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Knowledge Report

# Building Brand Resonance With Gulf Consumers

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This knowledge report explores how global and regional fashion and beauty brands can most authentically and effectively tap into the expansive, multicultural communities across the Gulf Cooperation Council.

In partnership with

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# Executive Summary

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is proving a bright spot for the fashion and beauty industries today.

Economic headwinds across major markets like the US, UK, France and China resulted in a significant hit to consumer spending last year. Individuals across income brackets have traded down on price points and redirected discretionary spend into experiences, travel and hospitality instead of personal goods — with global players broadly struggling to recapture their attention and wallets.

With brands looking to more dynamic regions for growth, the apparel, beauty and luxury goods markets in the GCC — which consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — have defied the broader slowdown.

The GCC countries are investing heavily in their futures through national development initiatives like Saudi Vision 2030, We the UAE 2031, and other “Visions” set forth by Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain. Focus areas include bolstering local creative and commercial industries, developing regional infrastructures and boosting tourism and international trade.

Fashion and beauty markets have subsequently benefitted, with Euromonitor International forecasting the apparel and fashion market in the GCC to be worth \$51.3 billion by 2027, up from \$40.2 billion in 2023. Meanwhile, the beauty and personal care market across the six countries is forecast to be worth \$17.1 billion by 2027, up from \$12.5 in 2023.

While the global personal luxury market was projected to decline by around 2 percent in 2024, the GCC region’s personal luxury segment grew by over 6 percent year-on-year, reaching USD 12.8 billion, according to Chalhoub Group’s GCC Personal Luxury 2024: Unstoppable report, released in May 2025.

“The GCC has been, over the last decade, one of the most interesting spaces to be in,” Nisha Jagtiani, group director and board member at Landmark Group, a Dubai-based retail and hospitality holding company, tells BoF. “The amount of change and the consumer’s ability to change is phenomenal.”

The diverse GCC consumer base has experienced a rapid evolution, from women’s increased economic freedom in KSA to the booming expat community and the influx of millionaires to the UAE.

The consumer is also sophisticated and attentive — quick to recognise when a brand is chasing short-term sales and leveraging generic marketing strategies rather than investing in the communities through meaningful activations and cultural connection.

This attitude, combined with the GCC consumers’ digital fluency, makes social media a powerful tool in the region — and a natural space for brand connections and storytelling. Brand narratives can be effortlessly integrated into these platforms, becoming a seamless part of GCC consumers’ daily habits.

One way in which brands seek to authentically connect to, and resonate with, this consumer is through Snapchat — one of the most widely used social platforms in the GCC.

In KSA alone, Snapchat has over 26 million monthly users, with the app reportedly reaching 90 percent of 13-34 year olds in the country, while 64 percent of the affluent population across KSA and UAE are monthly Snapchatters.

Ajit Mohan, chief business officer of Snap Inc., shared at the company’s Crafted for Luxury event in July 2025 that the “next big opportunity” in new markets and geographies includes the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where “Snap[chat] is a daily habit. Whether Ramadan, Eid or everyday moments, Snapchat is where digital roots meet deeply rooted cultural rituals.”

Beyond reaching audiences, the platform enables brands to cultivate intimacy and foster community through the immediacy of its chat function, as well as interactive features, AR experiences and location-based activations — seamlessly integrating into consumers’ daily habits and routines.

This knowledge report, published in partnership with Snap Inc. in MENA, combines expert insights from independent consultants, and brand and retail executives, to unpack the habits and expectations of the modern GCC consumer.

## Market Context

# The Gulf's Evolution and Its Changing Consumer Base



Attendees at the Chanel Ltd. pavilion during the Dubai Watch Week in Dubai in November 2025 (Getty Images)

The GCC's fashion and beauty industries offer high-growth potential for global and regional brands.

In 2026, Euromonitor forecasts the KSA and UAE apparel and footwear markets valuation at \$23 billion and \$19 billion respectively, with estimated year-on-year growth of 5.4 and 5.2 percent for 2025 to 2026. Other markets in the region see similar growth trajectories in the apparel and footwear markets — with 5.1 percent in Qatar and 7 percent in Oman.

While the UAE and KSA are considered the region's powerhouses, accounting for around 50 percent of total GCC fashion sales, Kuwait is thought to account for 15 percent of the GCC market, according to Bain & Company.

The regional beauty market, Euromonitor estimates, has similarly impressive growth trajectories — KSA's beauty market in 2026 is forecast to value \$9.3 billion, expressing a year-on-year growth of 9.6 percent between 2025 to 2026. The UAE's beauty market is forecast at \$3.5 billion, with a 6.6 percent estimated year-on-year growth.

These markets are still relatively nascent, but maturing rapidly to appeal to increasingly sophisticated local consumers and the growing tourism trade.

Brands scaling in the region must resist treating the Gulf as a monolith — particularly when operating alongside local players who are already well-attuned to their consumers. Market dynamics vary significantly between different countries,

sub-cultures and cities. Understanding population changes and regional distinctions is critical to success for global brands, to capture consumer attention and share of wallet.

“Brands who are doing well in the region are [those] who understand the customer,” says Zainab ALabdulrazzaq, editor-in-chief of Kuwait real estate developer Tamdeen Group and founder of the fashion and luxury lifestyle website 3oud.com.

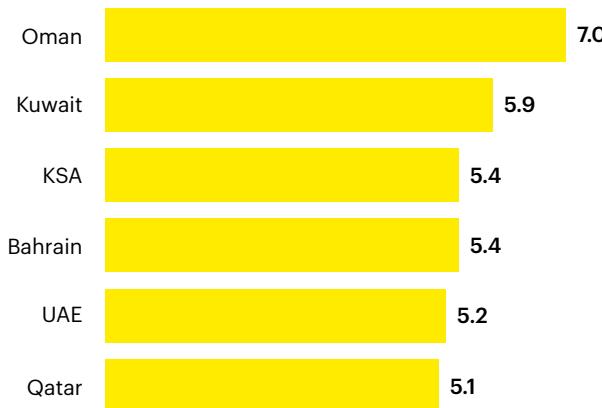
This chapter unpacks how demographic and infrastructural developments across the GCC have impacted how consumers engage with brands in the region, how this differs between Gulf nations, and how customer profiles — and behaviours — continue to evolve.

Exhibit 1

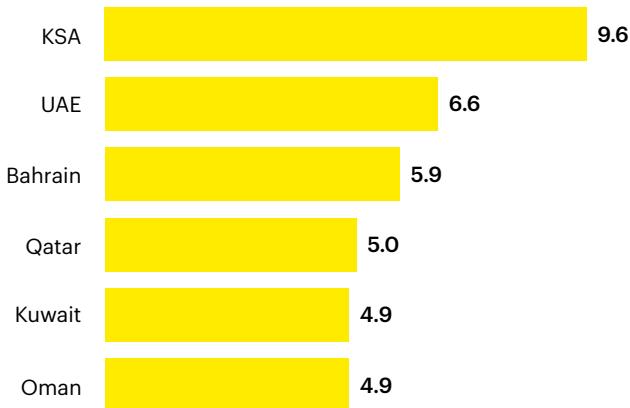
## Fashion and beauty markets within the GCC prove economic bright spots

Year-over-year growth CAGRs in apparel and footwear, and beauty and personal care markets in the GCC from 2025-2026  
%

### Apparel and Footwear Markets



### Beauty and Personal Care Markets



Source: Euromonitor International

### Decoding Demographics and Consumer Bases

The GCC consumer profile has undergone a rapid transformation in recent years.

Women entering the workforce has spread economic spending power over gender profiles across the six countries. KSA – the largest country in the region by some margin – saw its female labour force participation rate jump 64 percent between 2018 and 2020, according to think tank Brookings Institution, after laws relaxed around women joining the workforce in the 2010s.

