of data analysis revealed the depth of insights and information garnered from this first commissioned research mission. It was immediately identified as important for publication, not just as one white paper, but as a white paper series that can speak to our readers who represent multiple stakeholders. Our *Objectives of this paper & white paper series* section details our aspirational impact for our diverse readership.

Market representation & inferences

It was not intended at this stage to conduct a full-fledged ethnographic data collection of all demand-side market segments. As such, findings cannot be assumed to be representative of the total demand-side market. However, the abovementioned segment of both high liquidity and strong purchasing power is understood to be a very small market size¹ in the Kingdom. Our ability to capture 18 participants does offer indicative representation of the total population in that specific demand-side segment.

COMMITTING TO FURTHER RESEARCH

Examining the supply-side of the local design industry

Completing our first research mission on the demand-side of the industry afforded us a solid methodological base to commence a separate dedicated research mission focused on the supply-side. We look very forward to bringing the insights and findings of both research missions together and presenting our readers and design community with the first industry report on the local design industry in the Kingdom.

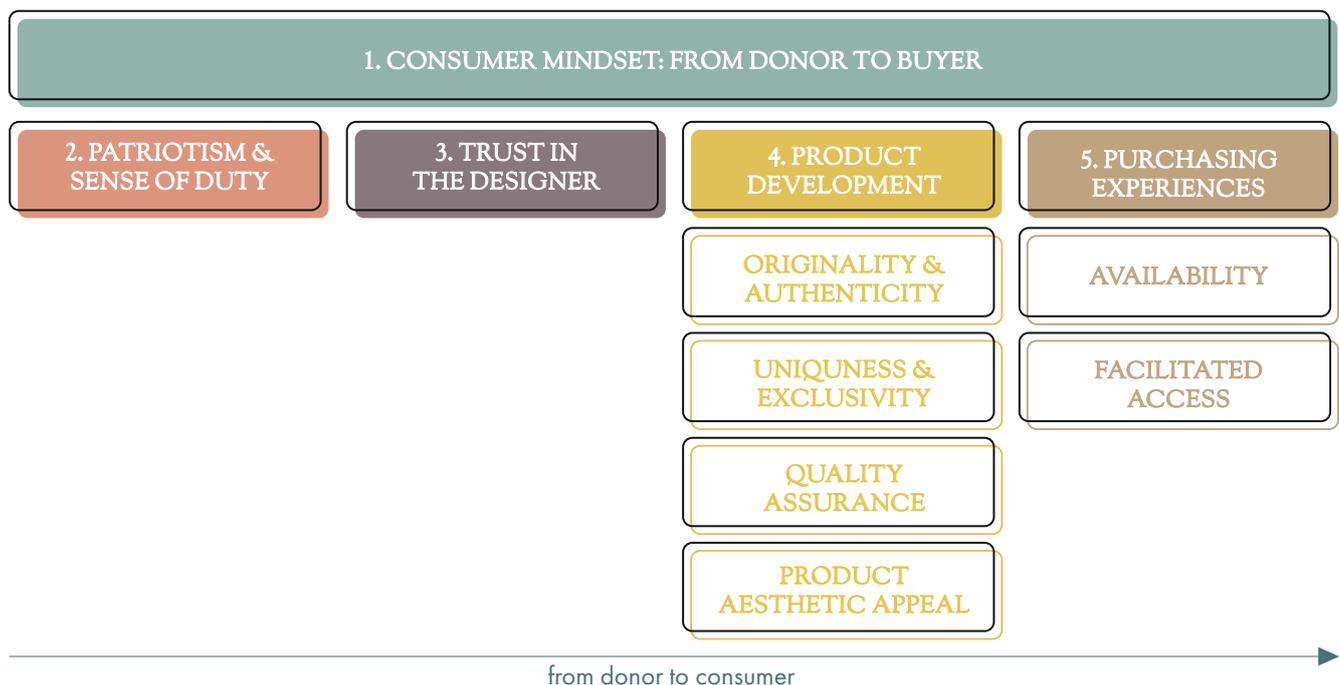
¹No scientific data exists on the market size of this specific segment represented by our research participants. Any market sizing exercise when this research mission was conducted would have been very assumptions-based and largely qualitatively-defined.

