

## Saudi History, Heritage, and Traditions: Integration in Modern Graphic Design Output

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Received 20-12-2024

Revised 21-12-2024

Accepted 11-01-2025

Published 13-01-2025



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### Abstract:

In the era of modern technology, multiple art communities around the world have brought graphic designers the instruments required to excel at the levels of art that the world has achieved over the years. One of the major instruments that has been brought to us is the concept of digital art. Digital arts offer us simple-to-understand software that has allowed us to experiment, as well as explore further, the depths of the laws of art. This has given graphic designers the power to express our outlooks on life in a much more accessible and understandable way. The following study focuses on how we can integrate traditional heritage patterns found in artworks, houses, and more into a template that will allow graphic design artists to base their outputs on a similar basis in symbols and patterns. As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia possesses a rich cultural heritage characterized by elements that reflect its historical, social, and religious traditions, it's important that we continue to express our heritage in the future. Creating this template can help modern graphic design students better understand and integrate these traditional heritage symbols and patterns into their practice, along with ensuring that our old ways remain archived with us as we reach for the future. This study evaluates the availability of resources and identifies gaps in educational or cultural support that can enhance students' design outputs. This quantitative research was carried out through an online survey of 42 graphic design students at the University of Taif to assess their familiarity with Saudi cultural symbols. This was followed by an evaluation of student design projects by a panel of 15 Saudi graphic expert judges. Based on the findings, graphic design students need to gain access to these cultural riches for further understanding the deeper meaning behind the symbols of the kingdom's heritage. In addition, students need to gain insight into the historical, social, and religious significance of the symbols they are working with.

**Keywords:** Graphic design, Saudi Arabia, Heritage, Designers, theory, Design program

### Introduction:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always preserved its rich cultural heritage (Long, 2005). Its people traditionally express these cultural patterns through forms of art; however, younger citizens have been less interested in these older patterns or shapes, as opposed to other things that capture their interest (Bowen, 2024). With the government

initiative of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision, which calls for nurturing respectful, tolerant students who are proud of their heritage, it is important to explore the background of Saudi heritage (Aldegether, 2020). Thompson (2021) pointed out that "Vision 2030 has impacted Saudi youth mindsets and behavior" (p. 1). He's pointed out the effects that

this vision has had over the youth of the Kingdom, as it's explaining and promoting a successful future for the Kingdom and it's growth, along with better understanding and engagement between older cultures with youth.

To further address this issue, the current study examines how graphic design students in the kingdom both understand and represent these symbols and patterns in their projects, along with identifying the resources and support needed to enhance their ability to express them.

### Literature Review:

This study builds on previous research that has focused on integrating the kingdom's cultural heritage into more modern design practices. The study conducted by Elbanhaway and Mahmoud (2022) examined the roles of sustainable design approaches in strengthening the expressions of cultural identity in buildings found within the kingdom, highlighting the need to balance technological progress with the preservation of local cultural elements (Moscatelli, 2022). This aligns with the objectives of the current study, which explores how graphic design can serve as a medium for expressing and evolving Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage. Alkathiri et al. (2024) emphasized the need to bridge the gap between historical and contemporary architectural structures.

Graphic design has always been a vital field in spreading awareness, understanding, and fostering interest in subjects. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) pointed out that, as a form of graphic design, images and other visuals, such as diagrams and the layouts of magazine pages and interfaces, have their own distinct potentials for meaning-making, different from those of speech and writing. Generally, graphic design outputs across the kingdom can remain just as effective, if not more effective, if the designer begins to further incorporate deeper meanings and understandings through symbols and patterns from the kingdom's rich history, culture, and heritage (Baer, 2021).

As our heritage is very diverse throughout the regions of the kingdom (Ibrahim et al., 2021), it is

important to have a deeper understanding of certain regional-based heritage in shapes and patterns to better explore options and improve interests in their outputs by others who may also be less informed, or even unaware, of their significance (Sigley, 2020). Furthermore, Sigley (2020) pointed out that exploring their heritage enables people in China to gain "a broader sense of route heritage discourse and its implications for the discussion of historical, present, and future forms of mobility and connectivity within China and beyond its borders" (p. 1). When you look at these patterns from another country's perspective, you may think that you're seeing the same pattern repeat over and over again with certain shapes and patterns that can be identified in more than one heritage piece. The truth is that there is deep history embedded into these designs (Althagafi, 2018). As Althagafi (2018) argued that the culture and traditions of a particular part of the world could be preserved in the future through archiving it as a template, but at the same time, borders between cultures could open up regarding the designs, techniques, and materials used.

Traditional Saudi symbols, colors, structures, and shapes can be emphasized by Saudi designers through integrating them into their own produced templates (Bakhotmah, 2020).

