RESEARCH

What +15,000 Middle East online stores actually score

6 points separate the best market in the region from the worst. The real gap is not between countries: it is between a store that knows where its sales come from and one that does not.

RESEARCH BY

Adam Hafez

Twenty years on search and growth, with more than forty startups.

August 2026 13 markets every store read the same way
47,288 sites visited 15,583 of them sell something all 15,583 measured in full

Want this for your own market?

We run the same read over any sector or country you sell into, and you get the numbers nobody else has about your own market.

Hello@adamhafez.com
+971 58 833 1157
adamhafez.com

SUMMARY

The whole report on one page

> **Middle East e-commerce is not broken. It is unmeasured: the median store scores 66 out of 100, and 48% of them cannot tell you where an order came from.**

66 median score out of 100	**48%** cannot attribute a sale	**7%** ask consent before tracking
99% carry a fault costing them now	**19.5** faults on the average store	**241 KB** median page weight
13 markets measured	**67 to 61** best market to worst	**+13** for a regional platform

The four findings behind those numbers:

- Measurement is the gap, not craft. 52% run analytics and 25% run an ad pixel, so most of this market is buying attention it cannot account for. 4% run ads with no analytics at all.
- The weakness is configuration, not code. The lowest of the six checks is speed at a median of 42, and almost every fault on the list below is a header or a tag rather than a rebuild.
- Nobody is far ahead, and no country is. Half the region sits between 60 and 72, and United Arab Emirates at 67 is only 6 points clear of Palestine at the bottom.
- The platform decides more than the country. Stores on 352 regional builds score 79 against 66 for the 13,266 on imported ones. That is 13 points from a choice made once, against 6 points between the best market and the worst.

And the three things to do first, in this order:

- 1. Links with no text at all. Add an aria-label saying where it goes, or alt text on the image inside it.
- 2. Any site can load your pages inside itself. Add frame-ancestors 'self' to your Content-Security-Policy, or send X-Frame-Options: SAMEORIGIN if you have no CSP yet.
- 3. Scripts that block the first paint. Add defer to each of those tags, or move them to the end of the body. Use async only for scripts that do not touch the page.

CONTENTS

What is in here

HOW TO READ THIS

Where the sample is thickest

United Arab Emirates is 60% of these stores, because the archive holds far more hosts under some national domains than others. Each market's own median stands on its own stores and is unaffected; the region-wide median is 66 pooled and 63 if every market counts once. Both are printed wherever it matters.

One population, read one way

47,288 sites under 13 national domains were visited. 24,795 of them sell nothing and were dropped, 6,910 never answered, and the remaining 15,583 shops are every figure in this report. There is no second sample to keep straight.

One page per store, read once

A shop can have a weak front page and clean product pages, and a tag manager can hide analytics this cannot see.

THREE WAYS TO USE THIS

Benchmark yourself

Run the free report on your own address, then find your score in the band table near the back. That is the whole comparison, and it takes a minute.

Brief an agency with it

The fault list and the ranked fixes are specific enough to hand over as a scope. Any agency worth hiring will recognise every line.

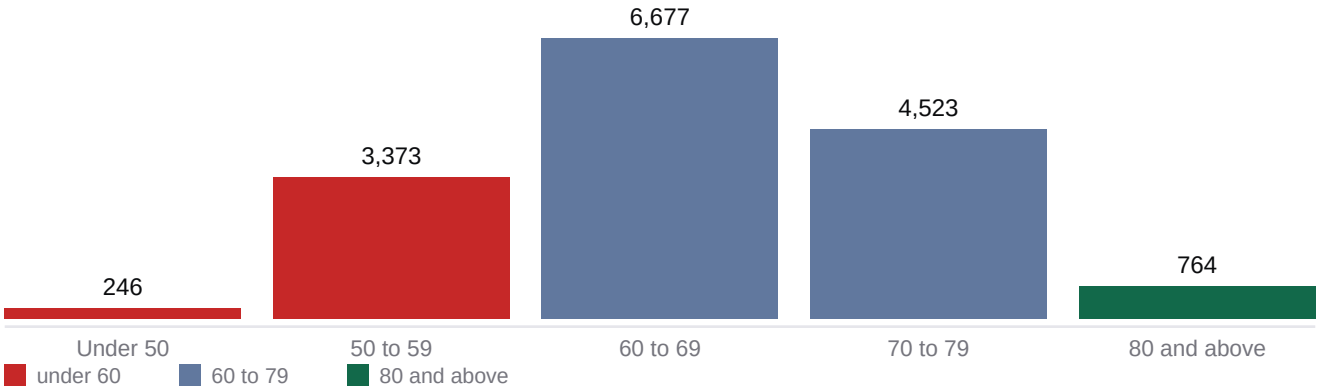
Check the agency itself

Run the same report on the agency's own site before you sign. The section on how they score is there because it is the cheapest due diligence there is.

THE SHAPE OF IT

Where the market actually sits

Every store that answered, by score. This is not a handful of broken sites dragging an average down: the best scored 95, the worst 43, and the bulk of the market is bunched in the sixties and seventies.

