

M+C SAATCHI GROUP

CULTURAL

Authored by
M+C SAATCHI GROUP

Photo by: Omar Khalil

POWER 2025

2025

7 TRENDS

IMPACTING

CULTURE IN GCC



1 CRAVING
CONNECTION



2 REMIX
CULTURE



3 GCC: GAMING
COOPERATION
COUNCIL



4 LOCAL
GOING
GLOBAL



5 INSTANT
EVERYTHING



6 PROUDLY
DUPED



7 MICRO
WELLNESS

WHY READ THIS REPORT?

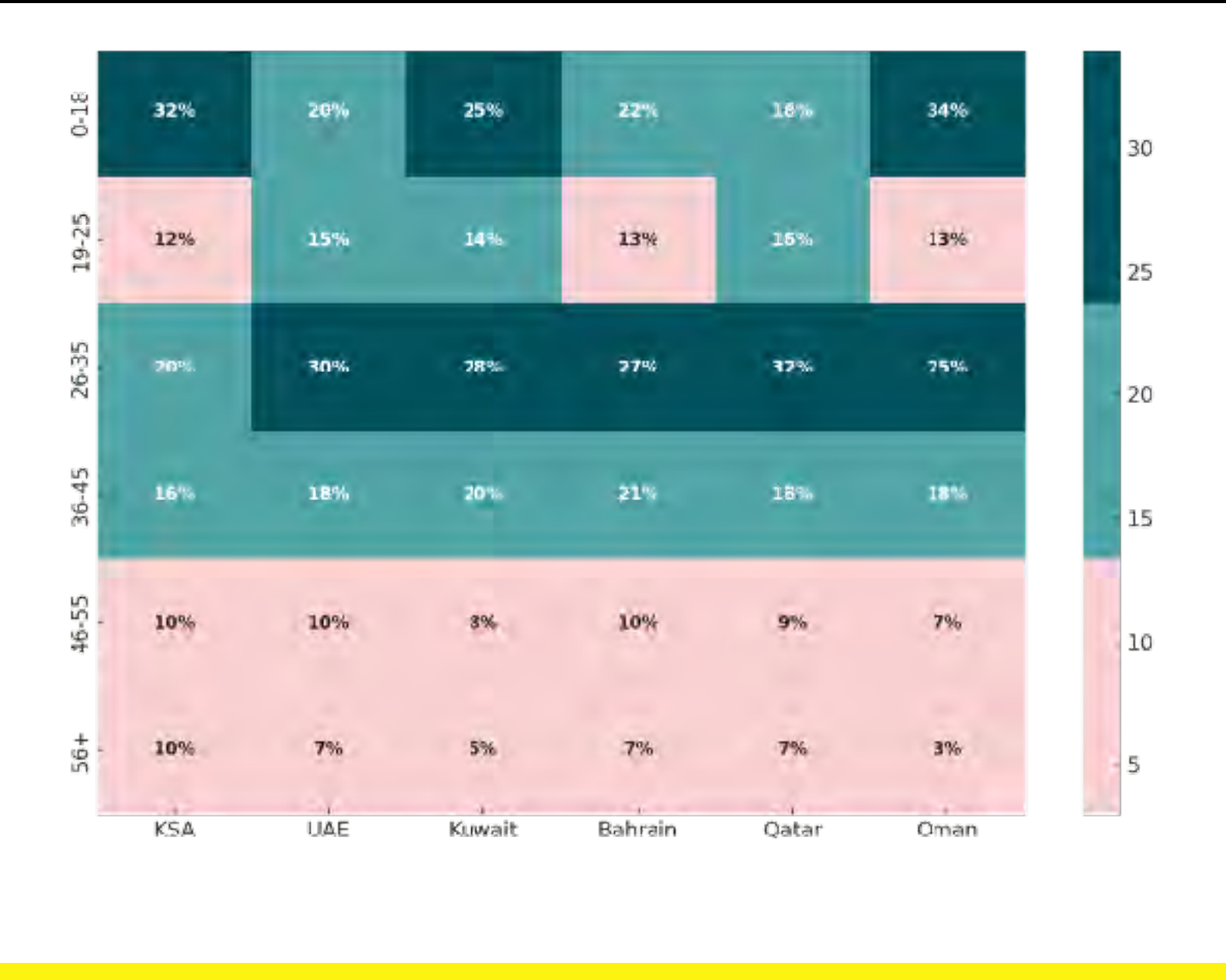
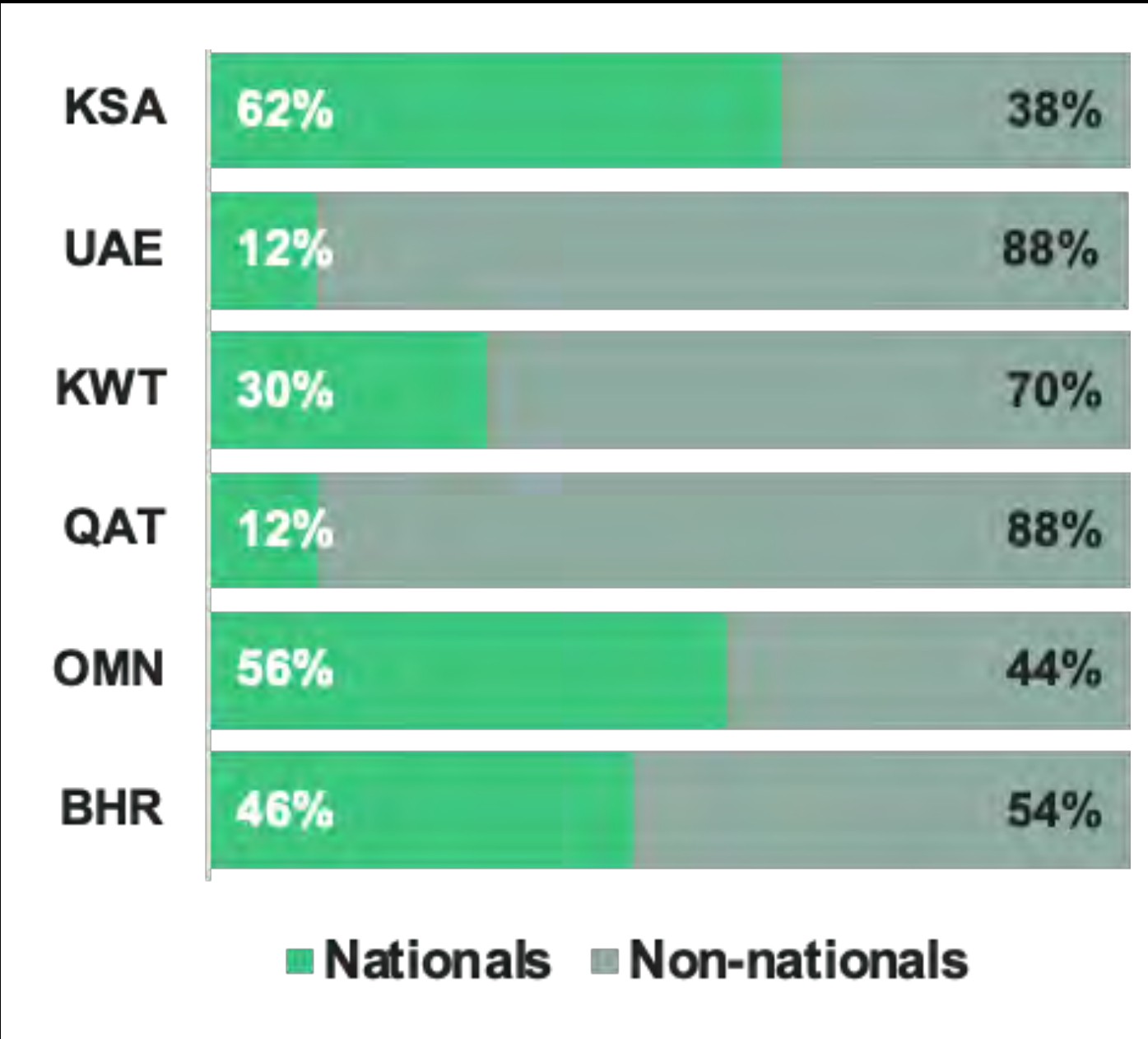
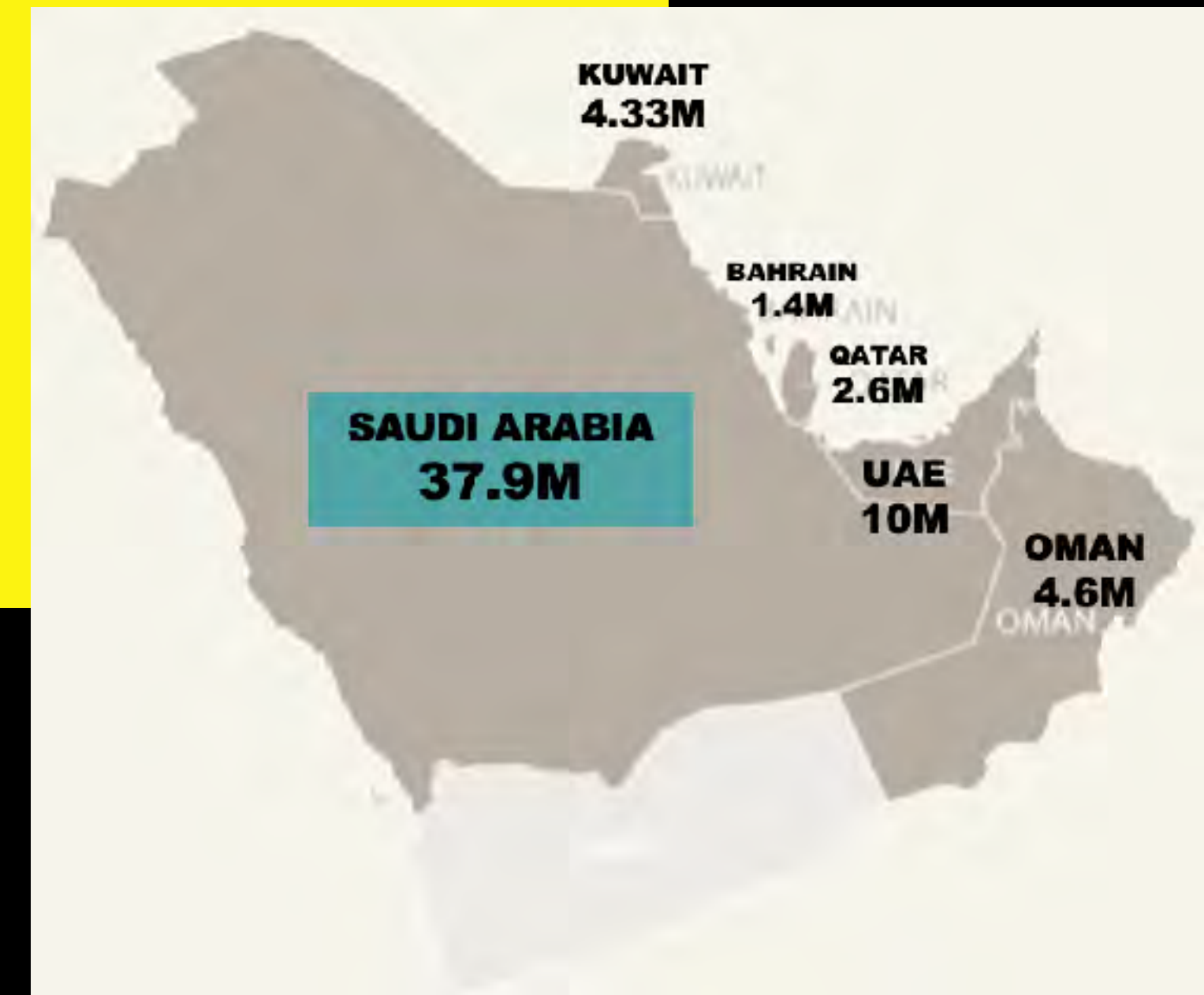
TRENDS SHAPE HOW WE SEE THE WORLD, BUT MOST REPORTS MISS THE MARK WHEN IT COMES TO THE GCC