KSA set a target for 30 percent of working-age women to be employed by 2030 – a milestone it surpassed six years early. At UAE-based Landmark Group, which holds the franchises for brands like Max Fashion, Splash and Shoemart, Jagtiani reports 75 percent of the 5,000 Saudi nationals working for the company are women.

“Part of a vibrant society and thriving economy is female empowerment,” says Alison Rehill-Erguven, CEO of Cenomi Centers – a Saudi Arabian owner, operator and developer of lifestyle centres. “If you have women now working in the workforce, you have more income pumping in, more discretionary spending.”

The population sizes of these countries are important to consider – compared to KSA’s 34+ million residents, the UAE has around 11 million, while Kuwait has around 5 million, Bahrain 1.6 million,

Oman 5.4 million and Qatar 3 million, according to Euromonitor population data for 2025.

Latest figures from the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (or GCC-Stat) put the GCC population at around 61 million in 2024 – rising by 2.1 million in a year.

Bolstering population growth are booming expatriate (expat) communities, which are evolving the demographic makeup dramatically across the different countries. For instance, expats account for the majority of the UAE’s and Qatar’s populations. Global Media Insight places the expat resident community in the UAE at more than 88 percent of the population, with Emiratis making up over 11 percent. Meanwhile, the majority of KSA and Oman residents are nationals.

And with the growing affluence and international profile of the GCC region, tourism is on the rise – aided by heavy investment in international campaigns.

Dubai, for example, welcomed a record 18.7 million international visitors in 2024 – a 9 percent increase from the previous year’s record of 17.2 million, according to the Dubai Department of Tourism. GCC-Stat reports tourism across the GCC to have contributed \$247 billion to the region’s economy in 2024 – an increase of 32 percent versus 2019 figures.

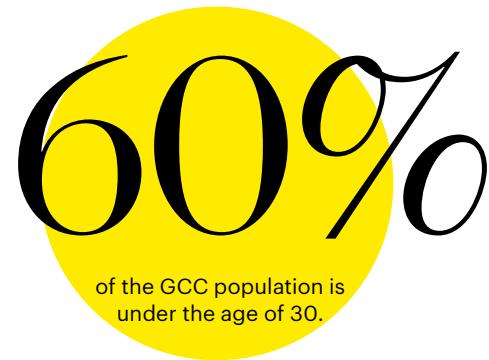
This influx of tourism in recent years has created further need to cater to multiple nationalities and needs.

“In this part of the world, there’s a lot of transformation happening,” says Snap Inc.’s vice president and general manager of the Middle East, Hussein Freijeh.

“However, amidst all this social change, the desire to preserve cultural values remains strong.”

Despite rapid demographic shifts, GCC countries maintain a strong and vibrant local culture and national holidays celebrated throughout the year. All six countries host National Days, celebrating pivotal, historical moments of independence or unification, for example.

The UAE then blends heritage with modernity with the Dubai Shopping Festival, while KSA hosts the Janadriyah Festival, showcasing the diversity of Saudi traditions and arts, and Riyadh Season, celebrating the nation’s capital. Oman’s Muscat Festival highlights local crafts, cuisine and folklore.



Source: PwC

## Understanding Regional Spending Power

The influx of new residents and tourists within the GCC is bolstering expenditure and economies in the region.

Consumer behaviours vary significantly from country to country, as well as city to city.

"The GCC is not one country. And even within the UAE — Dubai and Abu Dhabi behave really differently, so you can't generalise," Jagtiani says. "How a tier-two or tier-three city behaves, and a tier-one city like Jeddah or Riyadh, is completely different. Even Riyadh and Jeddah consumers behave slightly differently."

Today, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE rank highly for GDP per capita, and have a particularly high average disposable income. Consumers in Kuwait express a clear preference for international brands and luxury goods, indicating a relatively lower price sensitivity, according to a report from market intelligence firm Market Report Analytics.

While KSA has a growing affluent segment, the middle class consumer makes up the majority and mass-market demand still dominates, driving the value

segment forward. Residents in Oman and Bahrain also tend to be more value-conscious — while the average income is relatively high, the nation's sensitivity to oil price fluctuations has resulted in a more cost-conscious consumer.

This creates "its own kind of dynamics, and the adaptability to change [consumer] loyalty, therefore, is very different in that population," adds Jagtiani.

## A Young Population Driving Tech Adoption

Across the GCC, digital adoption has accelerated rapidly — propelled by a youthful population, 60 percent of whom are under 30, according to PwC.

"The GCC region is one of the highest consumers of digital platforms in the world," says Freijeh. "It's a young audience, with access to data and technology, who is very aspirational."

With a particularly high smartphone penetration — now exceeding 95 percent in the UAE, with similar levels across Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait — social media has surged in popularity across the region. In the UAE and KSA, over 90 percent of the populations were active social media users as of early 2025,

**"When we look at the performance of the region, we see verticals like travel and tourism booming, with new sites, with new destinations coming up."**

— HUSSEIN FREIJEH, VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER MIDDLE EAST, SNAP INC.

according to research by Northwestern University.

"They are very digitally savvy," says Rehill-Erguven. She references the high penetration rates of platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and "Snapchat's right up there," she says.

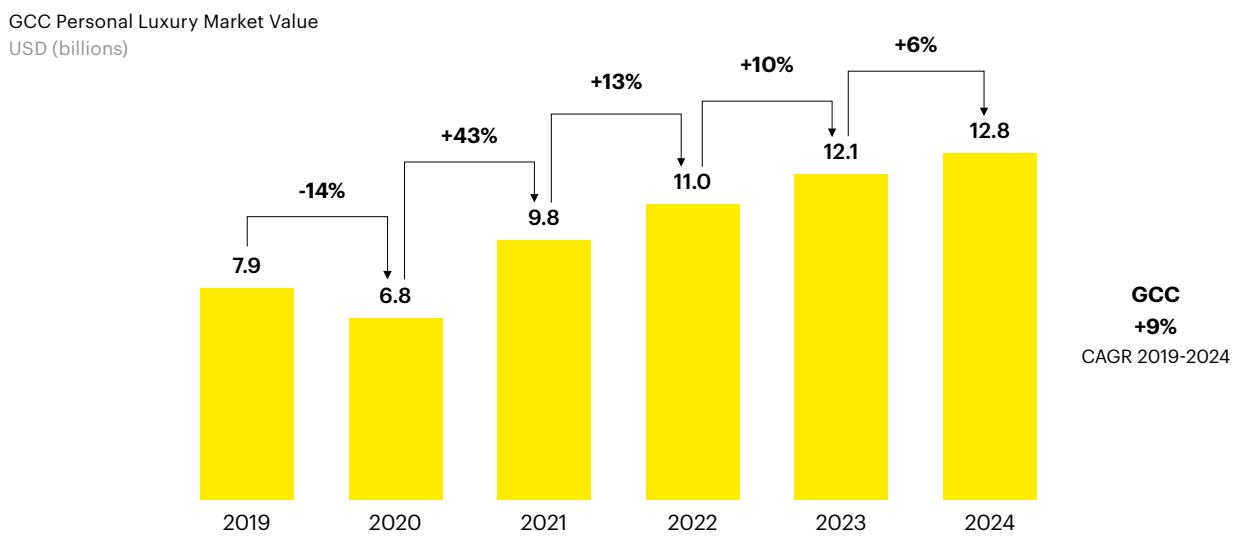
Snapchat's data reveals over 26 million monthly users in KSA alone, with many engaging with the app up to 50 times a day.

The platform is particularly popular as a cultural and social connector across the Gulf, with its intention to empower relationships to thrive online. Snapchat's

### Exhibit 2

## The GCC personal luxury market remains resilient despite global decline

The region's personal luxury segment grew by over 6 percent year-on-year, reaching \$12.8 billion in 2024.