Key findings & insights

Across our focus group discussions, research participants generously shared what drives them to buy local design and patron designers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There was strong consensus amongst our high liquidity and strong

purchasing power demand-side participants on their needs, interests, and demands from local designers. The vast majority expressed their strong and intentional desires to support talent and nurture the development of a local design industry in KSA.

EXHIBIT 2: DECISION-MAKING FACTORS WHEN BUYING LOCAL



Sources: Adhlal analysis; ZP analysis

Research respondents highlighted five key decision-making factors that drive their purchasing and patronage of local design:

1. Consumer mindset, with an evolved desire to engage with the industry as consumers rather than as donors;
2. Patriotism and a sense of obligation to support the community of local talent and their needs and demands
3. Trust in the designer;
4. Product development, from originality and exclusivity, to quality and aesthetic appeal; and
5. Purchasing experiences, from access to fair pricing of local products.

This Key findings section offers a deep-dive examination into each of these key decision-making considerations.

I. CONSUMER MINDSET: FROM DONOR TO BUYER

Our focus group discussions shed light on an emerging trend amongst our respondents, with many explaining that they are increasingly shifting away from their sense of charitable duty as a donor towards the desire to purchase as a buyer. This changing nature of purchasing habits and buying decision-making styles triggered heated discussions. One research participant remarked that buying with a donor hat is no longer as common

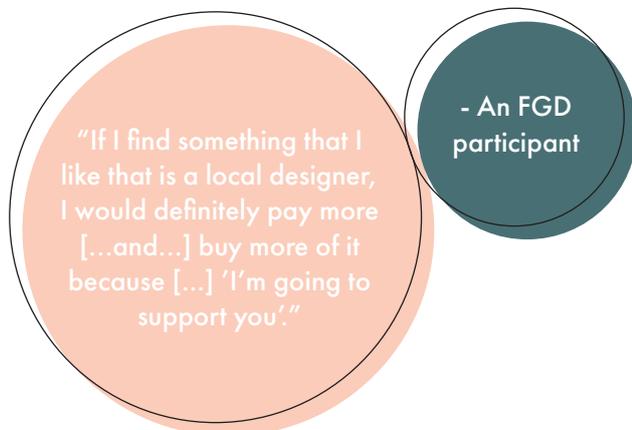
an impulse when supporting local talent. Another stated, "I would do that [buy local] out of, not out of feeling like a donor [...] I would do it because I prefer it."

It was interesting to discover that while the market segment our research participants represent increasingly care about being served as buyers and not being taken for granted as expected donors, many of our participants are engaging with local talent with an even stronger sense of patronage and responsibility. We find this dynamic to be very relevant to monitor as it evolves into a possibly stronger demand-side market segmentation of buyers versus donors and investors versus patrons.

2. PATRIOTISM & SENSE OF OBLIGATION

National pride and the preservation of identity came as strong decision-making drivers when buying local, a reflection of patriotism in the purchasing habits of our focus group discussion participants. A respondent commented, "Even if I'm not going to buy the item, for me to see something that's 'Made in Saudi Arabia' or designed in Saudi Arabia is very exciting." The majority of respondents elaborated that honoring identity means buying products that represent who they are and what they stand for.

Several of research participants also explained that they purchase local services and manufactured products out of a sense of obligation. "If I had the choice to buy," explained one respondent, "I will buy from the local, because I feel that it is my duty to support [...]."



Some further emphasized this strong sense of charitable duty to serve local designers, explaining

their interests in always intentionally buying local products. A research participant illustrated this motivation, saying, "If I find something that I like that is a local designer, I would definitely pay more [...and...] buy more of it because [...] 'I'm going to support you.'" Some respondents further implied that they would buy local even irrespective of the quality, price, or need for the product being purchased.