They are often built on Western narratives, overlooking the complexities, nuances, and cultural shifts driving change across the GCC. That is what inspired this report.

This report dives into seven cultural movements we expect to define 2025. Trends that reflect the way people in the GCC think, consume, create, and buy.

In a region where culture is power, brands that understand its shifts are the ones that stay relevant and stay ahead.

IN A REGION WHERE **65% OF THE POPULATION IS UNDER 35** AND **51% ARE NON-NATIONALS**, THIS IS ONE OF THE RICHEST CULTURAL MELTING POTS IN THE WORLD



Source: World Population Review & World Bank Open Data, 2024



TREND +1

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The business of loneliness

Under the veneer of luxury and leisure lurks a hidden epidemic: loneliness

HEALTH

No friends in UAE? Many residents face anxiety due to lack of social life

Having little to no friends can negatively affect one's confidence and sense of self-worth, which can result in self-doubt, a psychologist says

HOME / MENTAL-HEALTH / LONG READS

Are UAE residents lonely? How work from home, less 'offline' connections affect mental health

Wellbeing

The loneliness epidemic and how it can affect you in the UAE

With new research showing that solitude and isolation can be as damaging to our health as smoking and obesity, we look at whether this is a particular problem in the UAE

Over 1 in 5 People Worldwide Feel Lonely a Lot

Loneliness makes other negative feelings worse



Reddit · r/dubai

200+ comments · 7 months ago

Why is Dubai such a lonely place?

Dubai as a city feels lonely mainly because there's no social cohesion: everyone is from different

Photo by: Cheb Moha

CRAVING CONNECTION

THE WORLD MAY BE MORE DIGITALLY CONNECTED THAN EVER, BUT IT'S LONELIER, TOO



Photo by: Omar Khalil

The Middle East, like the rest of the world, is grappling with a “connection crisis”

In the GCC, this trend is amplified by unique cultural dynamics: the expat-heavy population, the relentless pursuit of professional success, and the absence of traditional community spaces that dominate in other parts of the world.

This is not a new phenomenon, but its sharp rise is impossible to ignore. The loneliness epidemic, long simmering beneath the surface, has now evolved into an unmistakable social reality as we head into 2025. More than a statistic, it's a mood and a collective yearning for something real, tangible, and shared.

TREND IN MOTION

The region is seeing people rethink how they connect with one another IRL, searching for ways to reclaim authenticity and community in their daily lives.

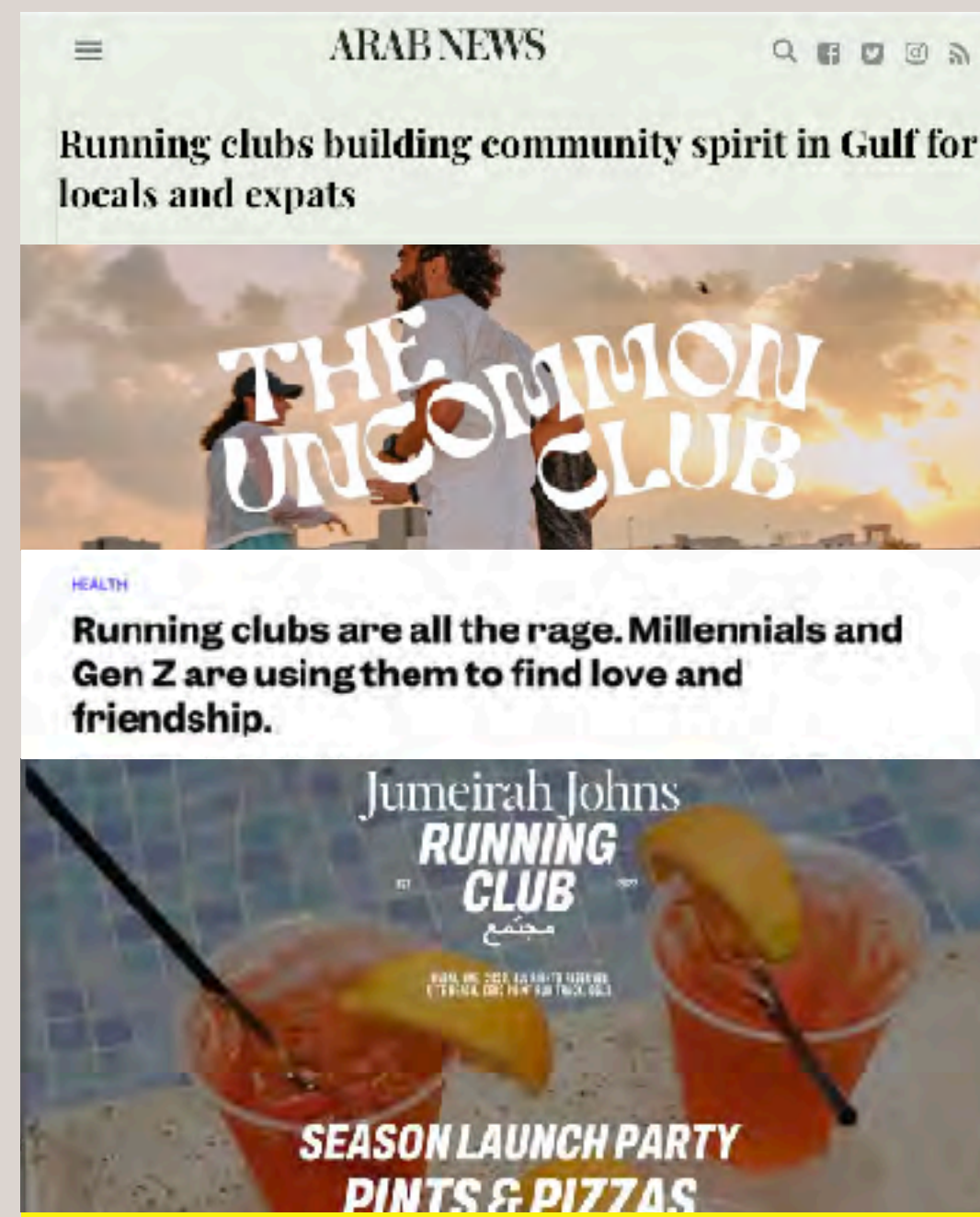
Running clubs are becoming more than fitness groups, they're spaces where people meet, connect, and build a sense of belonging in cities that can otherwise feel isolating.

Similarly, apps like Timeleft and Locals are simplifying connection, organizing shared meals and hobby-based meetups that feel personal and grounded. Community events such as Karak, Hang with Me, and Fred's Coffee Party are also gaining traction, offering ways for people to gather, share experiences, and foster relationships.

TimeLeft & 'Locals' Apps



Running Clubs



Community Events (i.e., Hang With Me, The Karak, and Fred's Coffee Party).