Additionally, other studies, such as ones by Fadli & AlSaeed (2019) have underscored the importance of developing a much more comprehensive understanding in these cultural archives, along with offering improved educational resources to support the integration of heritage elements into design projects, a key recommendation emerging from the present research. Ahmed et al. (2023) pointed out the need to "increase interest in studying Asiri art motifs and the artistic and aesthetic values they carry in universities and academic programs by including a course on Asiri folk art and supporting inspired clothing and textiles" (p. 1). This study evaluates the availability of resources and identifies gaps in educational or cultural support that can enhance students' design outputs.

**Study Purpose:**

This study intends to answer the following questions:

1. How familiar are Saudi graphic design students with symbols and patterns of regional heritage and history throughout Saudi Arabia?
2. What can be changed or added to further increase their knowledge, along with improving their incorporation of these symbols and patterns into newer outputs?

**Methodology:**

This study employed a multistage research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of how graphic design students in Saudi Arabia engage with and represent the country’s cultural heritage in their work.

In the first stage, an online survey was conducted with 42 graphic design students from Taif university in Saudi Arabia. The survey aimed to assess the students’ familiarity with common

regional symbols and patterns found in Saudi culture.

The second stage involved the evaluation of student design projects by a panel of 15 expert judges with backgrounds tied to professional graphic designing, media, and communication. These judges were emailed the outputs requesting their own inputs on it. who were asked to provide feedback on the accuracy and creative expression of the heritage elements incorporated into the projects. The judges’ assessments provided valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement in the students’ work.

**Findings:**

*Summary of Student Responses:*

Based on the feedback, students demonstrated a general understanding of the diversity of Saudi heritage symbols across regions but acknowledged the need for deeper knowledge and better access to resources, as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: graphic designers Student Responses**

Aspect	Findings	Number of Students (out of 42)	Percentage
Familiarity with Regional Symbols	Students know basic differences between regional symbols (e.g., Najd's geometric patterns, Hijaz's calligraphy).	28	67%
Need for More Knowledge	Students admitted they lack detailed understanding of the cultural significance of these symbols.	36	86%
Access to Resources on Regional Symbols	Students highlighted limited resources, especially digital archives, on region-specific symbols.	39	93%
Desire for Educational Support	Students requested resources such as workshops, templates, and regional archives for deeper learning.	34	81%

Many of the respondents were able to identify some general differences in the context of patterns and shapes, such as Najd’s geometric patterns or

Hijaz’s focus on Arabic calligraphy and intricate woodwork. However, their overall understanding of the kingdom’s heritage is largely superficial,

lacking a more in-depth knowledge of the historical and cultural significance of these symbols. The majority of respondents noted that there are **few accessible resources**, whether physical or digital, focused on Saudi regional symbols. Old design (OD) or region-specific symbols remained more ambiguous with respondents in terms of design archives, making it difficult for respondents to

explore these elements in detail. They pointed out the need for more **academic resources**, such as curated collections, **digital databases**, and partnerships with **local cultural centers**. They also expressed interest in **workshops** or **field trips** related to the kingdom's cultural heritage to further immerse themselves and increase their interest in the rich heritage of specific regions.

**Table 2: Judges Responses**

Aspect	Findings	Number of Judges	Percentage
Presentation Well Represented	Judges agreed that the projects were visually appealing and well-presented.	13	87%
Shapes and Symbols Represent Regional Heritage	Judges noted that the shapes and symbols used reflect specific areas of Saudi Arabia.	12	80%
Need for More Research	Judges emphasized that students need deeper research into the meaning, history, and use of heritage symbols.	14	93%
Lack of Explanation for Symbol Usage	Judges found that students did not adequately explain why specific symbols were chosen or how they represent Saudi identity.	13	87%

### **Key Observations From the Judges**

As shown in Table 2, the majority of judges (87%) felt that the respondents' projects were well presented, with visual effects that properly conveyed the kingdom's rich heritage. While 80% of the judges believed that the shapes and symbols found in the respondents' templates correctly represented specific areas (e.g., Najd, Hijaz, Asir), they also noted a lack of in-depth understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these elements. In addition, most judges (87%) remarked that many respondents failed to articulate **why** they chose certain symbols over others, or how these design choices relate to the broader identity of the kingdom. Furthermore, 80% of the judges suggested that respondents incorporate **more innovative ideas** that can further help to show the deeper meanings behind these patterns, along with exploring further methods to enhance cultural

identity in their designs.

### **Results:**

The study's findings revealed both opportunities and challenges in the integration of the kingdom's traditional heritage patterns into modern graphic design pieces.