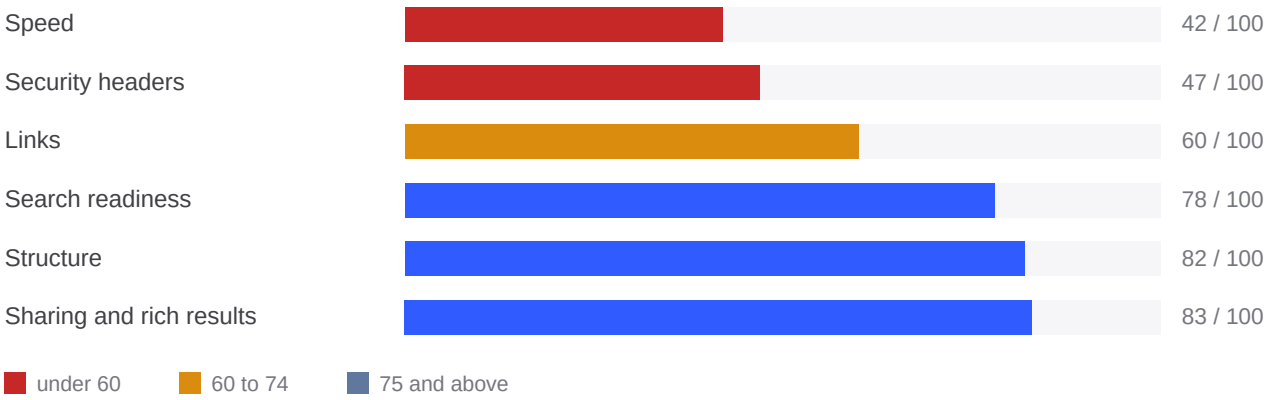


Half of all Saudi online stores score between 60 and 72 out of 100.

BY CHECK

Which part of the market is weakest

The same six engines behind our free report, scored separately. Weakest first. Across all 15,583 stores.



CHECK	MEDIAN	MEAN	STORES UNDER 60
Speed	42	42	86%
Security headers	47	50	75%
Links	60	63	33%
Search readiness	78	79	4%
Structure	82	80	1%
Sharing and rich results	83	81	26%

READING YOUR OWN SIX

Fix the lowest one first, not the loudest

The six are scored the same way, so the smallest number is the biggest gap. On this market that is security headers, which is server configuration and usually one afternoon.

Structure being the strongest is not luck

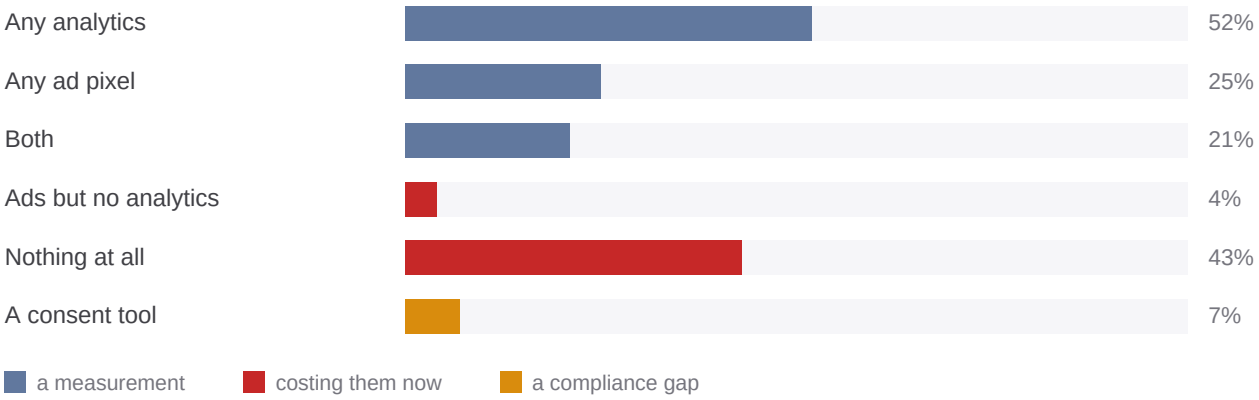
Headings come free with any modern template. Where a market scores well it is usually because the platform did it, which tells you the rest is what nobody has touched.

CHECK	WHAT IT READS
Security headers	the headers your server sends before a byte of the page
Sharing and rich results	Open Graph, the X card and JSON-LD structured data
Speed	page weight, compression and how long the server took to answer
Search readiness	title, description, canonical, and whether the topic is clear
Links	link text, empty links, and where each one actually goes
Structure	whether the headings form an outline a machine can follow

MEASUREMENT

What this market can and cannot see

Read from the home page markup: analytics, advertising pixels, session recording and consent tooling. A store with no analytics is not running a quiet operation, it is running a blind one.



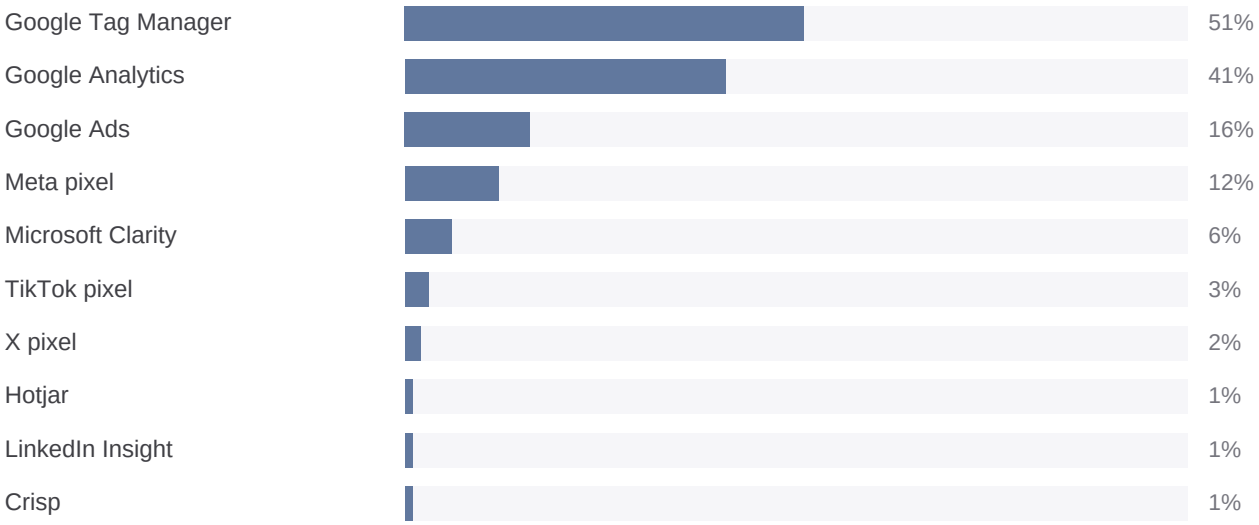
STATE	STORES	WHAT IT COSTS THEM
Analytics and a pixel	21%	can read what the spend bought
Analytics only	31%	can read traffic, not campaigns
A pixel and no analytics	4%	paying for traffic they cannot read
Neither	43%	no idea where an order came from