TREND IN MOTION

The craving for connection is mirrored in the rise of dating shows across the Middle East.

According to YouTube's Global Trends Report for the end of 2024, programs like The Blind Date Show in Egypt, Love is Blind Habibi in Dubai, and Meet Up in Tunisia resonate with audiences by tapping into emotional needs.

One standout example is the YouTube-native reality show Qesma w Naseeb, which took the region by storm, racking up over a billion views this year.

The Blind Date Show - Egypt



Match (Morocco/ Meet Up Tunisia)



Love is Blind Habibi/Qesma w naseeb





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

In 2025, as loneliness peaks, the focus for brands should shift from chasing “engagement” to cultivating community and driving real conversations.

1 SPONSOR AND SUPPORT CONNECTION HUBS

Community events like Karak, sponsored by Yango and Power Horse, show how brands can tap into spaces that people already value.

The focus should be on contributing to these experiences in a way that enhances the moment and strengthens your presence in the culture people are building.

2 LEVERAGE YOUR RETAIL SPACES

Lululemon hosts yoga classes. Apple offers mentorship sessions. More brands should follow their lead, turning retail spaces into destinations for learning, connection, and shared experiences.

Places that bring people together and build community.

+

TREND + 2

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REMIX CULTURE



Photo by: Omar Khalil

THERE IS A CULTURAL SHIFT HAPPENING IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND IT'S ALL ABOUT REMIXING

At the heart of this movement is a love for
self-expression and play



Photo by: Cheb Moha

Younger generations, especially Gen Z, are pushing boundaries and rejecting the expectations that shaped past generations. They are unafraid to experiment, taking what is familiar and transforming it into something bold, fresh, and unexpected. It is a celebration of individuality with a strong sense of pride and community woven throughout.

Drawing inspiration from everywhere—global trends, regional styles, and viral moments—they mash ideas together in ways that feel both authentic and exciting.

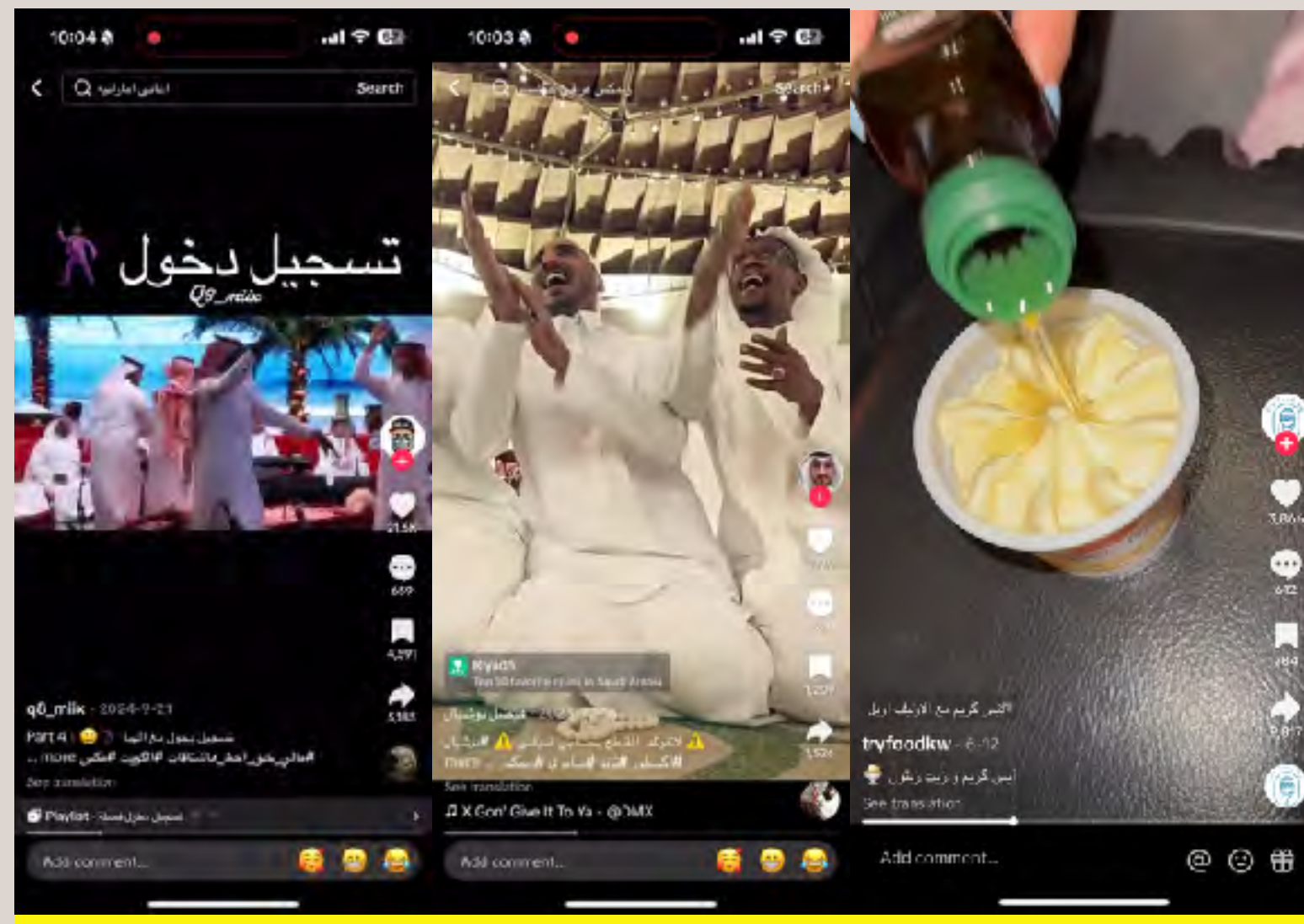
TREND IN MOTION

From content and food to music and spaces, remix culture is making its mark across the region in fresh and unexpected ways.

This year we've seen playful food trends like olive oil drizzled on vanilla ice cream and a Saudi orchestra performance that went viral for putting a cultural spin on Rolling in the Deep, infusing it with Samri rhythms, instruments, and vocals.

Meanwhile, spaces like BRED are bringing this remix energy to life. Inspired by the pulse of Arab streets, this neo-cultural festival blends hip-hop, basketball, street art, fashion, food, and music, celebrating urban culture through a distinctly Middle Eastern lens.

REMIKING Content/Food

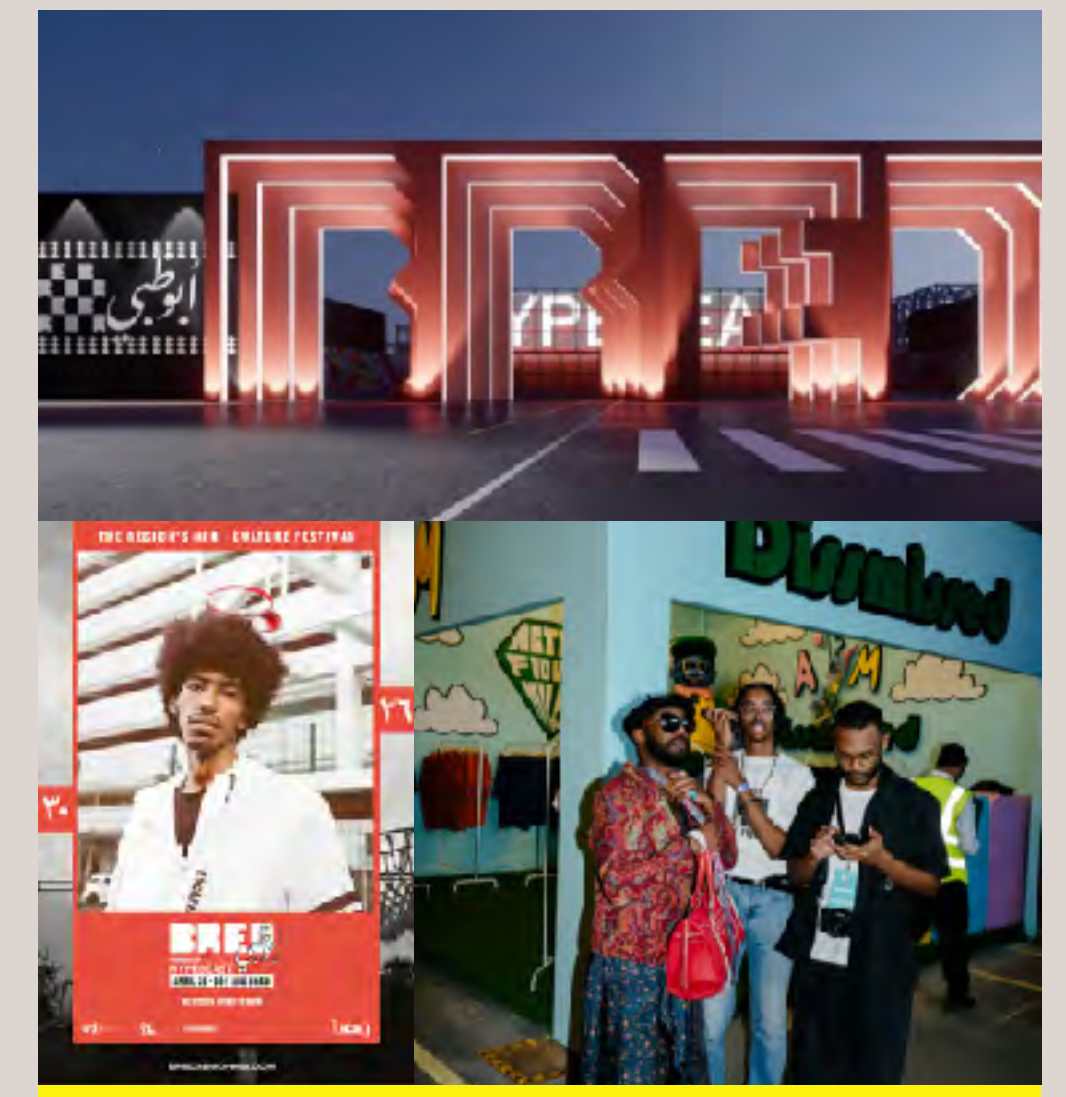


REMIKING MUSIC

Al Thaqfeya channel/ Saudi orchestra rolling in the deep with traditional Samri dances