Given the patriotic influence in the decision-making habits of many of our research participants, the strong interest in products that are trademarked as 'Made in KSA' was no surprise. The majority confirmed that products that represent Saudi traditions and culture were particularly sought-after. As one respondent remarked, "Nowadays, the local talent has been creating and producing beautiful works, whether it's made in Saudi, or designed in Saudi and made abroad. This is completely different [to] a few years ago [...] So, I would totally support 'Made in Saudi Arabia'."



3. TRUST IN THE DESIGNER

The majority of our research participants expressed a strong interest to empower local talent and buy design products and services designed and manufactured by designers in the Kingdom. A respondent illustrated a special interest in young designers, saying, "You have a lot of youth that have a lot of energy [...] the challenge is to enhance their ability to both be able [to] produce [...]."

Many of our respondents explained that they feel vested in the creative journeys and careers of the local designers that they support and encourage.

Trust emerged as a theme, with some research participants mentioning that personal connections and trust in the designer are significant decision-making factors. One respondent described this as you need to “trust the source.” Another respondent added, “You have to gain trust,” referring to the efforts local designers need to invest in to build trusted relationships with their clients and market.

4. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Originality & authenticity

Our focus group discussions taught us that there is strong demand – and even unmet demand – for authentic products with strong and thoughtful identity. Many research participants argued that the idea and concept behind a local product is paramount. For many of our respondents, authenticity is a product design quality that can make or break the decision to buy, collect, or patron. One of our respondents illustrated this by saying, “What compels me is basically the idea; it is all about the idea. I want to know how things are designed, what is the idea behind it.” This was an important reminder of how vested many of our respondents are in their buying and collecting habits.

“We are looking for a voice,” expressed one of our respondents. Our focus group discussions brought to surface the sentimental value that some of our respondents place on the local products they choose to purchase. Our research participants stressed on authenticity as key to their purchasing and patronage decision-making. It was viewed as a desirable value-add for locally designed products.



The connection between patriotic Saudi identity and authenticity was a recurring theme, with some recognizing a gap in the market for design

that reflects both qualities. A research participant explained, “It’s either too traditional or too... sometimes there is no identity.”

Respondents remarked on the growing relevance of protecting the intellectual property of designers, especially against efforts to copy original works. While many research participants acknowledged the nascent regulatory infrastructure to enforce intellectual property rights, they advised that designers should patent and trademark their original concepts and innovative designs. One respondent further noted, “[...] even if you do patent something, you’ll find a lot of people trying to copy what you’re doing. Of course, it will never be the same.” Some participants humorously remarked that copying remains a form of flattery for the original designer.

Uniqueness & exclusivity

The desire for bespoke pieces was prevalent in our focus group discussions. Our respondents explained that uniqueness increases product desirability and can affect their purchasing choices. One research participant stated, “I’ll look for craftsmanship, quality, and uniqueness.” Another respondent said, “I am looking into something unique, different, something that is [...] made really well, with a high standard [...]” Quality is afford its own sub-section in this Key findings section.

Another respondent explained the need for exclusivity against the backdrop of widely-distributed local production, saying, “[...] you find a lot of things, when an idea comes out it becomes repeated a lot with just small alterations, but, it, it gets hard to find really well made unique ideas, products, [and] designs.”

Prioritizing & investing in quality assurance

Quality was one of the themes that received the most attention during our focus group discussions. Research participants described their pains in finding products designed and executed with high quality and consistent standards of quality assurance. As one of our respondents strictly stated, “I want something that is made well. I’m looking for something that is made well with good quality [...] with a high standard [...]” Another participant also noted, “[...] basically you have a requirement

in the beginning which pushes you to purchase something, and the quality will drive you." As one participant further noted, "It really comes down to how much they've [the designers] invested into the quality of their product."