Global Personal Luxury Market Value in Billions (USD)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
296	232	305	368	384	378	

**Global**  
+5%  
CAGR 2019-2024

Source: Chalhoub Group Intelligence report 'GCC Personal Luxury 2024: Unstoppable'  
Disclaimer: Some percentages are rounded for clarity

**“The merchandising, the collection, look and feel of the store, and the service by the staff needs to be as close as possible — or better — than what we do in some of the other parts of the world.”**

— JASMINA BANDA, PRESIDENT OF JOINT VENTURES AT CHALHOUB GROUP

design, with a personal and private approach to messaging, and with expiring content, makes the platform a natural fit with the comparably conservative cultural and social values of the GCC.

The same digitally savvy, youth-driven audience fuelling social media growth in the GCC is also driving demand for — and adoption of — emerging technologies across industries. Their comfort with online platforms, apps and digital services creates fertile ground for innovations in AI, fintech, health tech and sustainable solutions.

For instance, GCC nations are fostering AI-driven entrepreneurship through initiatives such as the National Strategy for Data in KSA — which has set a target of nurturing over 300 Saudi startups using AI — while the Bahrain Labour Fund is driving an initiative to upskill 50,000 Bahrainis in AI by 2030.

Regional retailers are also leveraging AI-powered recommendation engines to enhance personalisation and efficiency, both in-store and through digital platforms — popular features among consumers seeking newness and convenience in retail experiences. Meanwhile, blockchain-enabled supply chains, smart logistics solutions and autonomous delivery pilots are positioning the region at the forefront of tech-enabled commerce.

### Investments and Visions Shaping Regional Markets

Governments across the GCC are investing heavily in regional businesses and infrastructural developments to diversify economic opportunities away from oil dependencies, and boost tourism, international residential appeal and global prestige.

As part of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan, the Kingdom has singled out creative industries as a strategic pillar to showcase Saudi heritage and to position the country as a global cultural destination. In 2020, KSA's Ministry of Culture established the Fashion Commission to empower and nurture regional creative talent, supporting the fashion sector across the value chain, from design through to production, development and product lifecycle management.

In Oman, initiatives such as the Fashion Future Programme 2025 aim to nurture local talent and promote the fashion sector — supporting the country's Vision 2040 goal of building a diversified, knowledge-driven economy.



Diriyah, built around the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif, is one of Saudi Arabia's flagship giga-projects developed under the Public Investment Fund as part of the Saudi Vision 2030. It is designed to drive economic diversification, boost tourism, and enhance cultural heritage. (Diriyah Company)

Meanwhile, Dubai's government has set forth its own city-wide economic agenda, D33, with aspirations to double its GDP between 2023 and 2033. It seeks to achieve this by investing in industries like fashion and retail, as well as building out the infrastructure required to allow these markets to thrive.

Another focus area for investment in all GCC countries is in tourism and travel. "When we look at the performance of the region, we see verticals like travel and tourism booming, with new sites, with new destinations coming up," Freijeh tells BoF, referencing the regional excitement around the opening of Disneyland Abu Dhabi in the early 2030s.

Dubai's World Expo in 2021 set a new global precedent in the region for what tourism events of this size and calibre can unlock. The prestigious six-month event showcased the city as a global nexus and centre for cultural activities in a city defying the Covid-19 pandemic that was still raging through Europe.

The Expo attracted more than 24 million visitors and saw over 192 countries participating, with brand representation from the likes of Chanel and Giorgio Armani. Reuters estimated it cost around

\$6.8 billion. KSA hopes to build on this success as host to the next Expo in Riyadh in 2030.

Several GCC countries are also investing in high-profile sporting events to contribute to this tourism drive and elevate their global profile. The launch of the Formula 1 Saudi Arabia Grand Prix in 2021 and Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup demonstrate the region's increased affiliation to globally recognised sports and the audiences they bring.

Building on this momentum, KSA emerged as the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup, underscoring its ambition to become a world-class hub for international sporting events.

### Mall Culture and the Evolving Consumer Habits In-Store

Physical retail remains a cornerstone of consumer culture in the GCC, where "mall culture" is deeply woven into the region's social fabric.

The region's sophisticated mall culture — which has long integrated leisure, luxury and lifestyle — now sets benchmarks that Western markets are beginning to

adopt with "third space" concepts, where brands seek to create environments that foster community as much as commerce.

"If I look at the malls here, they're actually a lot more experiential, whether you look at [food and beverage], the entertainment, as well as the retail shopping experiences you see here, even [compared] to when I travel globally now," says Jagtiani. "This wasn't the case a decade ago, or even five, six years ago. Every mall is trying to up the next one."

Dubai's Mall of the Emirates is undergoing a £1.6 billion expansion, while its parent company, Majid Al Futtaim Group, is expanding into Saudi Arabia. Bahrain opened Marassi Galleria mall in early 2024, and Kuwait's Tamdeen Group completed a major upgrade of 360 Mall, adding new retail and food and beverage (F&B) outlets, a Grand Hyatt hotel, a multi-purpose arena and a Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy. In KSA, the historic city of Diriyah is being developed as a \$63.2 billion giga-project, with a luxury retail hub at its core.

These projects are capturing tourism footfall while recapturing the spending power of local consumers. Indeed, the surge in tourism across the GCC in 2024



Regional luxury e-tailer Ounass partners with in-demand brands, such as Amina Muaddi, and hosts pop-ups to offer consumers access to exclusive activations and experiences. (Ounass)

was driven by a sharp rebound in intra-regional travel, as more than 19 million residents journeyed between member states, according to preliminary data from the GCC-Stat.

A significant proportion of Middle Eastern luxury spending was also repatriated during the pandemic as luxury consumers were unable to travel to Europe. Post-pandemic, more than 60 percent of luxury spending occurs domestically, according to BoF and McKinsey's *The State of Fashion 2023* report.

This expenditure shift brings expectations that brand services, in-store experiences and product availability in tier one cities in the region — Dubai, Riyadh, Kuwait City, for example — are of the same standard as those in global luxury capitals.

“The offering that we need to provide in stores, both in terms of merchandising, the collection, look and feel of the store, and the service by the staff needs to be as close as possible — or better — than what we do in some of the other parts of the world,” said Jasmina Banda, president of joint ventures at Chalhoub Group, on a recent BoF LIVE.

Banda referenced LVMH-owned jewellery brand Chaumet, which partners with Chalhoub Group in the city, as an example of a brand resonating well in the locality. She attributes a lot of its success to how the retail team and the general manager has managed to “connect well with the local clientele and provide exactly the types of service, the types of storytelling and the types of relationship to make it happen.”

### Omnichannel's Definitive Role in the Region

Digital commerce in the GCC is surging, propelled by consumers who expect seamless, fast and flexible shopping experiences.

Whether providing food or luxury fashion, online platforms from Noon to Ounass are reshaping how the region shops. Omnichannel sales in the GCC grew by 21 percent between 2019 and 2023, according to Euromonitor, outpacing both offline- and online-only models. As a result, investments in store technology and multichannel services have surged.

For some of Landmark Group's brands, for instance, click-and-collect now accounts for a quarter of sales: “By the time the customer comes in, they've



Two consumers walk through a shopping mall. (Getty Images)

already researched online. [...] So, when they arrive, they come with a sense of purpose,” says Jagtiani.

At luxury e-commerce platform Ounass, part of its strategic success lies in how it brings digital partnerships to life through immersive physical experiences. When launching new collaborations — like its activation with Amina Muaddi on Kite Beach or its debut with Skims through a two-week “beach club” pop-up in Dubai — the brand engages consumers through creative, high-impact activations that bridge online and offline worlds.

“People long and yearn for unique experiences,” Ounass CEO Khalid Al Tayer said onstage at BoF CROSSROADS in Dubai in 2025, reflecting on the regional consumer appetite for tailored luxury services and brand narratives that resonate. “So that storytelling

capability, and that medium of creating it, is an activation that is really unique and important for a brand.”