BRED NEO-CULTURAL FESTIVAL
(A fusion of hip-hop, basketball, street art and fashion, food, and culture)



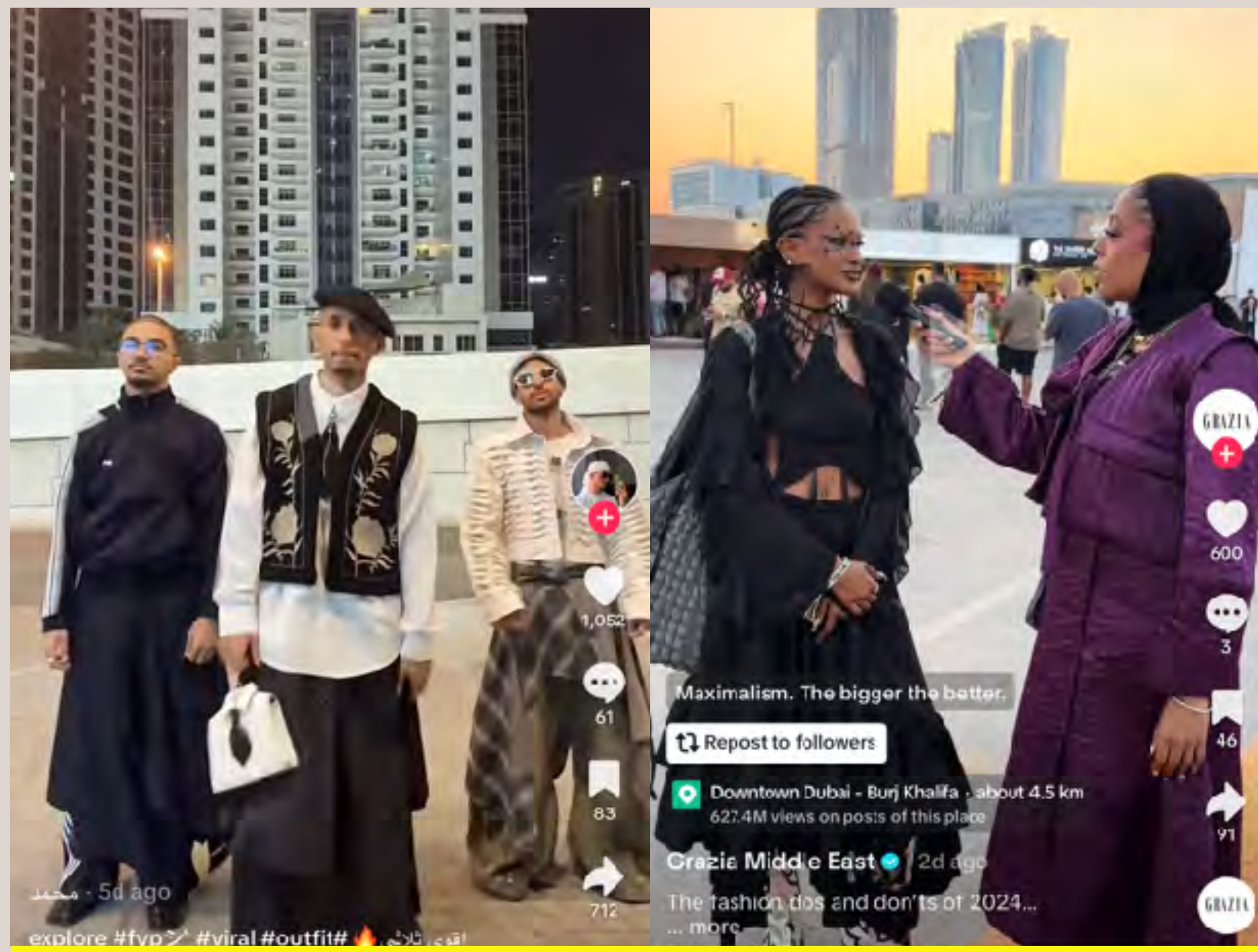
TREND IN MOTION

Building on the rise of remix culture, maximalism is emerging as one of its boldest expressions.

It's taking over fashion, design, and interiors with vibrant prints, layered textures, and fearless colour combinations. Minimalism is being left behind in favor of richness, personality, and self-expression.

At Sole Festival Dubai, conversations about what's next all pointed to embracing identity and going all-in on maximalism. Reports from AD Middle East and Pinterest's 2025 forecasts echo this shift, showing that people are ready to decorate their spaces with bold patterns, eclectic textures, and vibrant colors

Maximalism in fashion (Sole DXB festival)



Maximalism in Homes, decor and everything else. AD Middle East & Pinterest 2025 Report





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

A new wave of creativity is sweeping through the Middle East, driven by a generation unafraid to reimagine and experiment. For brands, it is a moment to take notice and engage.

TREND+2 REMIX CULTURE

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1

INVITE PLAY AND PARTICIPATION

Create spaces, campaigns, and products that encourage interaction and self-expression. Let consumers co-create, remix, and make your brand their own.

2

MIX CULTURES, PARTNERS & INGREDIENTS

Blend your brand with local culture, artists, and brands. Mix styles, materials, and ideas to stay fresh and relevant.

I.e. Ravi Restaurant x Adidas/Among Few x Reebok Club C 8

3

GO BOLD TO GET NOTICED

Don't play it safe. Be vibrant, layered, and expressive.

Lean into bold ideas that break through the noise, ignite curiosity, and spark conversations.



TREND + 3



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Culture

How Dubai is positioning itself as the Middle East's gaming hub

MenaTech Entertainment chief executive Mario Perez speaks to The National about how the emirate's latest moves are shaping the future of the industry in the region

Home > Technology > Esports and gaming

Insights: The MENA region is poised to be the next big mobile gaming oasis

According to the International Trade Administration, there are around 23.5 million gamers in Saudi Arabia, which accounts for almost 70 per cent of its population

06-13-24 | 9:00 AM

How the economics of gaming is shaping the Middle East

The region is now booming economically due to its thriving gaming industry, fueled by investments and infrastructure development

The rapid growth of the MENA gaming industry, and why Saudi Arabia is the key driver

Photo by: Cheb Moha

GCC: GAMING COOPERATION COUNCIL

A NEW ERA OF GAMING IS UNFOLDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Photo by: Cheb Moha

The GCC is set to become the global capital of gaming with massive government investment

While gaming has already become a massive global industry, 2025 is set to spotlight the region as a central force driving its future. This part of the world is seeing gaming evolve into a cultural and economic phenomenon, fuelled by large-scale investments, world-class events, and strategic initiatives.

This transformation is shaping how brands engage with audiences, unlocking opportunities for deeper integration into gaming culture. The region's impact is expected to extend globally, influencing trends, technologies, and consumer behaviours far beyond its borders.

TREND IN MOTION

The numbers are insane
(like truly insane)

The region's rapidly growing gamer base is unmatched, making it one of the fastest-expanding markets globally. It already accounts for over half of the billion-dollar esports market, with gaming content ranking among the most-watched videos online.

Whether it's tutorials, gameplay highlights, or fan-made content, these games have created vibrant communities that cross borders and keep growing.

Arabian Business/ Fast Company Middle East 2024

92%

of people (70.7 million) in MENA-3 markets (KSA/ UAE/Egypt) were gamers in 2024.

Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa account for

OVER 56%

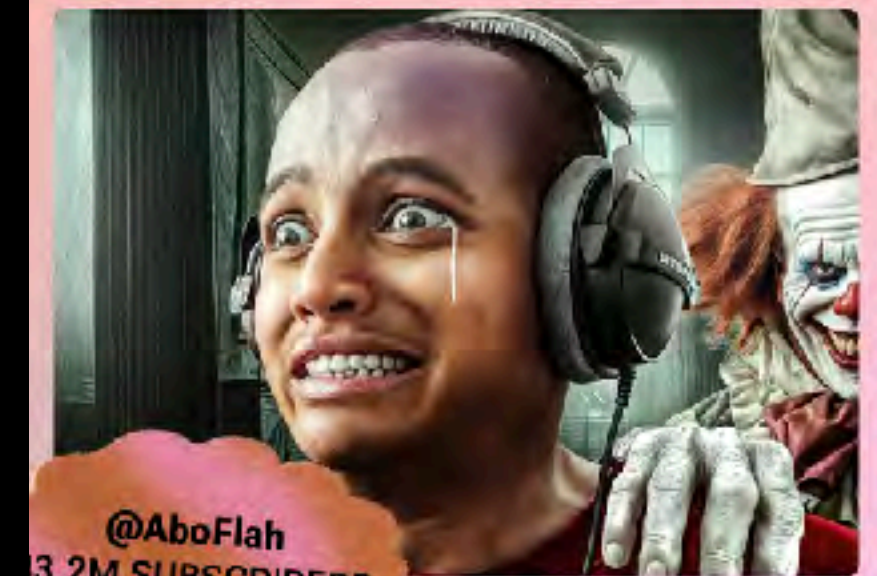
of the global esports billion-dollar market.