48% of stores cannot tell you where an order came from, and 52% track people without asking.

MEASUREMENT

The tools they actually use

By share of all 15,583 stores. Counted once per store, so a shop running both Tag Manager and Analytics appears in both rows.



Tag Manager outranking Analytics is the tell: a container is installed and then either nothing is put in it, or what is in it is a pixel rather than a measurement. The two are not the same job.

WHAT THEY MEASURE WITH	STORES	READS WHAT
Google Analytics	41%	traffic and behaviour
Google Tag Manager	51%	a container, not a measurement
Any advertising pixel	25%	what an ad did, if analytics is there
Session recording	7%	where a visitor got stuck
Nothing at all	43%	nothing

BEFORE YOU SPEND ANOTHER RIYAL ON ADS

Analytics first, always

There is no version of paid traffic worth buying before you can see what it did. It is a tag and a morning.

A consent tool is cheaper than the alternative

7% of this market has one and PDPL is in force. Being in the 7% costs a morning.

TWO THINGS THIS SECTION IS TELLING YOU

A container is not a measurement

Tag Manager is on 51% of these stores and analytics on 52%. The gap between those two numbers is stores that installed the box and never put anything in it.

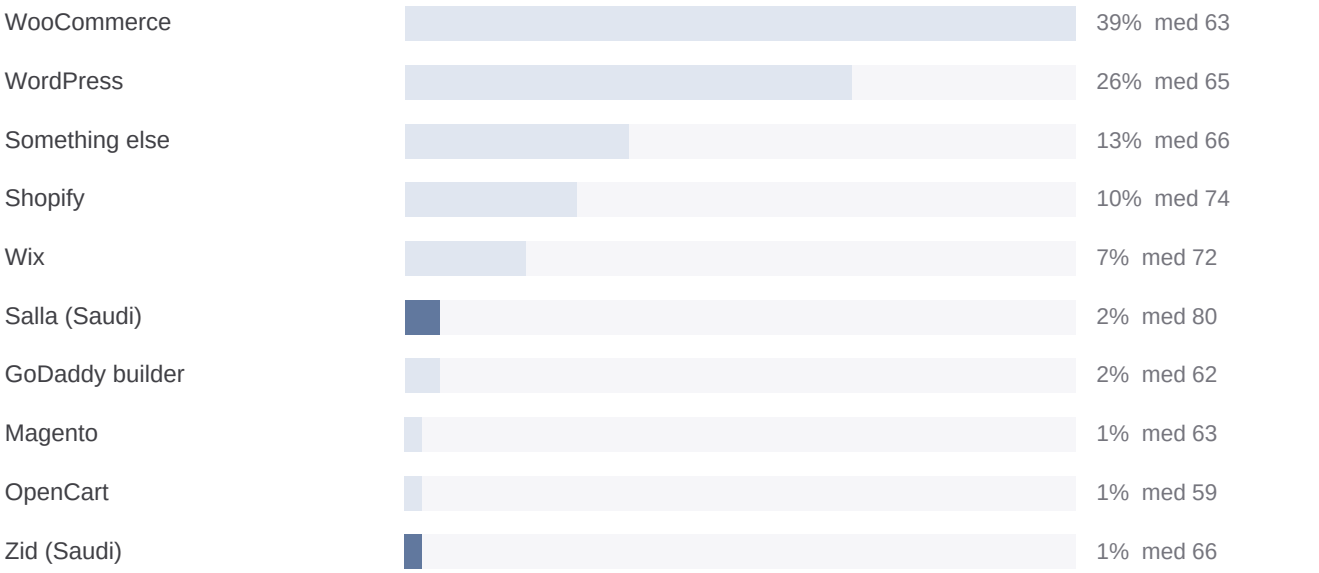
Consent is the exposure nobody has priced

52% of these stores run tracking with no consent tool in front of it. That is fine until the first market you sell into decides it is not, and it is a one-afternoon fix before then rather than a project after.

PLATFORMS

What these stores are built on

Read from each store's own markup. The platform is the one cause a reader can act on: where one platform's stores score below another, that is a default rather than a hundred separate mistakes.