The rapid growth in smartphone penetration has also positioned mobile as a dominant channel for digital commerce. Mobile commerce now accounts for nearly 40 percent of online retail in the region, according to Euromonitor, with consumers using mobile devices not only to shop, but to discover and communicate inspiration with family and friends, blurring the lines between social engagement and retail.

As a result, platforms like Snapchat have become powerful brand and retail touchpoints, driving discovery and conversion through immersive AR try-ons and influencer-led content — while tapping into the immense power of community and storytelling in the region.

## Building Community

# Creating Meaningful Connections With the Gulf Consumer



Two audience members at the Hindamme show at Riyadh Fashion Week in October 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (Getty)

Consumers in the region want more from the brands they purchase than products alone. They expect meaningful engagement and exceptional service. They expect authentic brand activations that provide a unique experience and reflect their values and identity. They expect to feel part of a brand's community and to be celebrated within it.

For global brands seeking success with this consumer base, building genuine connections and a sense of community is crucial to sustaining growth in a competitive, digitally driven market.

"Community is not just a marketing lever in the Gulf — it's a currency of trust," says Freijeh.

This section will explore how brands can cultivate a sense of community in the GCC, from tapping into local influencer strategies to effectively leveraging the regional cultural calendar — to build trust, relevance and commercial impact.

## Work With Local Creators to Build Brand Trust and Relevance

The recent, sharp uptake in social media in the GCC has seen a rapid growth in the regional influencer economy. In fact, the UAE's influencer advertising market alone is projected to reach nearly \$97 million by 2030, from \$69.4 million in 2024, according to Statista.

The rise of micro-influencers (influencers with between 10,000 and 100,000 followers) and regional ambassadors has transformed digital behaviour and reshaped avenues of influence. Last year, when BoF and Dubai Design District (d3) surveyed over 1,000 Dubai residents on their shopping behaviour, local creators and influencers on social media were cited as the most popular source of inspiration and/or information on what fashion to buy.

Unlike global celebrity endorsements, these voices are perceived as closer to the

consumer, often representing a specific city, neighbourhood or demographic. Their appeal lies in cultural relatability, which lends itself to a greater sense of trust.

"We work with [...] micro-influencers because they bring credibility," Jagtiani notes. "Our customers want to see people like them, not just aspirational global icons."

Indeed, over 70 percent of GCC consumers say that they are more likely to purchase from a brand that engages local ambassadors they recognise and trust, according to Euromonitor.

Snapchat provides a means of engaging regional content creators through a channel that feels intimate and personal. As Snap Inc.'s Mohan explains, it is a place "to be present, not polished," where users upload more behind-the-scenes and lo-fi content that brings their audience into what feels like their private world.

“Creators here are massive. It’s much bigger than in other regions because it’s how people express themselves culturally. And, with Snap investing in professional creator tools, that ecosystem is only going to expand,” says Geoffrey Perez, global head of luxury at Snap Inc.

For this reason, L’Oréal Groupe invited over 400 content creators to L’Oréal’s Skin Summit in Riyadh in May 2025, for which they partnered with Snapchat. Olfa Messaoudi, chief marketing officer of L’Oréal Middle East, tells BoF about the event: “It wasn’t about a single campaign, but about creating a platform where conversations around beauty, science and culture could happen in real-time.”

At the event, content creators were “learning how to talk about skincare, but at the same time, creating their own content with their own voices. This is an example today of what we want to do. It’s really about trust and authenticity,” she adds.

In the GCC, mainstream celebrity culture – particularly around musicians and TV personalities – does not dominate social attention in the same way it does in Western markets.

Instead, local audiences increasingly turn to digital content creators and influencers

for entertainment and cultural commentary – elevating these creators to a level of visibility and influence comparable to western celebrities. The likes of Noha Nabil, Nojoud Al Rumaihi, Hayla Ghazal and Darin Al Bayed have gone on to amass significant followings – and built brands and businesses with global reach and financial success.

Digital platforms have also become crucial spaces for amplifying female voices. For brands, this shift highlights the importance of engaging women as active participants in shaping narratives that resonate across the market.

“The way we collaborate with diverse creators isn’t just about product seeding – it’s about amplifying voices that reflect the values of the new GCC consumer,” says Messaoudi.

### Leverage the Power of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth – relating to recommendations from friends, family or even influential figures perceived as within one’s network – carries great significance in the region and remains a powerful marketing opportunity. “Word-of-mouth and social media by friends/ family” is one of the most common

sources of inspiration, according to the d3 x BoF Insights survey of Dubai residents in 2024.

“When you want to try something new – a coffee shop, a new store – the people you ask are the people you trust,” says Freijeh. “This ‘circle’ plays a massive role in brand discovery and engagement.”

Tamdeen’s ALabdulrazzaq, for example, perceives The Row as performing particularly well in Kuwait, which she can base off her immediate sphere of friends and colleagues. “If I go to any gathering, I see The Row everywhere. If I take you around in my office, five out of ten [employees] will be wearing something from The Row.”

Within this sphere of influence, it is not only about which brand they are wearing, but also which ones they are not. She references a leading French luxury brand that she perceives as unpopular among Kuwaiti influencers and friends she follows, and the impact this has on her and her immediate circle.

“I have my top 10 [influencers] who I think are fashionable in Kuwait, and I like to see their style. I’m interested in what they’re wearing. They hate [this] brand in terms of who’s wearing it and the treatment they give [other] people. I never stepped inside [their boutique] in Kuwait. My sister, my friends, lots of people around me, you will never see them in the products, because of the type of people promoting it.”

Word-of-mouth recommendations are, by their nature, impossible to control or track. But brands should still consider showing up in the spaces where familial conversations take place, such as on Snapchat.

Its combination of reach and intimacy makes Snapchat a unique environment for brand storytelling, community activation and product discovery – 77 percent of users leverage Snapchat to share products or brands they are shopping or to recommend these to friends or family, according to Snap Inc. data.

### Appeal to Diverse Communities and Cultures in the Region

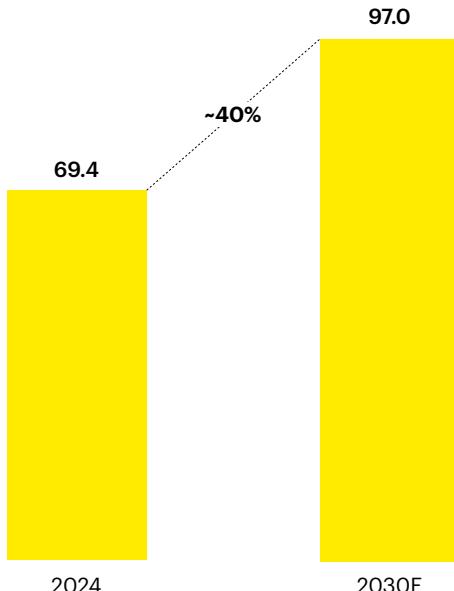
Building communities within the GCC requires nurturing relationships within the cultures that contribute to the cosmopolitan nature of the region.

“Many customers, especially in this part of the world, [have] cultural nuances,” said Al Tayer onstage at BoF CROSSROADS 2025. “We are tribes

#### Exhibit 3

### The UAE’s influencer advertising market will grow by almost 40% from 2024 to 2030

Value of UAE Influencer Advertising Market  
USD (millions)



Source: Statista

**“Community is everything here. You can have the best store, the best product, but if people don’t feel a part of it, they won’t stay loyal.”**

— NISHA JAGTIANI, GROUP DIRECTOR OF LANDMARK GROUP



Regional brands, from fashion startups in Riyadh to homegrown beauty brands in Dubai (like Huda Kattan's Huda Beauty), are competing with global luxury players due to their innate understanding of the cultural nuances and resonant narratives that consumers expect. (Getty Images)

between friends. We're tribes that [are] associated with a narrative, with a brand. It's, in a way, trying to develop that language and relationship with them."