YouTube Trends Report

“

In MENA, there have been **OVER 950M VIEWS** on videos related to EA FC 24 in 2024.

”



Poppy Playtime and Zoonomaly appearing on our lists, as the region's biggest gaming Creators like **AboFlah** and **BanderitaX** leaned into the genre. Meanwhile, new releases from established titles like EA FC and Garena Free Fire topped the lists.

TREND IN MOTION

Massive plans are already in motion.

Dubai is hosting the Games of the Future, and Saudi Arabia is stepping up with the Esports Olympics. Then there's Qiddiya City, building the world's first Gaming and Esports District with four arenas designed for 73,000 fans.

Abu Dhabi is matching the energy with a \$1 billion esports island, proving the momentum here is only getting started.

Dubai confirmed as host city for games of the future 2025



Saudi Arabia to host inaugural Olympics Esports Games in 2025



Abu Dhabi Esports island announced



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

Gaming is reshaping culture and creating new opportunities for brands. The challenge is stepping into this space with purpose, adding value, and building genuine connections that resonate with gamers.

1 DON'T SHOW UP WITHOUT PURPOSE

Most brands still miss the mark because they do not understand gamers. Showing up is not enough.

Gamers want value, something that improves their experience or gives them a reason to care. Brands need to build with this in mind.

2 CREATE MOMENTS THAT WOULD ONLY WORK LOCALLY

In this region, gaming is almost cult-like. It is a culture with its own rules and rituals.

Winning here means investing in creators, tournaments, and events that feel native to the space.

3 TREAT GAMING LIKE META

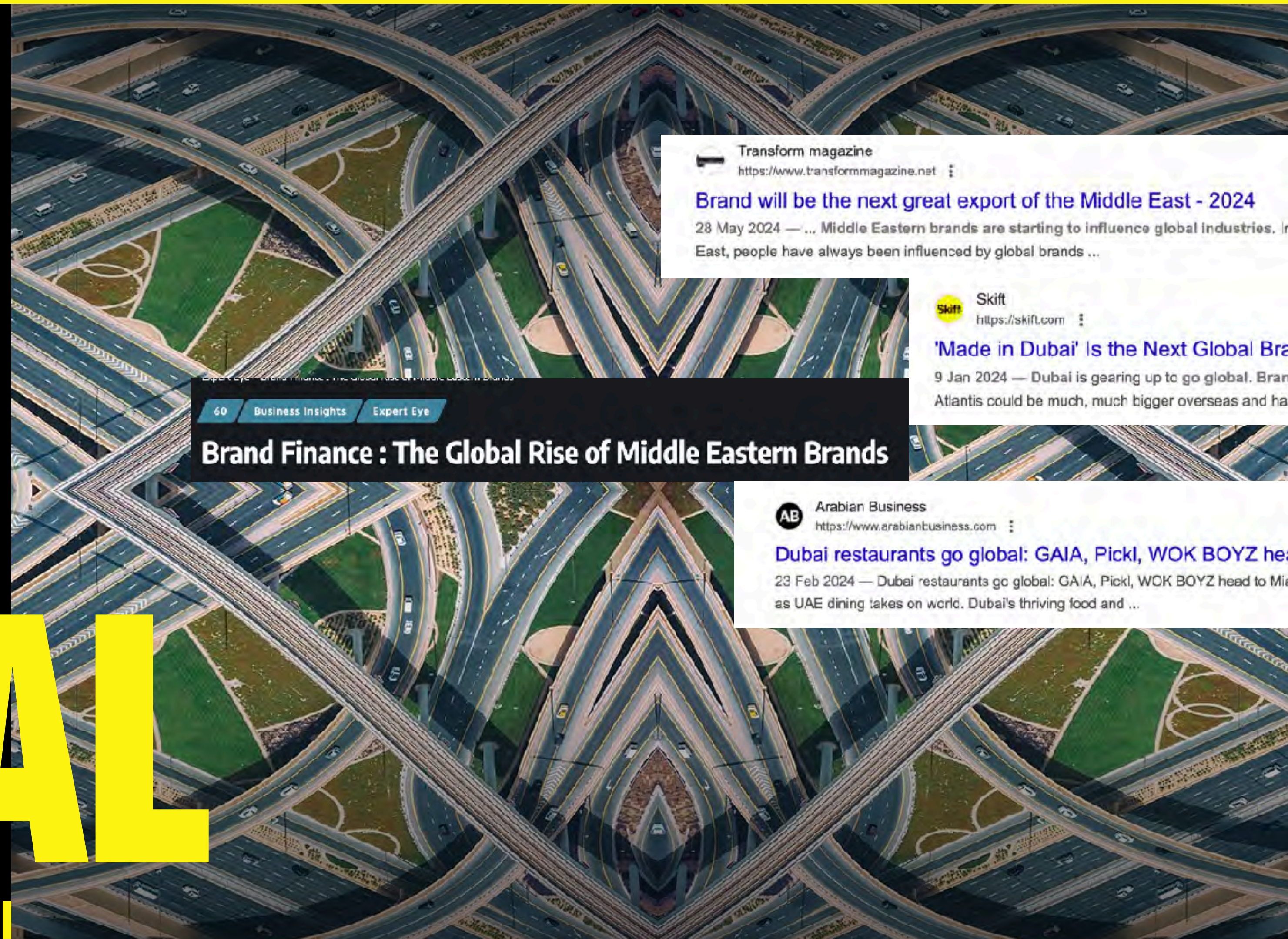
Gaming is already as big as social media and it is only getting bigger.

Brands need to treat it like a major media channel, giving it the same focus and investment as platforms like Instagram and TikTok.



TREND +4

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Transform magazine

<https://www.transformmagazine.net>

Brand will be the next great export of the Middle East - 2024

28 May 2024 — ... Middle Eastern brands are starting to influence global industries. In the Middle East, people have always been influenced by global brands ...



Skift

<https://skift.com>

'Made in Dubai' Is the Next Global Brand

9 Jan 2024 — Dubai is gearing up to go global. Brands such as Jumeirah, Emaar Hospitality and Atlantis could be much, much bigger overseas and have been "late" to expanding.

60

Business Insights

Expert Eye

Brand Finance : The Global Rise of Middle Eastern Brands



Arabian Business

<https://www.arabianbusiness.com>

Dubai restaurants go global: GAIA, Pickl, WOK BOYZ head ...

23 Feb 2024 — Dubai restaurants go global: GAIA, Pickl, WOK BOYZ head to Miami, London, Canada as UAE dining takes on world. Dubai's thriving food and ...

**LOCAL
GOING GLOBAL**

2025 IS SHAPING UP TO BE A BREAKOUT YEAR FOR **REGIONAL** **INFLUENCE**



Photo by: Cheb Moha

Could the GCC become the next global cultural export after the era of Korea?

For years, influence moved in one direction. Western trends shaped the Middle East, setting the tone for what was seen, heard, and consumed. That balance is shifting, and 2025 is set to prove it.

The region is no longer on the receiving end. It is creating, leading, and pushing culture outward from music and fashion to food and film, local culture is leaving its mark everywhere.

TREND IN MOTION

We can see this shift unfolding across industries, with local brands gaining traction on the global stage.

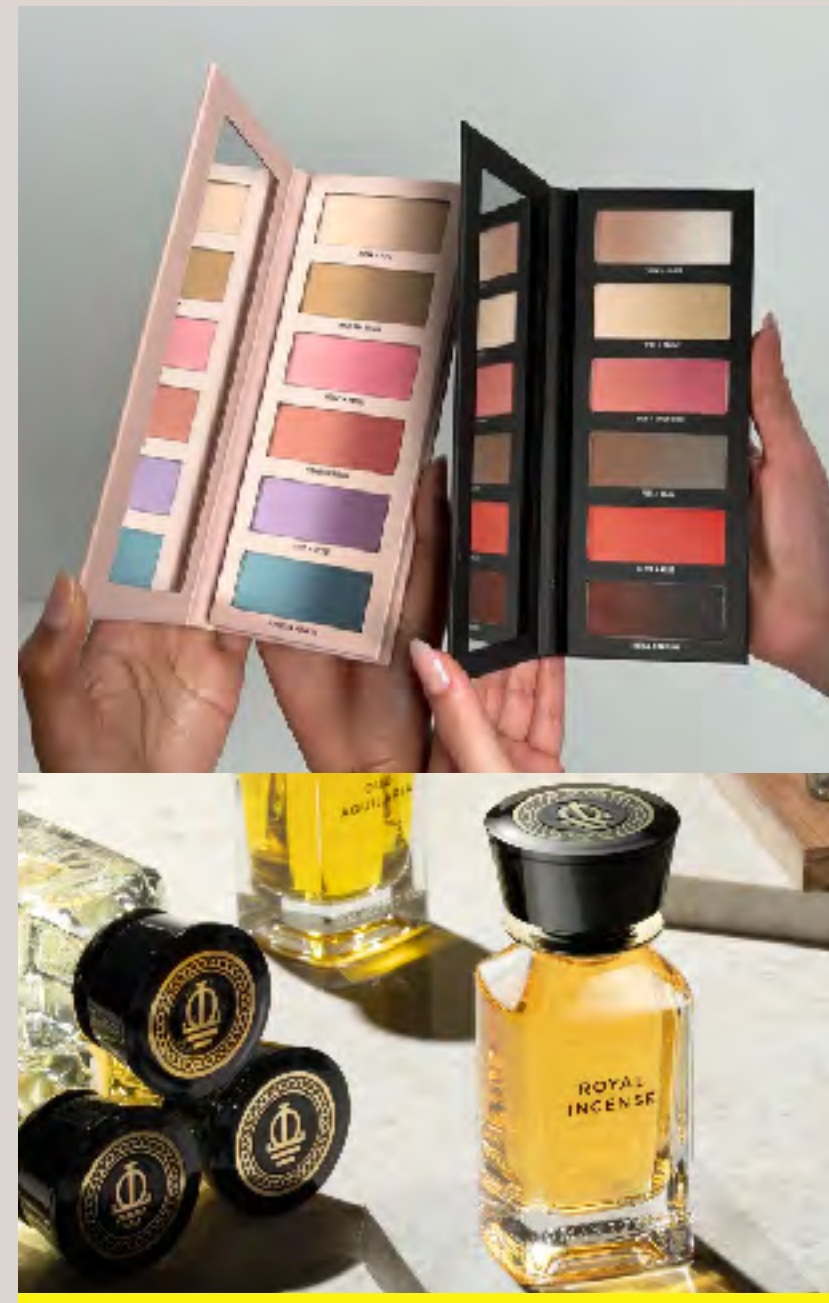
Restaurants like Gaia and Wok Boyz are scaling up and exporting local concepts worldwide. UAE-born fashion and beauty labels are landing in luxury retailers like NET-A-PORTER and Harrods and showing up on celebrities like Kylie Jenner and Jennifer Lopez.