PLATFORM	STORES	SHARE	MEDIAN SCORE
WooCommerce	6066	39%	63
WordPress	4080	26%	65
Something else	1965	13%	66
Shopify	1584	10%	74
Wix	1053	7%	72
Salla (Saudi)	297	2%	80
GoDaddy builder	241	2%	62
Magento	113	1%	63
OpenCart	101	1%	59
Zid (Saudi)	55	1%	66

CHOOSING A PLATFORM, OR LIVING WITH ONE

The platform sets your floor, not your ceiling

Stores on the same platform cluster tightly here. Most of the difference between two shops on one platform is the theme and what was switched on.

A bespoke site is the widest spread in this data

It contains both the best and the worst scores. Custom is not a problem, an unmaintained custom build is.

FAULTS

What is actually wrong, in order

Counted once per store, across all 15,583. 61 distinct faults appeared in total; these are the twenty most common.

19.5 faults on the average store, of which 5.4 are high severity.

FAULT	SEVERITY	STORES
Links with no text at all	high	91%
No referrer policy	low	91%
One phrase linking to more than one page	medium	76%
Any site can load your pages inside itself	high	76%
Requests that must finish before anything appears	medium	74%
Links that open a new tab without saying so	low	73%
Scripts that block the first paint	high	73%
Images with no width and height set	medium	72%
CSS and JS written into the page itself	medium	69%
Browsers may guess your file types	medium	68%
Nothing tells the browser to stay on https	high	68%
New-tab links to other sites without rel=noopener	medium	63%
The server took 1.8s to send the page	high	62%
No Content-Security-Policy	medium	62%
The outline jumps from h1 to h4	medium	62%
"language" appears as a heading 3 times	low	51%
The HTML is 197 KB	medium	49%
Incomplete social preview	low	49%
No og:image	high	48%
Your server announces its exact version	low	38%

READING THE FAULT LIST

Severity is what it costs, not how hard it is to fix

Most of the high-severity rows here are one line of server configuration. They are ranked high because of the damage, not the effort.

A fault on 90% of stores is not a differentiator

Fixing it does not put you ahead, it stops you being behind. The ones worth doing first are on the next list, ranked.

WEIGHT

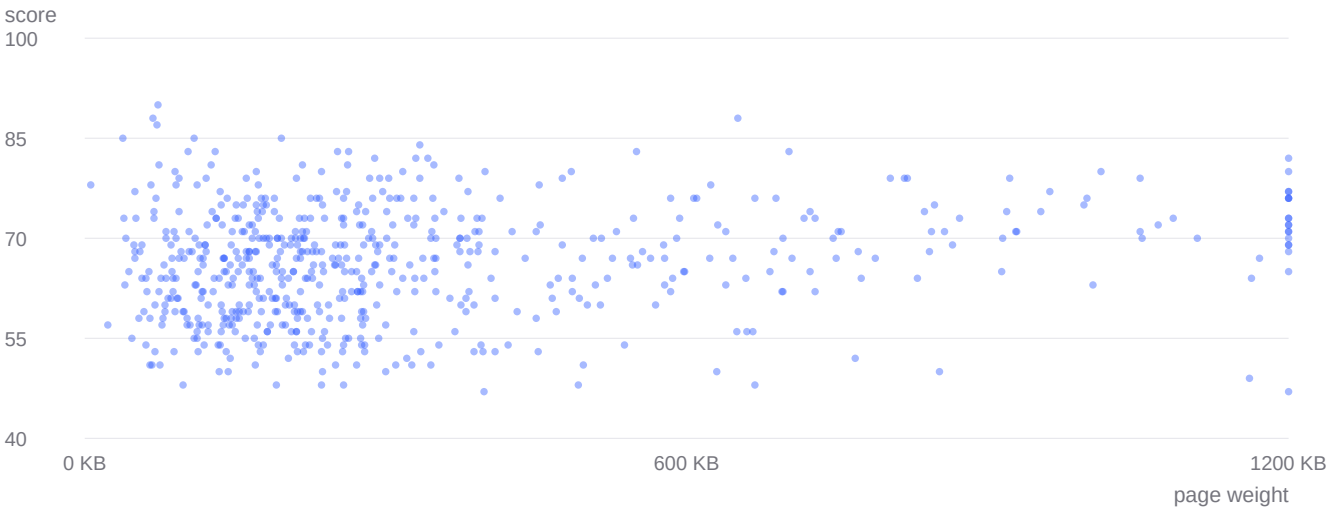
How heavy and how slow

Page weight and server response, both measured by making the request. A paste-in checker cannot see either, which is why most audits of this market do not report them.

241 KB	768 KB	2240 ms	32%
median page weight	the heaviest tenth	median response	took over 3 seconds

5% of stores ship more than a megabyte on the home page alone, and the heaviest in the sample was 2.0 MB. The median store loads 51 scripts.

Every store in the deep sample, weight against score. If heavy pages scored badly the cloud would lean; it does not.



Page weight and score are unrelated here: the correlation is 0.18, where 1.00 would be a perfect one.

WHAT THAT MEANS FOR YOU

Do not lead a rebuild with page weight

A lighter page is worth having and it will not move this score. The faults that move it are tags and headers, which cost hours rather than a project.