Speaking to those in the region as one generic consumer will typically alienate the broader consumer base. Instead, within each country and city, brands should seek to nurture affiliations with subcommunities and appeal to their cultures and heritage.

"You can't bring influencers from Egypt to target me in Kuwait," says ALabdulrazzaq. "If you want me to get something from your product [range], [they] will not influence me. But if you bring someone from my region, I will follow because [they] look like me, we have the same language — I will relate [to that]. Brands have a huge miscommunication around that. I always see them working with the wrong influencers."

As Rani Ilmi, founder and managing director of Frame Publicity, which works with brands like Huda Kattan Beauty and Roksanda to Moschino and Malone Souliers, adds: "Typically, a communication strategy that works in Dubai works a little [in Saudi] and can be replicated there, [but] never in Kuwait or Qatar."

Global brands should look to regional players for inspiration in effective community building tactics. From fashion startups in Riyadh to homegrown beauty brands in Dubai, these businesses are competing with global luxury players due to their innate understanding of the cultural nuances and resonant narratives that consumers expect — making credibility and belonging crucial for success.

Ahmed Hassan, the founder of Saudi Arabian brand KML, recently spoke to BoF about the importance of creating relevance and cultural resonance for regional audiences, as opposed to an "international feel".

"We need to do something that is relevant to ourselves and our cultures, and I think this is [where] the future is hovering," said Hassan. "People want something that is true to themselves. So now you see a lot of designers coming back to their origins, their heritage, and they're developing on that."

Sara Al Rashed, founder of Asteri Beauty — the first clean, vegan makeup brand to come out of Saudi Arabia — shared with BoF on stage at Oud Fashion Talks in 2024: "Our products are desert-proof,



The Gucci sneaker virtual try-on feature was used 20 million times on Snapchat (Snap Inc.)

which means our products are high performing in extreme weather, extreme heat and dryness. I am a Saudi woman and an Arab woman and I know what the Arab woman needs. Our shades, our formulas, are basically made for us.”

In retail, e-commerce giant Ounass has outpaced international competition in the region, with 80 percent of all luxury e-commerce orders in the GCC completed by the Ounass delivery fleet.

“[We] go into a micro-level community type of communication,” Al Tayer said at BoF CROSSROADS 2025. “Our aspiration is that what we say and what we present in Saudi is similar but different to what we do in the UAE. We tune into the micro-traditional elements of each country and then are fanatically focused on our obsession with the local customer.”

### Create Authentic Community On-and Offline Moments

Brands must integrate physical and digital moments for authentic community-building experiences — whether hosted in stores and through in-person events, online through social channels like Snapchat, or by combining the two.

“Community is everything here. You can have the best store, the best product, but if people don’t feel a part of it, they won’t stay loyal,” says Jagtiani.

Community events and educational workshops are key touchpoints that

brands are leveraging to reach consumers beyond transactional shopping.

For example, Sephora hosted an immersive beauty experience through “Sephoria”, a large-scale event that held in Dubai in November 2025. Sephoria blends product discovery with entertainment — offering attendees personalised consultations, live demonstrations and interactive installations.

This event showcased Sephora’s product range and created a space for beauty enthusiasts across the region to gather — allowing its consumers to feel seen, connected and part of a broader community.

Integrating Snapchat into such experiences can offer potential for further community reach and engagement. Seventy-three percent of luxury consumers in the GCC believe brands should interact with them on Snapchat in order to build trust and a sense of community. Furthermore, 81 percent of users are more likely to purchase a luxury product after interacting with the brand on Snapchat, according to Snap Inc.

“Consumers here want to feel like they are part of the conversation, not just being marketed to,” says Ilmi. “The brands that succeed are those that make the consumer feel heard and seen.”

On Snapchat, for instance, Gucci created a lens through which users could virtually try on four different Gucci sneaker styles using Snapchat’s augmented reality (AR)

technology. Users could then share their looks with friends, purchase the shoes directly through a widget, and also engage with the brand — transforming a product try-on experience into an interactive and personalised brand touchpoint. Snapchat reported that the try-on feature was used 20 million times.

“Personalisation is becoming the new frontier in the region for community building, with AI and technology now helping us create emotional connections,” adds Messaoudi.

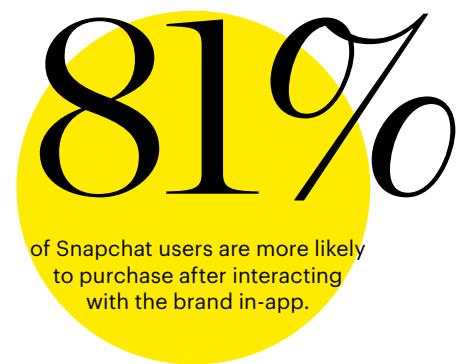
### Tap Into the Multifaceted Regional Calendar

To build resonance in the Gulf, brands should tap into the regional calendar and show up during key moments to demonstrate an appreciation of the GCC culture — and to be a part of the collective memory.

“We operate in a highly seasonal market — [national holidays like] Ramadan, Eid and back-to-school are some of the most critical trading moments for us, but each carries a very different emotional connection for the consumer,” says Jagtiani.

Public and religious holidays like Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, from March to June on the Gregorian calendar, are indeed mainstay moments.

Seeking both resonance and measurable impact, cosmetics brand Maybelline adopted a diversified media strategy spanning organic content, paid placements and creator-led storytelling during Ramadan. The campaign, which targeted women in the region aged 21 to 24, leveraged Snap’s “Total Takeover” suite: a high-visibility mix of content that allowed Maybelline to dominate four of the platform’s five tabs (which consist of Snap Map, chat and camera functions, Stories and Spotlight — a feed for short-form, entertaining content) for a full 24 hours.



Source: Snap Inc.



The region's growing sporting calendar, with annual events like Dubai Tennis Championships offers a new local and visiting consumer base for brands to capture.(Getty Images)

The Maybelline campaign spoke directly to the aesthetic codes and behaviours of Snap's core demographic in the region, and achieved over 131,000 profile views and an average camera playtime of 23 seconds over the Holy Month – demonstrating the potential reach and resonance of culturally tailored, well-timed campaigns.

Brands are also increasingly tapping into cultural moments that are unique to the region, whether the National Days celebrated by all six GCC countries, or KSA's Founding Day, Riyadh Season or Red Sea International Film Festival and Sharjah Biennial. These calendar moments are growing in regional and global significance, reflecting the region's growing creative economy.

Other social, religious and cultural moments then resonate with the expat communities in countries pertinent to large diasporas like the UAE and KSA, including Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, and Russian Orthodox Christmas.

Meanwhile, the region's growing sporting calendar, with annual events like the Abu Dhabi Formula 1, Diriyah's E-Prix and Dubai Tennis Championships, the equestrian event

CHI Al Shaqab in Qatar or the new Olympic Esports Games in Riyadh in 2027, offers an alternative local and visiting audience base.

Beyond cultural and seasonal touchpoints, local consumption patterns such as Salary Week in KSA – the period when employees receive their monthly pay, due to nationally standardised salary payments on the 27th of each month – triggers monthly spikes in discretionary spending. This similarly presents timely opportunities for targeted campaigns and considered product drops.

AlAbdulrazzaq also highlights the significance of wedding season in Kuwait and the wider GCC, providing a popular space for brands to show up. She cites the wedding of Lebanese beauty influencer Youmna "Youmi" Khoury, who married entrepreneur Gurhan Kiziloz in Italy's Lake Como wearing a couture Dolce and Gabbana gown, as well as wedding of Celio Saab, son of fashion designer Elie Saab, to Zein Qutami in Lebanon: "It was everywhere, the amount of posts was unbelievable."