Developers are making moves too, with Aldar launching projects in London and taking regional influence to the global stage.

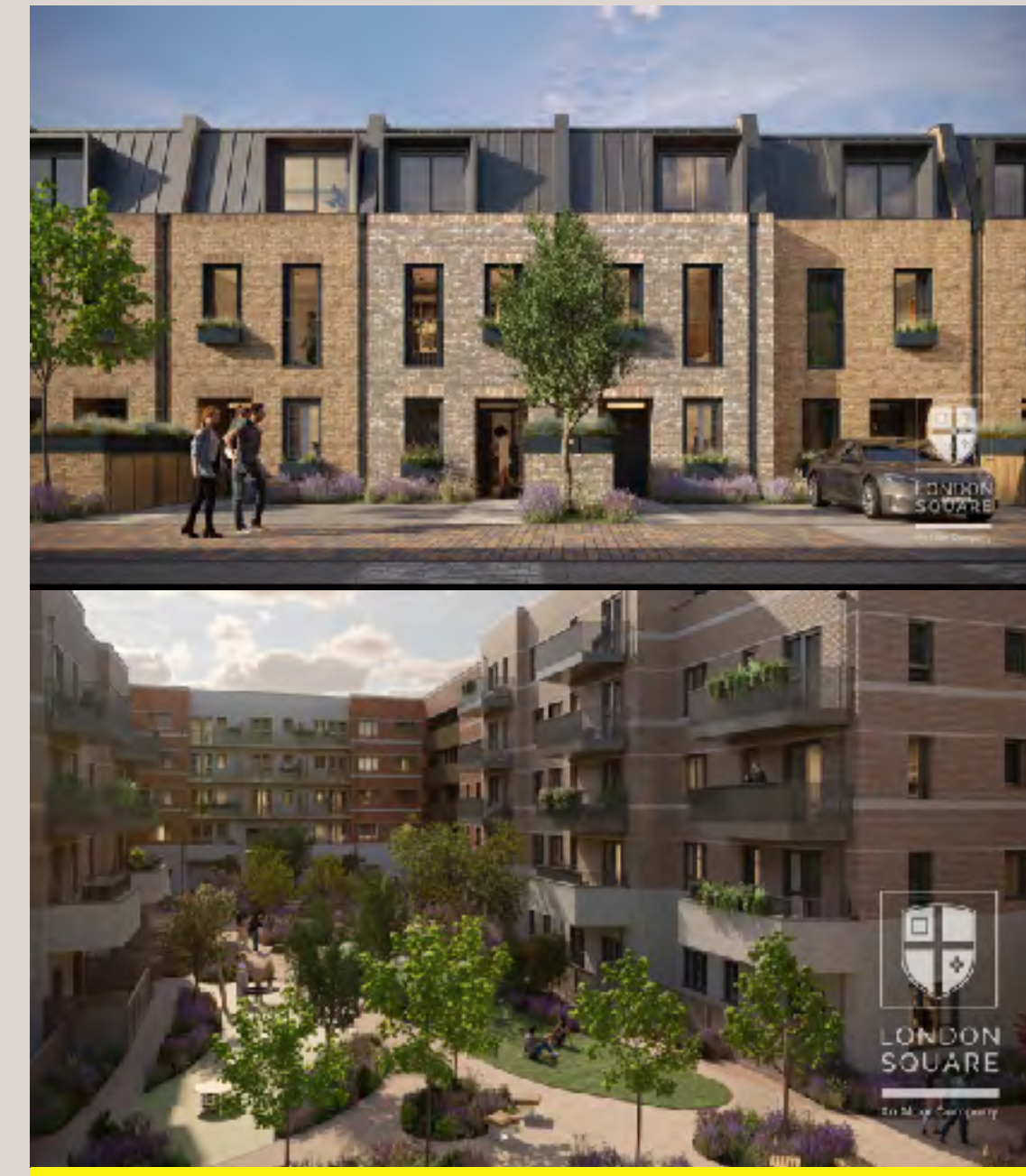
Restaurants: GAIA (London), Wokboyz (Canada and Ghana)



Beauty: Hindash Cosmetics / Oman Luxury



Developers: Aldar (London Square)



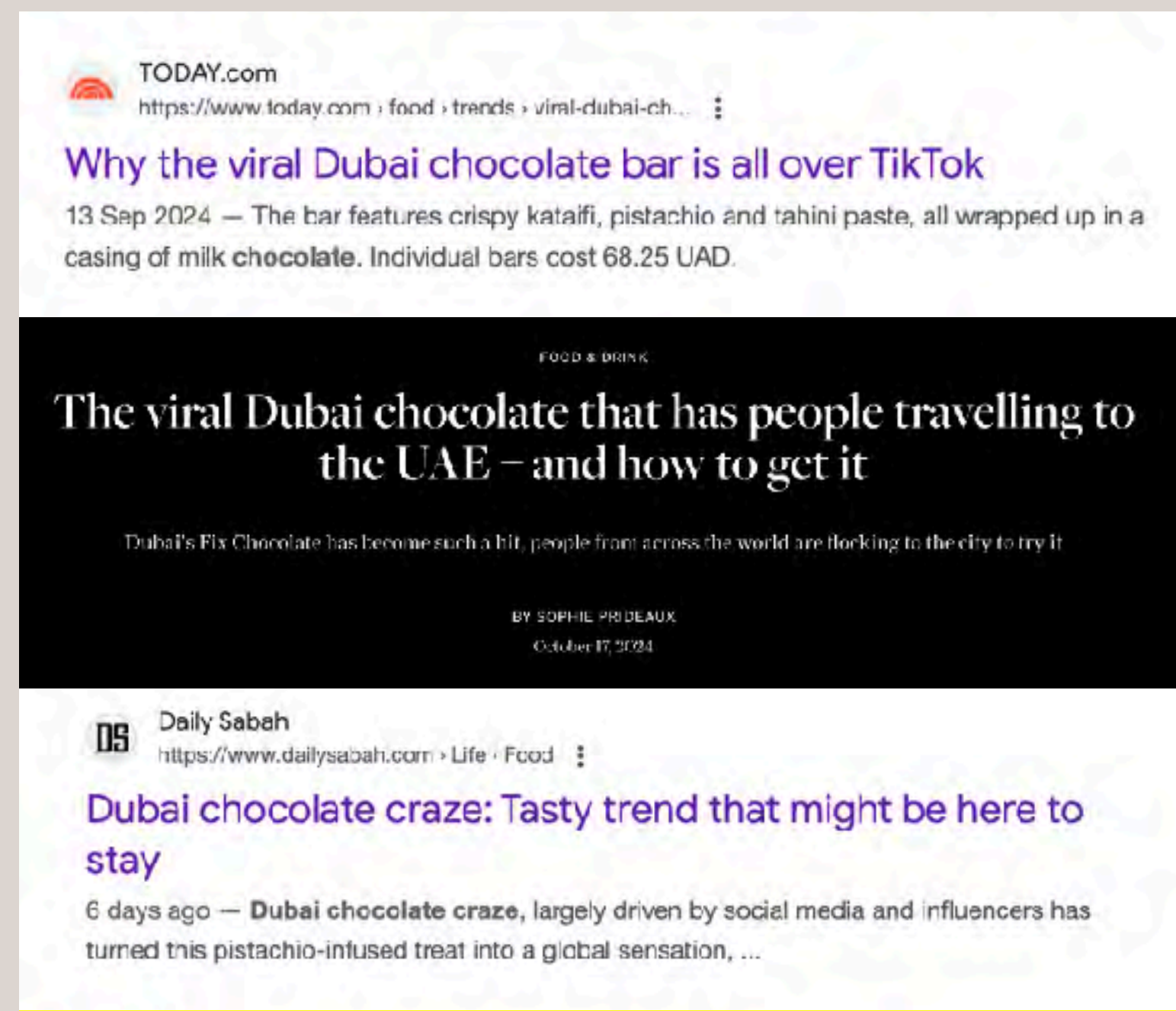
TREND IN MOTION

Local content is going viral globally, proving its influence is reaching new heights.

