Farzan Balkani

Product Strategy | AI Systems | Digital Innovation

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Summary

Customer Experience and Product Strategy leader with 16+ years of experience driving digital transformation, product growth, and organizational scale across e-commerce, travel, and gaming in the Middle East. Proven track record in building design systems, CX frameworks, and high-performing teams, delivering measurable impact on conversion, efficiency, and operational cost. Experienced in executive collaboration, portfolio-level strategy, and leading multi-team design organizations at scale.

Key Achievements

- *Increased conversion rates 52% through design system implementation*
- *Reduced design cycle time 60% and implementation time 40%*
- *Led 50+ user research initiatives driving 20-80% conversion improvements*
- *Scaled design function supporting 20+ product teams*

Professional Experience

Design Director at Digikala — UAE, Dubai

June 2024 – Present | One of the largest e-commerce platforms in the region, serving over 40 million users.

- Led and contributed to the design of **Digikala's AI-powered shopping assistance** and **customer support experiences**, shaping **user interaction models**, **conversation flows**, and **trust principles** to improve product discovery, decision-making, and post-purchase support.
- Scaled a multi-team design function **supporting 20+ product teams** across core and venture products.
- Introduced **AI-driven design and research workflows**, improving cross-functional efficiency and delivery throughput.
- Designed and implemented **career frameworks** for design teams across product and venture units.
- Contributed to product and **CX strategy** for **Social Commerce**, **Superapp**, **Mall**, and **Fashion verticals**, influencing roadmap and experience principles at portfolio level.
- Coached **product managers** and **designers**, strengthening **leadership capability** and cross-functional collaboration.
- Directed the creation and rollout of a **multi-brand design system** and **large-scale redesign** with accessibility-first **(WCAG) standards**.
- Contributed to **corporate strategy** by developing a **user-centric framework** for evaluating and aligning the product portfolio.

Chief Experience Officer at Alibaba Travels — MENA

Mar 2022 – Oct 2024 | Iran's leading online travel agency offering diverse OTA services.

- Owned end-to-end **customer experience strategy** across multiple OTA verticals, aligning CX, product, and business KPIs at executive level.
- Directed **50+ user research initiatives**, translating **insights into growth** and experience improvements.
- Created the **CROX framework**, identifying **experience blockers** using conversion rate and NPS data.
- Improved conversion rates across key verticals by **20%–80%** through CX-led optimization initiatives.

Design Director at Alibaba Travels — MENA

Nov 2019 – Oct 2024

- Elevated **UX maturity** across the organization from **Emergent** to **Structured**.
- Built and launched the **Atlas Design System**, resulting in 52% increase in conversion rate post-launch, 60% reduction in design cycle time and 40% reduction in implementation time and **30% decrease in operational costs** through improved information architecture and content visibility.
- Established **WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards** across digital products.
- Led a **custom typeface initiative**, improving performance metrics by **20%–30%**.

VP of Product and Co-Founder at Farabeen — MENA

Mar 2018 – Nov 2019

- Launched Paymishe (C2C e-commerce platform): **onboarded 500+ shops, generated $100K+** in sales with zero marketing spend.
- Built Zabanyad (language learning app): reached **250K followers** and **120K+ downloads**.

Senior Lead Designer and Board Member at Sariina — MENA

Dec 2012 – Oct 2018

- Designed and delivered **40+ e-commerce platforms** across **B2B** and **B2C** sectors, generating millions of dollars in sales overall.
- Led the design and development of **10+ products**, reaching **300K+ users**.

Part-time Works and Projects

- **Product Manager and Product Designer** — FoundersBuddy, Netherlands (2018–2019)
- **Growth Strategist and Product Designer** — Country Steel Sales, Australia (2012–2019)
- **Senior Product Designer** — Hamechio, Germany (2017–2018)

Key Skills

- **Customer Experience & Strategy:**

  Customer-Centric Strategy, Growth & Conversion Optimization (CRO), Customer Research (JTBD, NPS, A/B Testing), Journey Mapping
- **Design Leadership:**

  DesignOps, Cross-Functional Team Scaling, Stakeholder Management, Mentorship & Coaching, Design Governance
- **Product & UX Design:**

  UX Strategy, Prototyping & Interaction Design, Usability Testing, Information Architecture, Accessibility (WCAG 2.1)
- **Systems & Delivery:**

  Design Systems (multi-brand scaling), Agile & Product Discovery, AI-Driven Workflow Optimization, Digital Transformation

Languages

- **English** — Fluent
- **Persian** — Native

Volunteer work and speaking engagements available on LinkedIn profile.