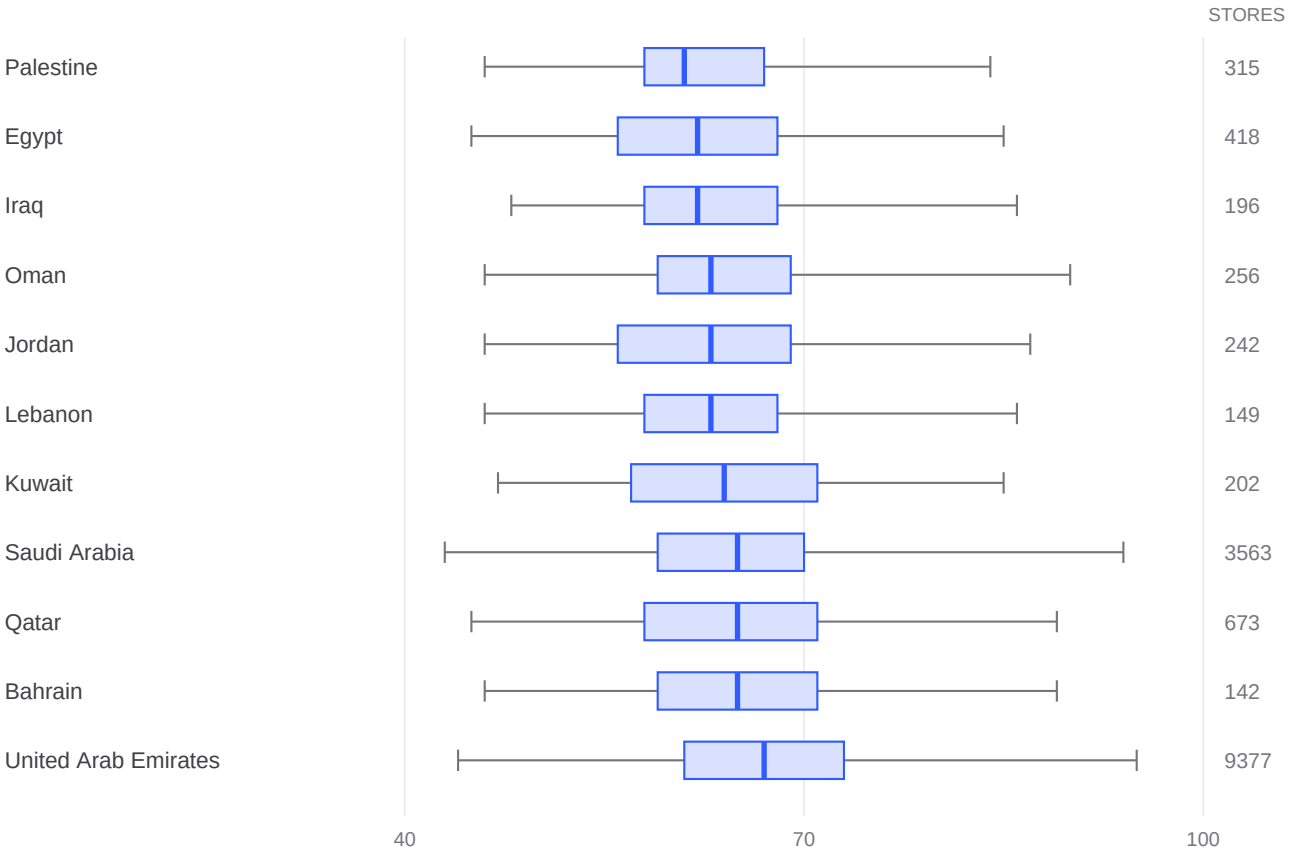
Weight still costs you on mobile

This chart says weight does not predict the audit score. It says nothing about the shopper on a phone deciding whether to wait.

THE SPREAD

How wide each market really is

Every market with at least fifty stores, weakest median first. The box is the middle half, the line inside it is the median, and the whiskers are the best and worst store in that market. The medians sit close together; the spreads do not.



WHAT THE SPREAD TELLS YOU

A tight market is a shared default

Where the box is narrow, nearly every store carries the same faults, which means one platform built most of them and one fix would move the whole market.

A wide market is where the opportunity is

A market running from the forties to the nineties has good operators and poor ones side by side, and the poor ones are losing to their neighbours rather than to the region.

Compare yourself to your own market, not the region

The whiskers matter more than the medians here. A store at 72 is comfortably above the middle everywhere in this table, and still behind the top quarter of every market in it.