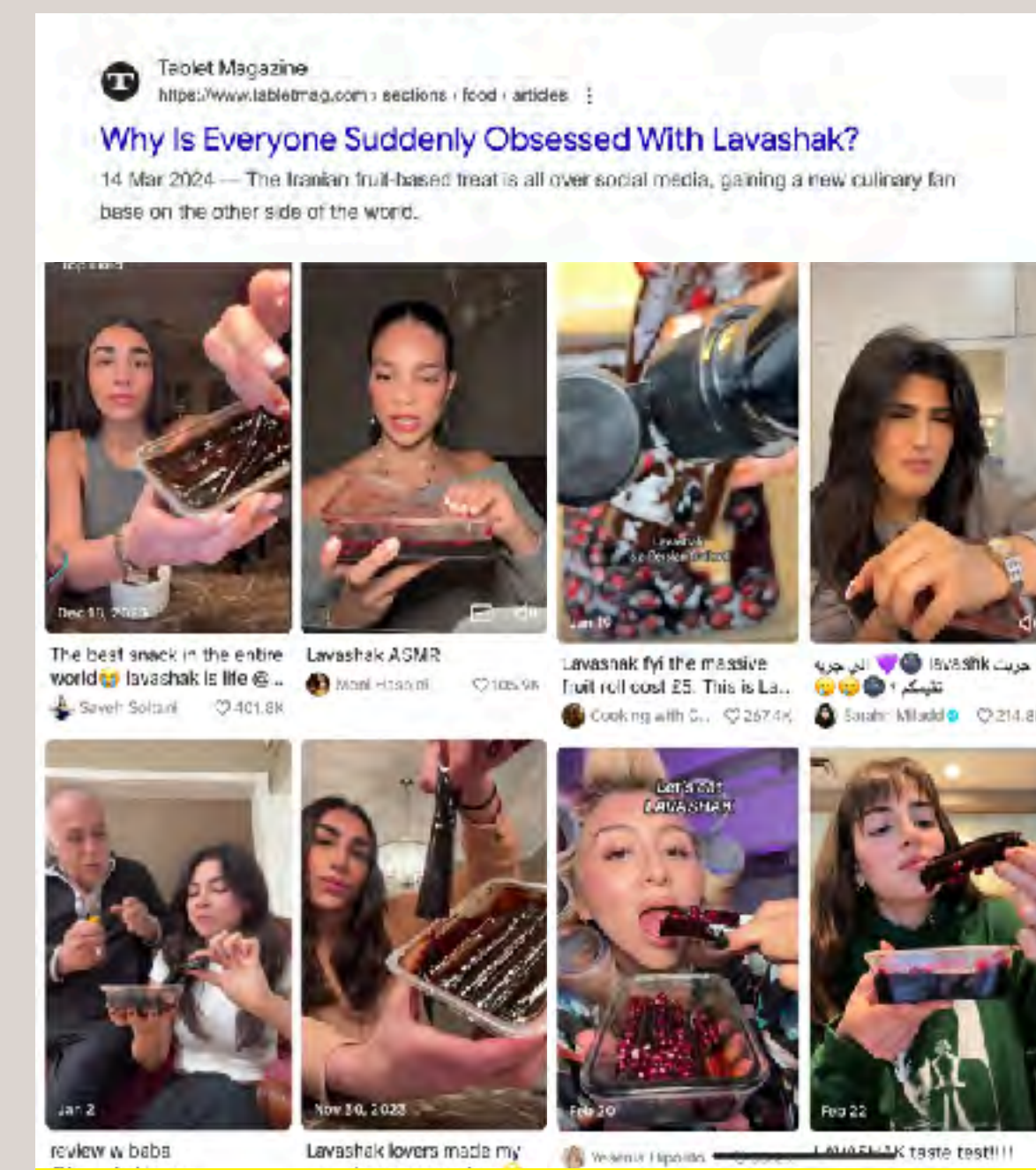
Viral moments born in the region are capturing global attention and shaping trends far beyond their origins. Dubai's chocolate mukbang craze took social media by storm.

You also have the lavashak trend, which gained global traction and turned into an online sensation.

Dubai Chocolate



Lavashak Snack





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

As brands from this region gain global recognition, now's the time to double down on what makes them stand out.

TREND+4 LOCAL GOING GLOBAL

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1

EMBRACE HERITAGE AND PROVENANCE

Leverage your brand's unique cultural background and origin story. As global consumers become increasingly receptive to brands from diverse regions, highlighting your authentic roots can be a powerful differentiator.

2

COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL CREATIVE COLLECTIVES

Collaborate with local brands to unlock new markets and expand reach. Focus on identifying the right partners to ensure impactful connections.

3

INCORPORATE LOCAL FLAVORS AND INGREDIENTS

Viral hits like chocolate pistachio kunafa prove regional twists grab attention. Use local ingredients to stand out.



TREND +5

M+C SAATCHI GROUP



Careem Food 'Dirhams for Delays' campaign launches in Abu Dhabi

Running from September 2 until October 31, the campaign reimburses customers AED1 for every minute that their order is delayed, based on the promised delivery time (ETA)

Noon Minutes with WatchBox Announces Latest Campaign, Redefining 15-minute Delivery in UAE

By [Communicate Staff](#) Wed, Feb 21 2024

HOME / BUSINESS

UAE: Talabat raises Dh7.5 billion in largest global tech IPO so far this year

The offering achieved a double-digit oversubscription level, with a number of sizeable anchor orders

Published: Fri 29 Nov 2024, 9:40 AM Updated: Fri 29 Nov 2024, 10:06 PM

By Web Desk

By Shifali Jain

IF YOU'RE IMPATIENT JUST LIKE US, HERE'S 11 UAE FASHION & BEAUTY SITES THAT HAVE SAME-DAY DELIVERY

Same day delivery? Yes please!

Photo by: Omar Khalil

INSTANT EVERYTHING

IN RECENT YEARS, INSTANT DELIVERY APPS HAVE BECOME A STAPLE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

What began with food has quickly grown to include groceries, clothes, and just about anything you need delivered in under two hours



Photo by: Cheb Moha

This region has always stood out for its exceptional service culture, setting the standard long before the rest of the world caught on. The demand for speed surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, as lockdowns and movement restrictions made fast and reliable services more essential than ever. That momentum has only continued to grow.

More recently, Dubai's traffic jams have made headlines, turning quick errands into time-consuming tasks. With every new reason to save time, expectations for faster, easier solutions just keep rising.

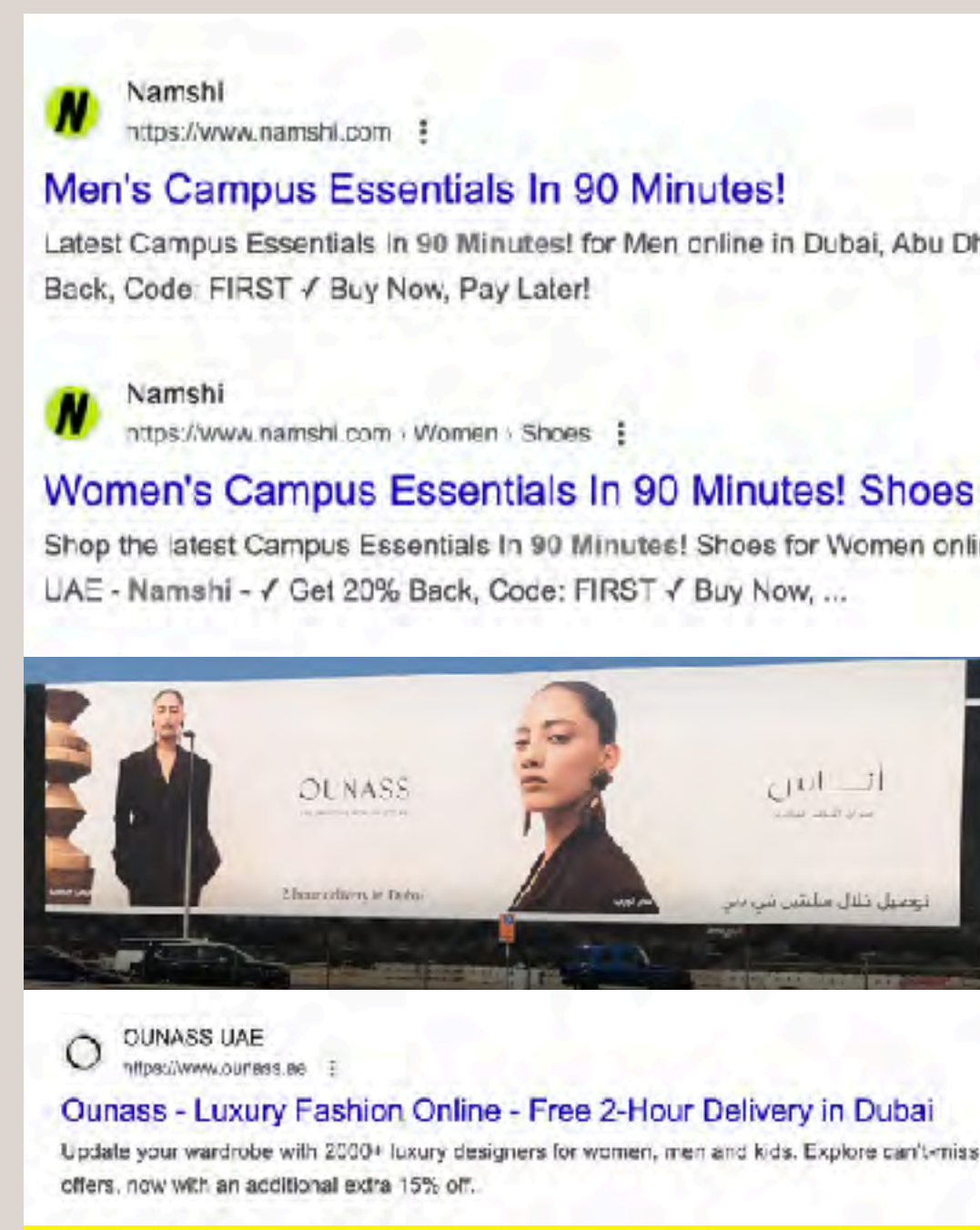
TREND IN MOTION

Speed and accessibility have become a way of life. With just a tap, anything you need feels instantly within reach.