Quality was consequently identified as a major area for improvement and investment by our research participants.

Some respondents also spoke to the lack of consistency of quality assurance for design specifications of mass-produced products. They remarked that it makes it challenging, for example, for construction developers and contractors to place orders on significant projects that demand not only stringent bidding, but also professional delivery. "I don't think the quality has been [...] invest[ed] in [...]," stated one participant. Trust in quality was described as low.

The concerns of quality, as well as inconsistent, and even poor, craftsmanship were viewed as consequences of the lack of available mentorship in the market.

Product aesthetic appeal

Made in KSA withstanding, the characteristics and features of locally designed and made products are gaining more importance in the purchasing habits and decisions of our research participants. Participants explained that admiration towards a product is becoming increasingly important for them. Aesthetic appeal helps seal the deal. "If it speaks to me visually, if I can connect with the piece, whatever that piece may be, and aesthetically it pleases me, then that's sufficient for me to move forward with that piece," said a participant.

"If it speaks to me visually, if I can connect with the piece, whatever that piece may be, and aesthetically it pleases me, then that's sufficient for me to move forward with that piece."

- An FGD participant

5. PURCHASING EXPERIENCES

Availability and facilitated access to local products

Our research participants explained that they value products with reliable availability in the market. They spoke to the inconsistent and irregular availability of local design. "It seems like Ramadan is when you have all local products, but then the rest of the year you try to find something and it's impossible," remarked one respondent.

Research participants mentioned that convenience and ease of access to locally made products affect their purchasing decisions. "[The] thinking has changed," explained one respondent. "Nowadays, here, no one goes to the market; it's all online," alluding to the growth of e-commerce platforms and online sales channels.

Some respondents alluded to the challenges in accessing local products and knowing where to look. One respondent explained the need for a platform that connects the demand for local design with the existing market offering and talent. They explained this gap, saying, "You need somebody to tell you where everything is." They described the challenge, adding, "When you want to find an artisan, you can actually find [them], instead of asking and begging people who [...] their tailor is, or who's [their] dressmaker, where they [get] the[ir] 'abaya [done]." Another respondent concurred, saying, "I can see many talented designers coming up, and they don't have the opportunity to show their designs."

- An FGD participant

"It seems like Ramadan is when you have all local products, but then the rest of the year you try to find something and it's impossible."

Bringing accountability to local pricing

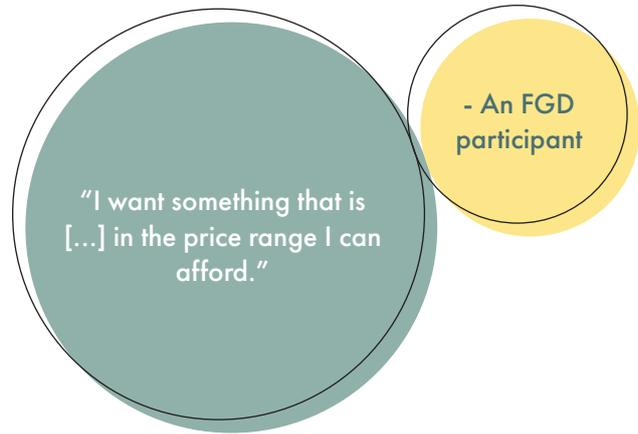
Our research participants brought to our attention their growing unease with the pricing levels of local design products. The majority of our

respondents criticized the prices of local products and highlighted the need for more efficiently calibrated pricing so that purchasing local products makes more financial sense. The recurring theme of our respondents wishing to embrace local design and designers as buyers and consumers rather than donor-like collectors was at the center of this debate. Without fair and trusted pricing, respondents remarked it is difficult to activate a real market of buyers and fundamentally move away from a charitable relationship to a client relationship.