THE LEAGUE TABLE

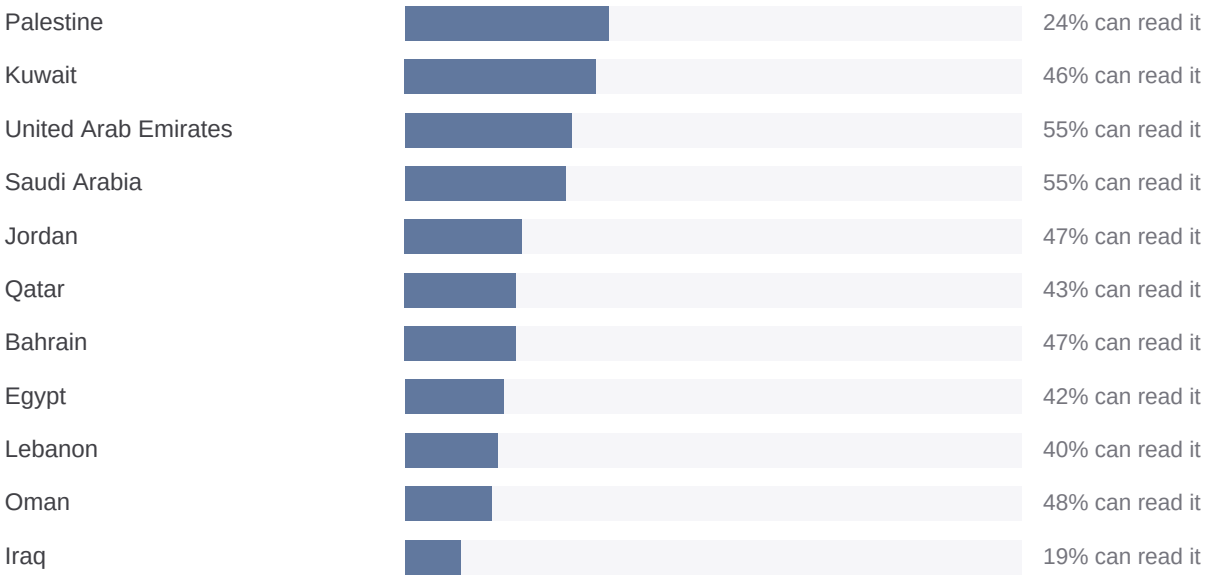
Every market, ranked

Every market with at least fifty stores measured, best median first. 10 of these 11 markets are built mostly on WooCommerce, which is why that column is not in the table: it says the same thing about nearly everywhere. Syria and Yemen were measured too, and left out here rather than shown as a median that would move on ten more stores.

MARKET	STORES	MEDIAN	ANALYTICS	AD PIXEL	CONSENT
United Arab Emirates	9,377	67	55%	27%	8%
Saudi Arabia	3,563	65	55%	26%	5%
Qatar	673	65	43%	18%	7%
Bahrain	142	65	47%	18%	10%
Kuwait	202	64	46%	31%	6%
Oman	256	63	48%	14%	7%
Jordan	242	63	47%	19%	8%
Lebanon	149	63	40%	15%	7%
Egypt	418	62	42%	16%	9%
Iraq	196	62	19%	9%	4%
Palestine	315	61	24%	33%	3%

United Arab Emirates leads at 67 and Palestine trails at 61. 6 points separates the best market in the region from the worst.

Where these markets genuinely differ is not the score. It is how many stores carry an advertising pixel, which runs from 9% to 33% across the same eleven markets.



HOW TO READ THIS TABLE

Read each market against itself, not the pool

United Arab Emirates is 60% of the stores here, so the region-wide median leans its way. Every market's own row stands on its own stores.

The ranking is the least interesting column

The whole region fits inside 6 points. Anyone selling you a strategy built on one Gulf market being years ahead of another is selling you a story the numbers do not support.

Analytics is where markets actually differ

The gap between the best and worst measured market is far wider than the gap in score. That is the column to read if you are deciding where a campaign can be held to account.

What a market is built on predicts its faults

Where one platform holds most of a market, its defaults are that market's defaults, and the fastest fix for a whole country is a change of theme rather than a change of agency.

HOME OR AWAY

Stores on a regional platform against an imported one

Salla and Zid were built in the region for it; Shopify, WooCommerce and the rest were not. Every store on a regional platform inherits the same defaults, so a gap here is one decision made once rather than thousands made separately.

79	66	88%	49%
regional platforms	imported platforms	regional, with analytics	imported, with analyt...

> **The 352 stores on a regional platform score 79 against 66 for the 13,266 on an imported one. Built here, and it shows.**

Median page weight runs 148 KB against 252 KB, and consent banners appear on 1% against 7%. If you are choosing a platform, these are the defaults you are choosing with it.

THE GAP

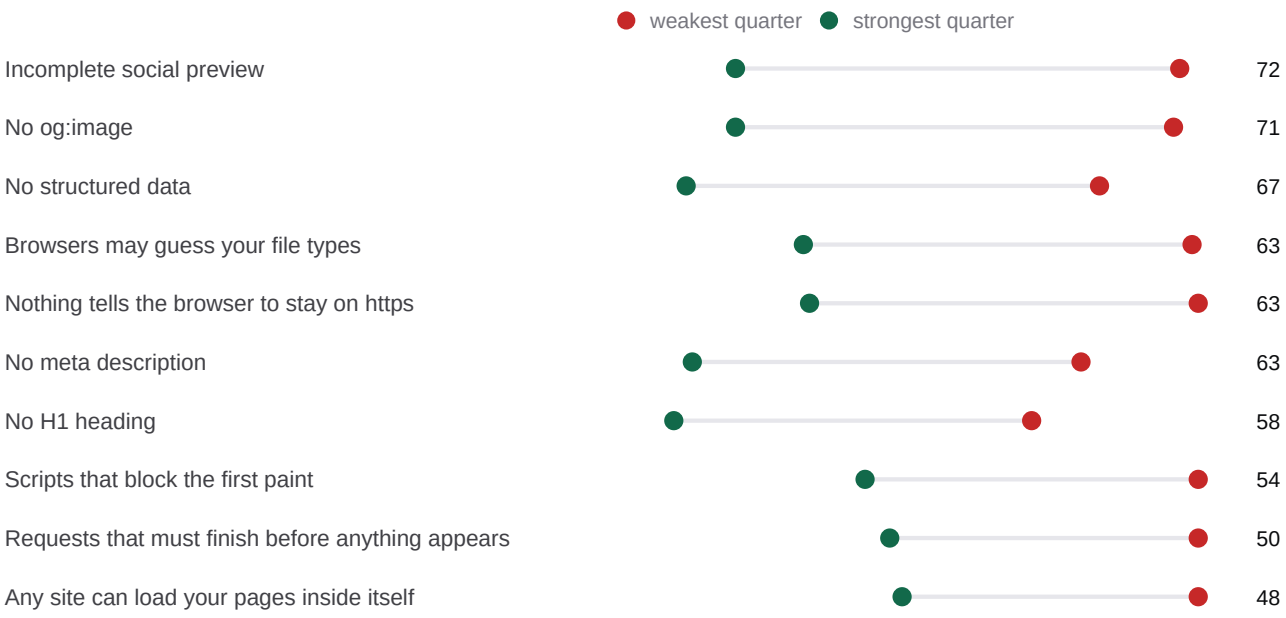
What the strongest stores do that the weakest do not

The 3895 highest-scoring stores in the deep sample against the 3895 lowest. This is the most useful cut in the data: a fault both halves share is the market's habit, while one only the weak half has is the thing actually separating them.