Local players with nuanced understanding of timing, cultural

sentiment and consumer behaviour frequently capture opportunities that outsiders miss – turning these moments into highly effective brand activations and meaningful connections.

Dubai-based womenswear brand Nafsika Skourt, for example, tapped into the significance of wedding season through its NS Window Shop – a week-long showcase for brides and guests alike in a Dubai hotel suite.

Consumers could try on dresses ahead of wedding season in a "try-before-you-buy" format, connecting the community with the brand. The event generated buzz, allowing guests to discover their sizing and eventually convert to a consumer when an occasion to wear a Nafsika Skourt product arose.

"Brands that show up meaningfully during these moments build trust and long-term relevance," says Freijeh.

### Bolstering Cultural Activations Through Social Touchpoints

For brands, the seasonal cultural rhythm presents both an opportunity and a challenge: localised, community-first strategies are no longer a nice-to-have,

**“Consumers here want to feel like they are part of the conversation. The brands that succeed are those that make the consumer feel heard and seen.”**

— RANI ILMI, FOUNDER AND CEO OF FRAME PUBLICITY

but essential to drive engagement — and increasingly expected by consumers in the region today.

“If you’re not part of the conversation during [key cultural moments], you’re invisible,” Freijeh says. “The question is not whether to participate, but how to do [so] authentically.”

During peak seasons, younger consumers often shop late into the night and turn to platforms like Snapchat to share recommendations with friends and family. Euromonitor data shows that beauty sales in the UAE rise by more than 20 percent during Ramadan, while fashion players see double-digit spikes around KSA’s National Day. Founding Day and Riyadh Season, the Jeddah Season Festival and Diriyah E-Prix Weekend also sees seasonal shopping peaks, driving both in-store traffic and online engagement.

For global brands, working with regional partners will help unlock a better understanding of how to capture the local consumer. Californian beauty brand Kosas, for example, partnered with Knot Bakehouse in Dubai on a drive-thru during Ramadan, which was targeted at consumers picking up matcha lattes after they broke their fast.

“They’d go at 7pm to the drive-thru, because you’re in your sweatpants and hiding from the world when you break your fast, and pick up their matcha,” says Ilmi, whose agency Frame Publicity worked on the campaign.

“We gave away Kosas concealers that have caffeine or peptides, with the matcha, and we offered [specialty] blended drinks. The first 50 people to go to the drive-thru received a product with it, and it was posted on the social media accounts of the coffee shop, not Kosas.”

The calendar of events around Ramadan and Eid is typically overbooked with social events and activations, with many global and regional brands hosting suhoors and iftars (a meal before dawn and after sunset, respectively) to promote Ramadan and Eid collections.

Still, it’s important to show up. So, many brands are turning to digital activations, such as through AR lenses on Snapchat. Celebrating different aspects of regional heritage through social media touchpoints, or offering virtual try-ons of limited-edition collections, can provide an activation without competing on the overflowing events calendar.

For example, Snapchat has seen growing



Snapchat has seen growing engagement with its AR Ramadan Mall — an immersive digital marketplace reimagining souqs and valleys into virtual neighbourhoods. (Snap Inc.)

engagement with its AR Ramadan Mall – an immersive digital marketplace reimagining souqs and valleys into virtual neighbourhoods, featuring brands such as Givenchy, Faces and Max Fashion.

Consumers are looking for new ways to engage with the brands they love during holiday periods, which saw the AR Ramadan Hall draw more than 16 million shoppers in 2024 with engagement times averaging over 20 seconds per user, according to Snap Inc. data.

Opportunity on Snapchat expands past specialised AR and Ramadan activations. When Freijeh attended the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix earlier this year, he recognised the impact and traffic that these moments can drive: “Almost everybody was on Snapchat,” he says. “They would watch the race through the camera [on] Snapchat, [...] sharing it with people they appreciate and that they’re close to.”

Ilmi also references the popularity of social media account “Khaleeji Weddings”, which has become a window into the Middle East’s wedding phenomenon – from the high average spend of regional celebrations to the diversity of customs, including more conservative ceremonies. Meanwhile, on Snapchat, accounts like “Saudi Weddings” have amassed over 1.2 million followers.

### Reflecting Local Heritage and Cultural Values

Authentically reflecting regional culture and heritage within brand designs or activations provides further opportunity for community building.

For example over 60 percent of Gen-Z consumers in KSA say they want brands to help them connect with their heritage in new and creative formats, according to Euromonitor.

Regional brands have nurtured culturally resonant design approaches, like Qatari ready-to-wear brand 1309 Studios, created by Ghada Al Subaey. This brand offers modest clothing for a modern abaya-wearer, designed to challenge stigmas around the abaya, “that you wear them to hide. I tried to change that narrative into: you wear it to celebrate that beautiful piece of cultural clothing while showing who you are,” she told BoF’s founder and CEO Imran Amed on stage at Oud Fashion Talks in Kuwait in 2024.

As a key part of her work, Al Subaey opened The Cutting Studio in Doha in 2022 – a production and mentorship facility designed to champion a nascent



Guests at the Red Sea International Film Festival 2025 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (Getty Images)

but growing fashion industry in Qatar. Its doors are open to anyone with an interest in fashion, welcoming the local community into the fashion creation experience.

Global brands are similarly aiming to achieve this level of intimacy with local consumers. Dior has created virtual scarves on Snapchat with motifs tailored to the user’s location and local heritage, highlighting how maisons are responding to this desire for targeted cultural resonance in the region. The activation also featured Saudi singer and actor Aseel Omran, who has appeared in Dior Beauty campaigns and serves as a Dior ambassador in the region – combining virtual try-ons with personal storytelling in Arabic.

Brands have also sought to celebrate regional heritage through events and exhibitions. In Riyadh, for example, Lululemon took more than 100 VIPs, including local ambassadors, up the Al Faisaliah Tower, celebrating a landmark in the city.

“You need to really engage in the fabric of society and you really do need to go beyond transactional in your relationship with the consumer, which has been the key,” Fahed Ghanim, CEO of Majid Al Futtaim Lifestyle – which operates more than 70 stores and 22 digital platforms across six markets in the Middle East,

with exclusive licensing rights for the likes of Lululemon, Abercrombie and Fitch and Shiseido and more – previously told BoF.

In Dubai, Cartier hosted the “Cartier, Islamic Inspiration and Modern Design” exhibition at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which ran from November 2023 to March 2024. The exhibition featured over 400 pieces, including jewellery, precious objects, art, drawings, textiles and photographs, showcasing the profound influence of Islamic art on Cartier’s designs from the early 20th century to the present day.

Through immersive digital projections and scenography using AR to tell stories of craft and culture, visitors could explore intricate patterns and shapes that have inspired Cartier’s creations. This fusion of traditional Islamic aesthetics with modern design elements demonstrated Cartier’s commitment to honouring cultural heritage, while embracing innovative storytelling – offering a platform for audiences to experience the confluence of heritage and modernity in the realm of luxury design.

“We want to invest in and maintain our culture,” says Freijeh. “That [has] turned into a massive opportunity for us to work with brands because [...] it’s always the dream of any brand to integrate into the culture of people.”

## Tools for Engagement

# Elevating Experiences Through Digital Touchpoints



Kuwait football fans pose for a photo during an Arabian Gulf Cup football match between Kuwait and Oman. (Getty Images)

Technological enhancements are showing up more regularly — and often inconspicuously — in the consumer experience today. Opportunities here include wearable tech, like smart watches, in-app or in-store gamification, and augmented reality (AR).

But it also means showing up in digital communities, engaging with consumers through comments online and chat functionalities to sustain touchpoints both online and offline.