We learned that many of our research participants sometimes feel that the customer is being taken advantage of. Respondents called for being more intentional about respecting the customer and offering more reasonable price points. "In a way, they're treating me like an idiot on what something [...] should cost," stated one of our participants, "and I get insulted." This same respondent added, "this is regardless of brand. And I will not pay that money because I think that you should respect [...] the customer [...]." There was general consensus amongst our participants that improving pricing strategies was also going to depend on making local design manufacturing more affordable and increasing the ease of doing business for local designers in the Kingdom.

Research participants brought to our attention that the market is becoming increasingly price sensitive, possibly highlighting a growing lack of patience with unreasonably high prices and poor value for money. "The consumer here is very price-sensitive, so [they] will sacrifice quality for [...] price," explained one participant. This same participant added, "Nobody wants to [...] pay the price of production with execution. I think that [...] when you want to buy a piece of quality, you cannot find it because the general consumer is not willing to pay the price."

Respondents spoke to the growing tension between quality and pricing. Some remarked that manufacturing with strong quality in Saudi Arabia comes at a different price point. "Quality is much more expensive than not quality," pointed out one research participants.



The importance of affordability and willingness to pay made was a recurring interesting debate across our focus group discussions. "I want something that is [...] in the price range that I can afford," stated one of our participants. They added, "[...] when I go into any design, comp[etition], week, exhibition, [or] whatever it is, I am looking [... for] something unique, different, something that is [...] made really well, with a high standard, something that I can afford."

Some research participants did however state their persistent willingness to pay high prices for locally customized products. As one respondent shared, "If I find something that I like that is a local designer, I would definitely pay more for that [...]." Some research participants responded confirming that for custom-made products and design, they would be willing to pay more, noting that prices are usually very high.

Looking forward: Our outlook on local Saudi design

Our research participants shared with us generous insights during our focus group discussions. They offered us a significant learning curve, introducing us to multiple lenses and ways of thinking that are key to enabling strategic and practical opportunities for the local design industry in KSA. We have detailed this section to present our outlook of the industry – for both its demand and supply sides – and highlight necessary steps that we believe need to be taken to advance our local marketplace.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE INDUSTRY POTENTIAL OF LOCAL DESIGN

It is clear, from the majority of our research participants, that our local design industry needs to embrace the consumer in the donors and patrons that have long-supported local designers and design products in the Kingdom. Our local talent are not just part-time freelancers and talent with design hobbies; many are vested professionals and entrepreneurs who have committed their careers to building noteworthy design legacies. It is critical to honor their hard work and natural acumen.

It is key we do so hand-in-hand. The demand-side of buyers and patrons must effectively support the supply-side of talent, which shall respond to the needs and desires of a demand-side of potential long-term clients. By acknowledging that both are the sides of a common coin, our local design ecosystem can graduate to that of an industry with much value to offer. Essential to this re-framing is embracing a language and spirit of market-making so that both sides can commit to serving and investing in each other.

For us at Adhlal, the local design industry presents a significant opportunity to deliver measurable and sustainable value-add to the national brand, our cultural diplomacy potential, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and socio-economic fabric of KSA. While this white paper has examined what might often feel like critical disconnects between our

demand-side participants and their experiences with the supply-side, we fervently believe that where there is market inefficiency, there is significant opportunity for growth.

We look forward to presenting to you more white papers and research that shed light on the many facets of this valuable potential. Until then, we hope that our readers will take ownership of this re-framed mindset and engage in building a more connected community and environment that bring supply and demand closer together.

BUILDING CONSUMER POWER

To shift from a local ecosystem to an industry with the potential to thrive, it is instrumental to build an industry that is demand-centric, ensuring that strong economic fundamentals govern the offering of supply to demand. The perceptions, excitement, and pains of our research participants taught us that the market has yet to host a culture of accountability between consumers and suppliers of local design. This is largely still due to the prevailing strong expectation that local designers will be able to sell their products thanks to the persistent sense of charitable duty of local buyers.