56 to 76	36% to 53%	212 to 289 KB	26 to 14
median score	have analytics	median page weight	faults on the page

> **91% of the weakest stores are missing incomplete social preview. 19% of the strongest are.**

The faults that divide them most. Each line is one fault, the red dot is how many of the weakest quarter carry it and the green dot the strongest, so the length of the line is the gap.



HOW TO USE THIS LIST

Start at the top, not at the worst

The longest line is the fault that most separates a weak store from a strong one. It is not necessarily the most serious fault in isolation, it is the one that most reliably comes with the rest of them.

A short line is not worth your afternoon

Where both dots sit close together, strong stores have that fault too. Fixing it will not move you up, because it is not what is holding you down.

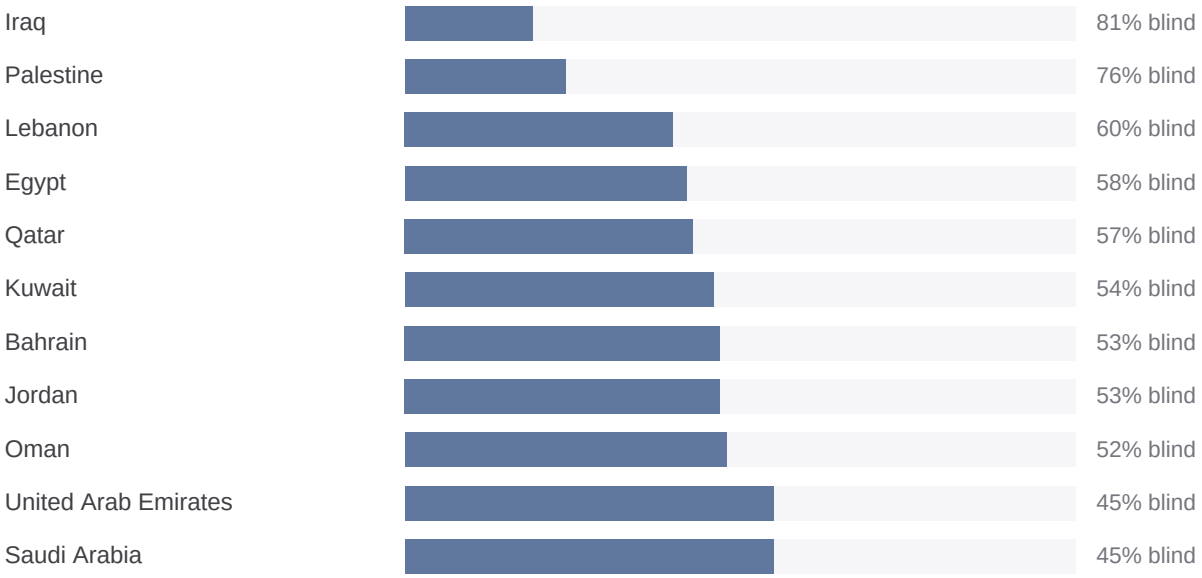
Everything on this list is a tag or a header

None of these needs a rebuild, a designer or a new platform. That is the whole point of publishing the list rather than a score.

WHO MEASURES

Analytics and pixels, market by market

The sharpest number in this report, cut by market: the share of stores buying traffic they cannot read. Worst first, because that is where the wasted money is.



Across the region 4% of stores run an advertising pixel with no analytics beside it. They are paying for traffic and have no way of knowing what it did.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS

Check the pixel before the budget

An ad account pointed at a store with no analytics cannot be optimised, only spent. This is a one-hour fix that changes what every later hour is worth.

Consent is a market-by-market question

Consent banners run from 3% to 10% across these markets. If you sell into several, the lowest number is your exposure, not the average.

YOUR OWN SCORE

Where you would sit

Run the free report on your own address and this is what the number means. From all 15,583 stores.

IF YOU SCORE	YOU ARE	WHAT THAT MEANS
43 to 55	Bottom tenth	worth a week of somebody's time
56 to 60	Bottom quarter	worth a week of somebody's time
61 to 72	Middle half	ordinary for this market
73 to 77	Top quarter	ahead of most competitors
78 to 95	Top tenth	ahead of most competitors

WHAT TO DO

The ten fixes worth the most, in order

Ranked by how many stores each would help, weighted by what it costs them. Every fix below is the instruction our own engine writes when it finds that fault, so this is the same advice a reader gets on their own report rather than a general checklist.

1 Links with no text at all

high 91% of stores

For example the one pointing at /. Usually a link wrapped around an icon or an image with no alt text. A screen reader has nothing to announce but the address, read out character by character, and search has nothing to describe the destination with.

Fix: Add an aria-label saying where it goes, or alt text on the image inside it.

2 Any site can load your pages inside itself

high 76% of stores

With neither frame-ancestors nor X-Frame-Options, another site can put your page in an invisible frame over its own buttons, so a click meant for their page lands on yours. On a page with a Buy or a Delete on it, that is the whole attack.

Fix: Add frame-ancestors 'self' to your Content-Security-Policy, or send X-Frame-Options: SAMEORIGIN if you have no CSP yet.