These kinds of interactions offer a means of elevating brand touchpoints and enhancing customer engagement to distinguish brand offerings amid an abundance of choice for consumers. And with 70 percent of retail sales now digitally influenced, according to The State of Fashion 2025 report, the opportunity to influence sales through digital touchpoints is clear.

Within the GCC, Snapchat remains a core platform for digital engagement, with a sophisticated range of tools across chat, lenses, geolocation features and sponsored advertising placements. Brand partners have included the likes of luxury e-tailer Ounass; luxury brands Tiffany & Co. and Louis Vuitton; and beauty brands MAC, Maybelline and Saudi perfume brand Al Majed for Oud.

This chapter will unpack new digital touchpoints brands and retailers are exploring — and how Snapchat's product suite unlocks consumer-first opportunities that resonate in the region.

### Sustaining Consumer Dialogues in Digital Spaces

Consumers today want to feel a connection with a brand before buying from it, with Edelman's 2024 Trust Barometer finding 84 percent of consumers require shared values to

engage with brands. And in the GCC, consumer values are a critical part of the regional culture and community-building experience.

To build that connection and demonstrate values, brands have to show up continuously and consistently both in-person and through sustained, regular touchpoints online — and where a brand's consumer frequently interacts.

With Northwestern University's data that over 90 percent of the populations in the UAE and KSA are active social media users in early 2025, social spaces like Snapchat are a critical way of engaging current and potential consumers.

Snapchat seeks to facilitate that brand connection and sense of community through its chat function, allowing brands to interact with audiences (and vice versa) in a two-way dialogue. Best practice has established an expectation that brands



A consumer uses the Snap virtual try-on filter (Snap Inc.)

engage with audiences to show the value they see in speaking to, and learning from, their audience.

“It’s very much us tuning in and actively listening because we don’t know what is going to resonate,” Kory Marchisotto, chief marketing officer at E.l.f. Beauty, previously told BoF.

This direct contact with customers helps to nurture digital communities. Indeed, McKinsey research in 2022 found brands that excel at community building enjoy superior engagement levels: more than 75 percent of content about the brand will be user-generated; influencer engagement rates can exceed 2 percent; more than 4 percent of online traffic will convert to sales; and brand-related posts go viral at least twice annually.

### Encouraging Brand Discovery Through Play

Of Snapchat’s 450 million global daily active users, 70 percent engage with AR programmes on the platform. Users in the GCC region open the app over 45 times a day and more than 85 percent of daily users in the MENA region interact with lenses every single day, according to Snap Inc.

“When users open up the app, they open the camera, and [...] Snap their friends. But to make it a bit less formal, they add filters to bring fun and joy – this is literally how AR integrations on Snapchat started,” says Perez.

This level of activity presents an opportunity to capture the attention of digitally engaged consumers – and seamlessly overlay brand discovery

through narrative and product play. With more than 12 million lenses (like a virtual jewellery try-on or branded makeup look) shared by Snapchatters, users have amassed 200 million uses of luxury lenses.

“Snap is where brands can be experienced and played with,” adds Perez. “Luxury is about experiences. And AR allows people to co-create, to live that experience together – rather than just watch it from behind a screen.

“We’ve bridged the gap between brand storytelling and product trial. It’s no longer just trying on a watch or glasses – it’s about telling the story of the maison; it is craft and making that tangible.”

In 2023, for example, Snapchat partnered with the Saudi Ministry of Culture for Riyadh Fashion Week – the Kingdom’s first major international fashion event. The collaboration introduced Tasawar (meaning “imagine” in Arabic), an AR exhibition that showcased the work of five Saudi designers – Hekayat, Hindamme,

ArAm, Abadia and Kaf by Kaf – through virtual showrooms, interactive runways, and AR try-on and headpiece filters.

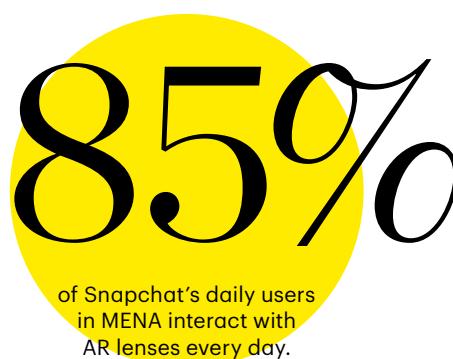
Christian Dior Couture has also partnered with Snapchat to launch an AR experience for its B27 sneakers, allowing users to virtually try on six different virtual styles. This initiative generated over 2.3 million views and achieved a 6.2x return on ad spend through the lens format alone. Many of those who engaged with the experience had never physically entered a luxury boutique before.

The gamification element offered by AR is part of what makes its integration into the shopping experience so compelling. There is a playfulness and informality through filters that is typically harder to access with luxury products.

Gamification also taps into the brain’s reward system, reinforcing positive brand association and lending itself to loyalty. Brands that use gamified engagement strategies have seen customer acquisition increase by up to 700 percent, and engagement and loyalty increase by around 30 percent, according to 2022 data from research and analytics firm Aranca.

### Catering to Convenience (and Reducing Returns)

By mimicking real clothes and accessories on consumers, virtual try-on technology allows retailers to virtually fit customers in seconds. This convenience factor has played a significant role in the technology’s adoption – when BoF and d3 surveyed Dubai residents, convenience was the second most important factor when shopping for fashion after price.



Source: Snap Inc.

One of the biggest pain points relating to convenience is size and fit, as well as product clarity. According to a 2021 McKinsey survey, up to 70 percent of returns are due to a lack of “product clarity” – a term that refers to fit or style.

As well as the huge environmental cost, returns significantly impact the bottom line. Globally, they represented a loss of \$890 billion for retailers in 2024, according to *Forbes*. With the exponential adoption of e- and mobile-commerce in the GCC, returns continue to challenge digital retailers in the Gulf.

The “fit” dimension – how a customer wants to style an item or outfit, regardless of their actual size – is something that virtual try-on experiences seek to solve. Users can see how different sizes of an item will look on them, even playing around with styling options, which can help them make more informed purchasing decisions.

“With Snap’s 3D Lenses, someone can open the app, point the camera at their wrist, and instantly see how a bracelet would look on them in real life. It’s a powerful way for brands to help customers visualise products before ever visiting a store, and makes shopping more interactive and personal,” says Freijeh.

“Whether it’s a skin diagnostic tool or a virtual try-on, it’s about giving consumers something [...] uniquely theirs,” adds L’Oréal Middle East’s Messaoudi.

According to studies by Snap Inc. 66 percent of e-tailers claim they have had fewer returns after implementing fit-guidance tech.

“Virtual try-ons are very utilitarian. The engagement rate still remains high,” says Snap Inc.’s Perez. “Sometimes, I don’t want to go into Cartier to try on the jewellery so this is another way for us to open up [access to products], while staying elevated and crafted.”

Regional shopping habits must also be considered when implementing virtual try-ons to add convenience to the customer journey.

Ilmi advises brands to think beyond a Western mindset, where the presence of a physical changing room in-store might be seen as eliminating the need for virtual try-on technology. In the GCC, the presence of one will not negate the role of the other.

“[Even if] there is a changing room, [GCC consumers] might just prefer not to try something on that day, but use the virtual

## Exhibit 4

## Retailers that invest in gamification see positive response from customers



**+700%**

in customer acquisition



**+30%**

in engagement and loyalty

Source: Aranca, ‘Gamification in Retail’ report, 2022



A consumer uses a digital skin diagnostic tool at the L’Oréal’s Skin Summit in Riyadh in May 2025 (L’Oréal)



A consumer uses the Snap virtual try-on filter in a Snap mirror (Snap Inc.)

[option]. The virtual has always been put either on a digital platform or in a more public setting in retail [environments], but I think there is that nuance of how people foundationally like to shop that is ignored with our market,” Ilmi says.