Demand does not effectively speak with and engage with supply. In fact, it was only during our focus groups that many of our respondents ever communicated and presented their purchasing habits and consumer decision-making styles. Many have never directly shared these interests, desires, and expectations with local designers. As such, research participants have yet to hold the market truly accountable to their shifting desire to become consumers and move away from engaging with the market as donors. Many of our respondents explained that although they are increasingly caring about market-based purchasing parameters, they still do think with the hearts and minds of donors and patrons when it comes to supporting local designers in the Kingdom.

As such, what this also teaches us is that high

liquidity and strong purchasing power demand-side players do not appear to have much consumer power influence on market supply dynamics. This is despite their frustrations towards problematics of originality, quality, access, and perceived overpricing, all themes that were repeatedly stressed throughout our FGDs.

BOLSTERING THE CREATIVE JOURNEYS OF LOCAL DESIGNERS

Alongside the empowerment of a local demand for local products, is the importance of empowering a local supply of local talent. It is key to invest in the resources and tools that our supply-side requires in order to elevate, capacity-build, and unleash forces of creativity and value creation; not only to serve the local market, but also to export our talent abroad for the world to see.

To the local designers, we invite you to take ownership of this white paper and transform its key findings into a custom-made manual to support each of your creative journeys. We hope that, the same way we learned so much from our research participants, these learnings will become your learnings. The insights and critiques of our respondents come from a place of deep respect for our local talent, and their detailed insights are a vote of confidence in the name of Made in KSA design.

We see significant opportunity to invest today in the local Saudi design industry so that our talent can embrace and propel their voices, brilliance, and potential.

What does that investment look like? It is imperative that we catalyze a nurturing environment to facilitate product development, ease of doing business, and access to a marketplace of sustainable clients. Our research participants spoke to the overdue need for mentorship programs and access to technical education. They also suggested building an ecosystem that feeds off of constructive criticism, in order to enable designers to proudly succeed against tougher market demands and rising global standards and competition.

We also turn to the government, civil society, and private sector to take on key roles and

responsibilities in strengthening the regulatory frameworks to support local design journeys. We must collectively offer incubation, acceleration, and investment opportunities for start-ups and growth-stage design businesses. We must also invest in safeguarding and preserving craft and identity.

FURTHER INVESTING IN DATA

It is our aspiration that this white paper series serves as a solid methodological start for further collaborative research to follow. To begin with, the key findings of this white paper have been used to help inform a broader dedicated research mission focused on the supply-side of the local design industry, especially young talent, freelancers and employed professionals, as well as established designers and design business owners. Fieldwork for this research mission has just closed in February 2020, during which we had the privilege to engage with and learn from our design talent in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We welcome and encourage other interested organizations to support well-designed R&D so that we may all continue to learn from a broader qualitative and ethnographic research of both demand-side and supply side dynamics of the local design industry. We particularly recommend that such research seek to explore the opportunities and challenges in public, private, and third sector capacity to support our local design industry.

NEXT STEPS FOR THIS WHITE PAPER SERIES

We hope that our next white paper to you all will serve as a mentoring capacity-building guide, setting the stage for our local designers to continue to deeply listen to the interests and advice of the research participants we introduced you to in this paper.

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The Zovighian Partnership is a family-owned social investment platform, established by father and daughter in 2013. Deeply invested in R&D, we are committed to delivering ethical, inclusive, and innovative design, research, and prototypes. Our methodologies apply homegrown and sustainable frameworks, models, and mechanisms.

Our team of researchers, strategists, and analysts serve communities, nation-builders, organizations, and governments. We are commissioned at every step of your journey, from early-stage ideas to already-established impact initiatives, programs, and ventures.

The team is privileged to be serving Adhlal, under the vision of Nourah Alfaisal.

The research team of research analysts, fieldwork experts, and data scientists are committed to building information power with integrity. All commissioned research is scientific with customized deep-listening methodologies that safeguard strong participation and self-determination, all to deliver meaningful and ethical data.

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