3 Scripts that block the first paint

high 73% of stores

A script in the head with no defer or async stops the browser from building the page until it has downloaded and run. The screen stays blank meanwhile.

Fix: Add defer to each of those tags, or move them to the end of the body. Use async only for scripts that do not touch the page.

4 Nothing tells the browser to stay on https

high 68% of stores

Without Strict-Transport-Security, a visitor typing your domain or following an old link starts on http. That first request travels in the clear and can be intercepted before your redirect ever runs. The header removes that first request entirely for anyone who has visited before.

Fix: Send Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=31536000; includeSubDomains once you are sure every subdomain serves https.

What to do (continued)

5 The server took 1.8s to send the page

high 62% of stores

Nothing at all can render until the document arrives, so this delay sits in front of every other improvement on the page.

Fix: Cache the HTML at the edge, or find the slow query or API call the page waits on before it responds.

6 One phrase linking to more than one page

medium 76% of stores

"0" points at /shop/cart and /shop/wishlist. Two links with the same words and different destinations cannot be told apart in a list of links, and they tell search that one phrase describes two different pages.

Fix: Give each one words specific to its own destination.

7 Requests that must finish before anything appears

medium 74% of stores

Every stylesheet and blocking script in the head is a round trip the visitor waits through while looking at a blank page.

Fix: Merge the stylesheets, and inline the small amount of CSS the first screen needs while the rest loads after.

8 No og:image

high 48% of stores

Without an og:image, a link to this page shares as a blank or cropped card, which kills the click on social and in chat apps.

Fix: Add <meta property="og:image" content="..."> pointing at a 1200630 image on a public URL.

9 Images with no width and height set

medium 72% of stores

The browser cannot reserve space for an image whose size it does not know, so the page jumps as each one loads. That is the shift visitors misclick on.

Fix: Put width and height attributes on every img tag. CSS can still resize it; the attributes only tell the browser the shape to reserve.

10 CSS and JS written into the page itself

medium 69% of stores

Inline code cannot be cached, so every visit downloads it again, and it is re-sent on every page of the site.

Fix: Move the bulk into an external file the browser can cache, and keep inline to the small amount the first screen needs.

AT A GLANCE

Every number in this report

FIGURE	VALUE	BASE
Markets covered	11	all
Sites visited under those national domains	47,288	all
Of those, sites that sell something	15,583	all
Sites that sell nothing, counted and dropped	24,795	all
Never answered	6,910	all
Median score, pooled	66/100	15,583
Median score, every market counting once	63/100	11 markets
Middle half of the market	60 to 72	15,583
Best market against worst	67 to 61	11 markets
Carry a high-severity fault	99%	15,583

At a glance (continued)

FIGURE	VALUE	BASE
Faults on the average store	19.5	15,583
Have any analytics	52%	15,583
Have an ad pixel	25%	15,583
Ads running with no analytics	4%	15,583
Show a consent tool	7%	15,583
Median page weight	241 KB	15,583
Regional platform against imported	79 to 66	13,618
Analytics, weakest quarter to strongest	36% to 53%	7790

WHAT EACH FIGURE COUNTS

A shop

A site is counted as a shop when it carries a commerce platform, a working cart control, or two independent pieces of evidence that it sells something. 24,795 of the 47,288 sites visited did not clear that bar and are not in any number here.

Analytics

A recognised analytics tool present in the home page markup. A tag container on its own does not count, because a container is not a measurement.

An ad pixel

A recognised advertising tag: Meta, Google Ads, TikTok, X, LinkedIn. Present in the markup, which says it is installed, not that it is configured.

A consent tool

A recognised consent or cookie-banner script. Its presence says a store asked; it does not say the answer was honoured.

A high-severity fault

One of the engines rated the finding as costing the store now rather than eventually. Every store here carries at least one.

Unreachable

A site that did not answer, answered with something that was not a web page, or took longer than eight seconds. 6,910 sites, and they are excluded rather than scored as zero: a server that is down today is not the same thing as a store that is badly built.

Median, not average

Every headline uses the median, so one enormous store cannot move it. Where the pooled figure leans toward one market, the unweighted one is printed beside it: 66 against 63.

Notes. This reads one page per store, so it is a measurement of one page on one day and not a verdict on any business. It cannot see rankings, traffic or sales: a store scoring 60 may well be outselling one scoring 90.

NEXT

Do this to your own site

Everything in this report came from six checks anyone can run over their own address for nothing. No account, no call to book: you give a web address, and the report comes back written down.

Read my site free

https://adamhafez.com/report

About a minute. Six checks, sent to you written down.

Hello@adamhafez.com **+971 58 833 1157**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SEND AN ADDRESS

The same six engines run

Not a sample of them and not a lighter version. The report you get back is built the same way every number in this document was.

It comes back written down

Each finding says what it is, why it costs you, and what to change. No call to book and no dashboard to log into.

Nothing is stored that you did not send

One page is read once. There is no account, and the address is not added to anything unless you ask for it.

OR HAVE IT DONE

What we do, and what it costs

Fixed price, paid by card, and the report lands in three working days. The larger engagements are quoted after a conversation.

ENGAGEMENT	WHAT IT ANSWERS	PRICE
SEO Check	Why isn't my site ranking?	$250
AI Search Check	Does ChatGPT know my business exists?	$250
Growth Check	Why has growth stalled?	$250
SEO Recovery Diagnosis	My site dropped out of Google. What happened?	$500

Every engagement is at https://adamhafez.com/services, and the whole catalogue of twenty free tools is at https://adamhafez.com/tools.