While the survey results indicate that some graphic design students have a basic familiarity with common regional symbols, their ability to accurately and creatively incorporate these elements into their design projects is hindered due to limited educational resources and insufficient exposure to the kingdom's cultural and historical background regarding these symbols

The judges' evaluation of the student's design templates with incorporated shapes and patterns attributed to the kingdom's heritage acknowledged the technical execution and visual representation of

the heritage elements. However, the judges also emphasized the need for a further understanding of cultural significance in the symbols being used, as well as the development of design solutions that move beyond simple representation to a further expression of Saudi cultural heritage in a more modernized and innovative context. The respondents' answers reveal a basic understanding of common heritage symbols and patterns, such as architectural motifs, dresses, and landscapes (Abowardah, 2019).

However, the average respondent's ability to properly incorporate these types of elements into their outputs was hindered due to a lack of knowledge of these topics. As one student noted, "I know these symbols are important, but I don't always understand the deeper meaning behind them." These facts help to highlight the need for proper educational resources and support systems to improve graphic designers' understanding, along with their appreciation of the kingdom's cultural diversity ("Jeddah Culture Center," 2020).

#### **Assessing Student Design Projects:**

The panel of expert judges evaluated the students' final design projects, providing valuable feedback on their strengths and pointing out areas that needed or could be improved in integrating heritage symbols. The judges commended the technical execution and visual representation of the heritage elements, noting that the students had successfully captured the aesthetic qualities of the symbols.

However, the judges also insisted on the need for the respondents to better understand the cultural and historical contexts of the symbols being used. As one judge remarked, "The designs are visually appealing, but I would like to see the students explain the meaning and significance of the symbols they've chosen to incorporate" ("Jeddah Culture Center," 2020; Moscatelli, 2022)

Additionally, the judges emphasized the importance of students showing more than just simple representations of these heritage symbols and patterns to develop more creative and innovative design solutions that elevate the

expression of Saudi culture in a more modernized way.

#### **Implications and Recommendations:**

The findings of this study highlight the opportunities and challenges in integrating traditional Saudi heritage patterns into modern graphic design outputs. While the students proved to be able to demonstrate a basic familiarity with regional symbols, their ability to show deep understanding and creatively reinterpret these elements is poor due to limited resources and exposure to such content and elements (Alhefnawi et al., 2023).

To address these issues, this study recommends the development of both region-focused cultural archives and educational support systems that can provide graphic design students with a more comprehensive understanding of the kingdom's cultural heritage. This should include not only visual and aesthetic elements of heritage but also the historical, social, and symbolic significance of these heritage symbols and patterns (He et al., 2023). By fostering a deeper appreciation and further pursuing creative engagement with the kingdom's cultural legacy (Bakhotmah, 2020), graphic design can play a crucial role in preserving and evolving the nation's rich heritage, ensuring that it remains a vibrant and relevant part of the country's identity (Moscatelli, 2022). According to Rafae (2024), "intangible cultural heritage is a significant part of a community's historical legacy" (p. 26).

#### **Conclusion:**

The importance of this study consists of highlighting certain issues related to the integration of Saudi cultural elements into graphic design, such as a lack of understanding, poor education resources, or low interest in these areas. As this topic highlights the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of these elements, along with encouraging more creative engagements in incorporating them into modern outputs, it also shows how necessary it is for graphic design students to fully understand certain shapes and patterns attributed to the kingdom's rich cultural

heritage.

As time progresses, fewer people are intrigued by or understand the deeper meaning and concepts of regional-based shapes and patterns attributed to local culture and heritage. Incorporating a template that follows region-based shapes and patterns that all have a deep meaning behind them will help to improve understanding and generate interest on the part of the populace for their cultural inheritance.

Allowing more people to understand these shapes and patterns not only helps them identify themes but also helps spread information about lesser-known regions within the kingdom. These patterns, shapes, and designs also play a role in the education of both children and graduates alike, in terms of exploring more ways to express themselves through clothing, art, and much more, based on our culture, folklore, and heritage.

Encouraging graphic design students to incorporate more of these elements will ensure the survival of traditional Saudi cultural elements. Before we strive for a greater future, let us take the time to admire what we created to reach the point we are at today, along with giving it the respect it deserves by properly archiving it through design templates that can be used by anyone, not only in the kingdom but also throughout the world.

### **Ethical Standards;**

The authors assert that all procedures contributing to this work were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Taif University, Saudi Arabia and comply with applicable ethical standards of the relevant national committee for Bioethics.

### **Funding:**

This research was funded by Taif University, Saudi Arabia, Project No. (TU-DSPP-2024-xx).

### **Acknowledgment:**

The authors extend their appreciation to Taif University, Saudi Arabia, for supporting this work through project number (TU-DSPP-2024-xx).

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