Virtual try-ons have clear potential in the region. In fact, in the UAE, Gen-Z consumers over-index on AR in retail, with more than half reporting to engage with AR shopping in the past year, according to Euromonitor — higher than the US (36 percent) and Europe (29 percent).

This emphasis on privacy aligns with existing shopping habits in the GCC, where it is common to have items sent home to try on rather than doing so in-store.

“If you are a Dior client, if you are a Chanel client, they will pick up and send the entire collection to you. You keep what you want and you send back [the rest],” says Ilmi. “It works the same for men and women. The store managers know you, the store managers will visit your house themselves. Everything is done via a WhatsApp payment link.”

“The actual transactions take place quite privately,” she adds. “So I don’t know that at present the utilisation of technology that allows for virtual [try-on] is utilised in the right private environments.”

## Advertising Through Snapchat Extends Brand Visibility

With Snapchat deeply embedded in daily life in the GCC, the app offers immense visibility to consumers across the region.

Outside of chat engagement and AR lenses, brands can gain access to this audience by integrating paid advertising seamlessly into the user experience, such as through Sponsored Snaps — which appear between or within users’ organic Stories from friends or creators. In this way, the ads feel more integrated into the user experience and conversational in nature.

Sponsored Snaps can also communicate with potential customers on the brand’s behalf, since they allow for direct, one-to-one interaction with the option for auto-responses or website links. Leveraged correctly, this builds upon the sense of authentic engagement that the customer seeks, to feel connected to their brands of choice.

In-app partnerships on Snapchat provide multiple content styles in one place, from polished adverts to organic ambassador-led Snaps and user-generated content integrated with the likes of branded AR filters. Brands can also choose to secure priority exposure in users’ feeds through Snapchat’s First Placement feature.

Their effectiveness is clear. Prada’s use of Sponsored Snaps in 2025 drove nearly 10 million unique users in one day in the UK. Ahead of Milan Fashion Week, the Italian fashion house used its public account to share behind-the-scenes content organically with its community, before amplifying top-performing posts. By turning organic highlights into ads in real-time, Prada was able to scale visibility and engage a wider audience — extending the impact of runway moments far beyond the front row.

Perez explains that a distinct advantage of Snapchat and digital products in general is their instantaneous accessibility. When products are released following their display on the runway, it typically takes six months for them to be shoppable in-store. Snapchat has worked with brands to instead provide instant access to products, like a new pair of Balenciaga sneakers made available as soon as the brand’s show ended at Paris Fashion Week — capturing audience attention while the event was still fresh.

“People could literally see these sneakers seconds after the show had ended, and then they were available for sale, because they had the 3D asset,” he says. What’s more, if a customer expresses interest in a product and goes to buy said product via Snapchat, there is a potential to capture their data.



Caption: When Louis Vuitton collaborated with artist Yayoi Kusama in 2023 for their global visual store fronts and campaigns, it also created an AR campaign on Snapchat, covering famous landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty with Kusama's signature polka dots. (Snap Inc.)

"What we're seeing is [these ads are] driving quality traffic on brands' websites and we can share metrics that people are buying directly after they've been exposed to that lens," Perez adds.

Brands are also tapping into content creators and brand ambassadors through lo-fi content — organic, unpolished videos and posts that feel personal and genuine. This approach allows ambassadors to create a sense of intimacy and trust that traditional campaigns cannot always replicate.

"Content creators in the GCC set a global benchmark for how we want creators to show up on the platform — they're authentic, consistent and highly connected with their audiences. I think all of this together presents a huge opportunity," says Freijah.

In recent years, brands showing in the region — whether Western brands like Brunello Cucinelli and Roberto Cavalli or regional players like Michael Cinco, Dima Ayad, Yousef Akbar and Arwá — have embraced this shift by inviting influencers and content creators to sit front row at fashion shows such as Dubai Fashion Week and Riyadh Fashion Week 2025, or to attend intimate community dinners.

Such moments naturally encourage attendees to share their experiences

online. The result is a blend of exclusive, real-time storytelling and approachable, lo-fi content that amplifies brand visibility across social platforms — while reinforcing the authenticity that defines the region's creator landscape.

### Geolocation Technology Puts Brands on the Map

By leveraging Snap Map and geo-location tools, brands can more precisely reach local audiences and drive discovery at key physical touchpoints.

In the UAE, for example, Snapchat's location data, including geo-fencing, allows advertisers to target users within specific neighbourhoods, enabling campaigns to reach niche, high-value consumers that other social platforms cannot. Gucci has capitalised on this capability globally, highlighting its stores as promoted places on Snap Map to guide users toward visits.

Geofilters offer another powerful tool for capturing "micro-moments", allowing users to overlay branded content on Snaps while at flagship stores, pop-ups or events. Since participation is voluntary, the content feels authentic and peer-driven, reinforcing brand identity and awareness.

In 2023, when Louis Vuitton collaborated with artist Yayoi Kusama on their global visual store fronts and campaigns, it also

created an AR campaign on Snapchat, covering famous landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty with Kusama's signature polka dots.

The brand rolled out the offering to an expanse of global capitals and their landmarks — a concept that would effectively tap into the resonance of local culture and landmarks across the GCC. When BoF and d3 surveyed Dubai residents in 2024, visiting museums and historical sites featured as a top three preferred cultural and creative activities, demonstrating appetite to tap into relevant cultural programming.

Well-executed campaigns can dramatically amplify reach: a sponsored geofilter can reach 40 to 60 percent of daily Snapchatters in a target region, demonstrating the potential of creative, location-based engagement.

### Maximising Retail Experiences through Wearable Technologies

Snap Spectacles — the platform's wearable tech, layering playful AR onto everyday interactions — are emerging as a new frontier for immersive brand storytelling.

For luxury, beauty and fashion houses seeking to forge deeper connections in the GCC, the Snap Spectacles will provide a new opportunity later this year — when they become publicly available — to



Snap Spectacles — Snap Inc.'s wearable tech, layering playful AR onto everyday interactions — are emerging as a new frontier for immersive brand storytelling. (Snap Inc.)

offer platform brand overlays as users move about their day. Dior and Louis Vuitton have already created “in-spec” experiences.

“Brands are now equipped with their own spectacles because we have a programme where they can pay a monthly fee and they can have their own to try [...] and test,” says Perez.

For brands in fashion and beauty, this means another immersive opportunity to create AR try-ons and multi-sensory experiences in physical spaces (flagships, pop-ups and events) that go beyond static imagery.

The Dior and Louis Vuitton partnerships debuted at Snap Inc.’s exclusive Crafted for Luxury event in July 2025. Dior’s Spectacles activation, inspired by Tarot card readings, provided an immersive brand story where participants selected a card linked to their zodiac sign, which revealed a sequence of custom animations based around the symbolism of their astrological sign.

Louis Vuitton deployed an AR Spectacles experience for an activation around its fragrance, “Sun Song”, which translated the scent into a shared, interactive journey. Users could explore ingredients in 3D, engage with Louis Vuitton brand signifiers and collaborate with friends in a multiplayer format, turning a fragrance launch into a sensorial brand experience.

**“People are going to go out together and create and co-create. It’s going to be an amazing playground.”**

— GEOFFREY PEREZ, GLOBAL HEAD OF LUXURY AT SNAP INC.

The upcoming generations of these glasses, Perez says, promise lighter wearables with more advanced capabilities, enabling brands to blend physical and digital worlds in a way that opens new arenas for storytelling.

Spectacles as a platform are also shifting from novelty to viable, creative infrastructure: “They underscore how we can evolve beyond the phone to create a computing platform that allows people to really start experiencing things through their eyes, rooted in real life,” Freijeh says.

“I cannot wait for people to actually interact in the real world outside with a connected layer of computing,” Perez adds. “People are going to go out together and create and co-create. [...] For luxury, it’s going to be an amazing playground [...] creating experiences that can be shared with the people that you love around you.”



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