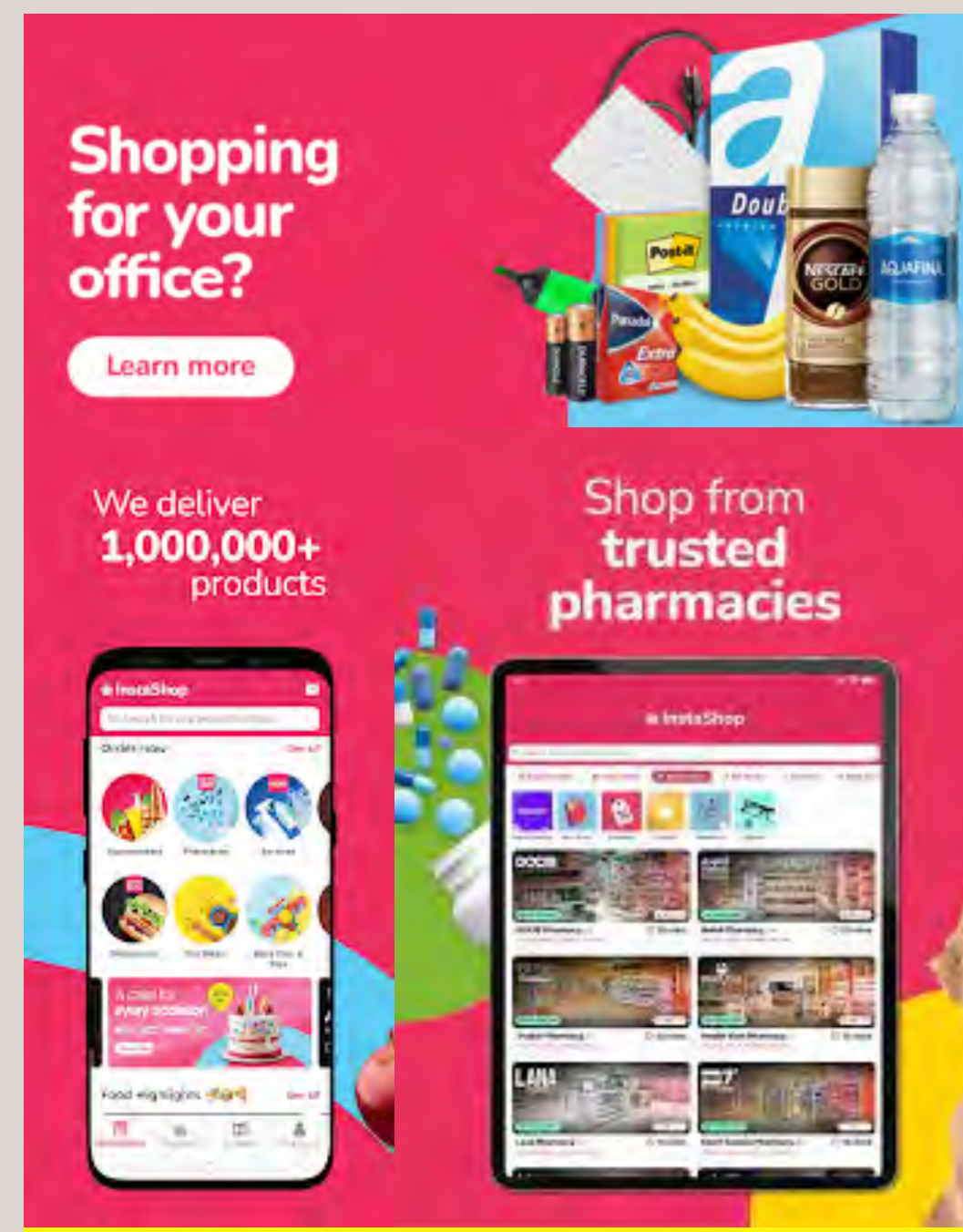
Ounass and Namshi deliver fashion in 90 minutes. InstaShop brings groceries and household items to your door in minutes. Careem Box lets you send drivers anywhere to pick up and deliver whatever you need.

Even Noon promises deliveries in just 15 minutes. The pace is relentless, and the demand for instant service keeps growing.

Namshi, Ounass 90 minute delivery



Instashop



Noon Minutes/ Careem Box



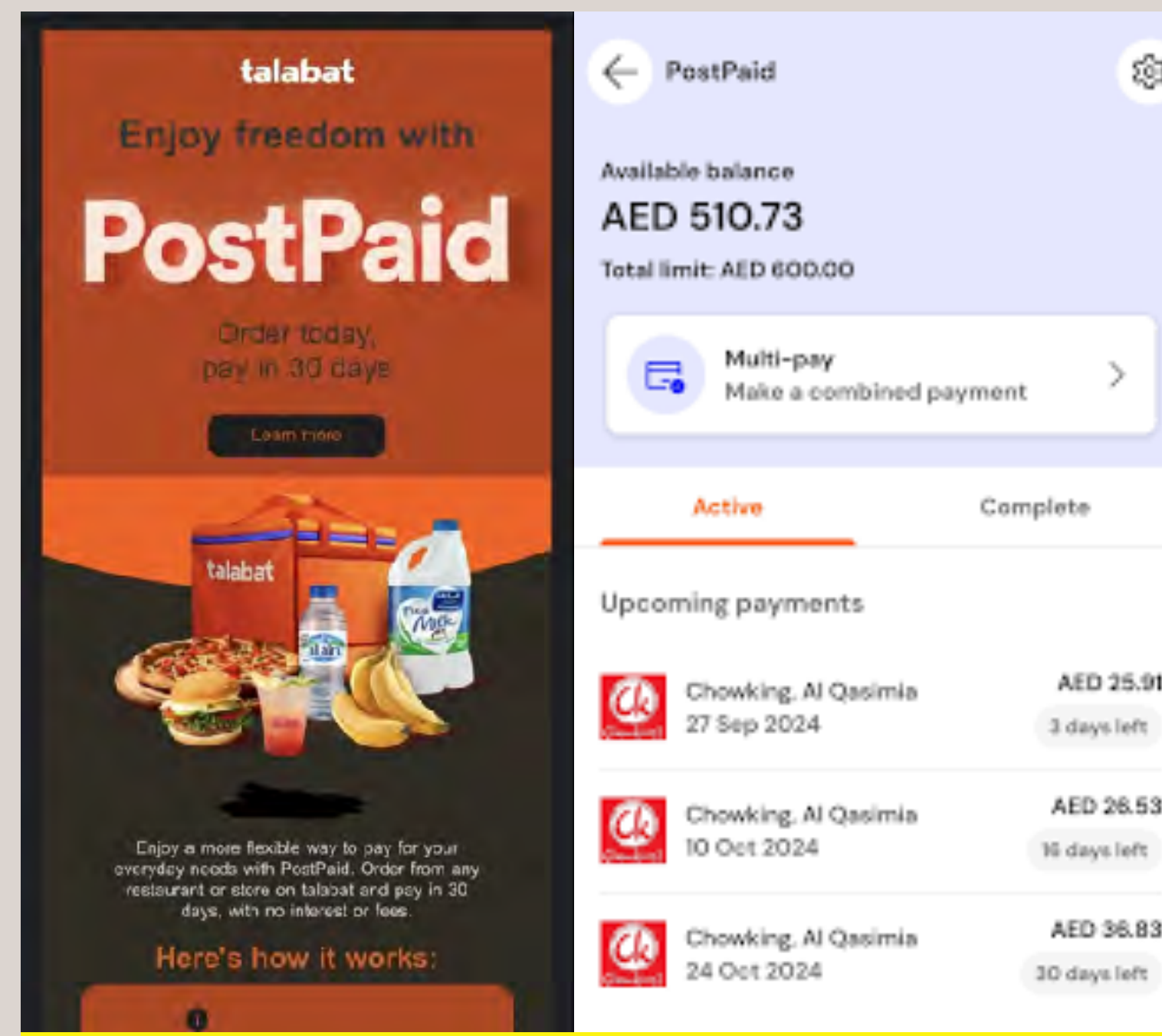
TREND IN MOTION

The rise of instant gratification is not just about faster deliveries. It is also reshaping how people pay for everyday purchases.

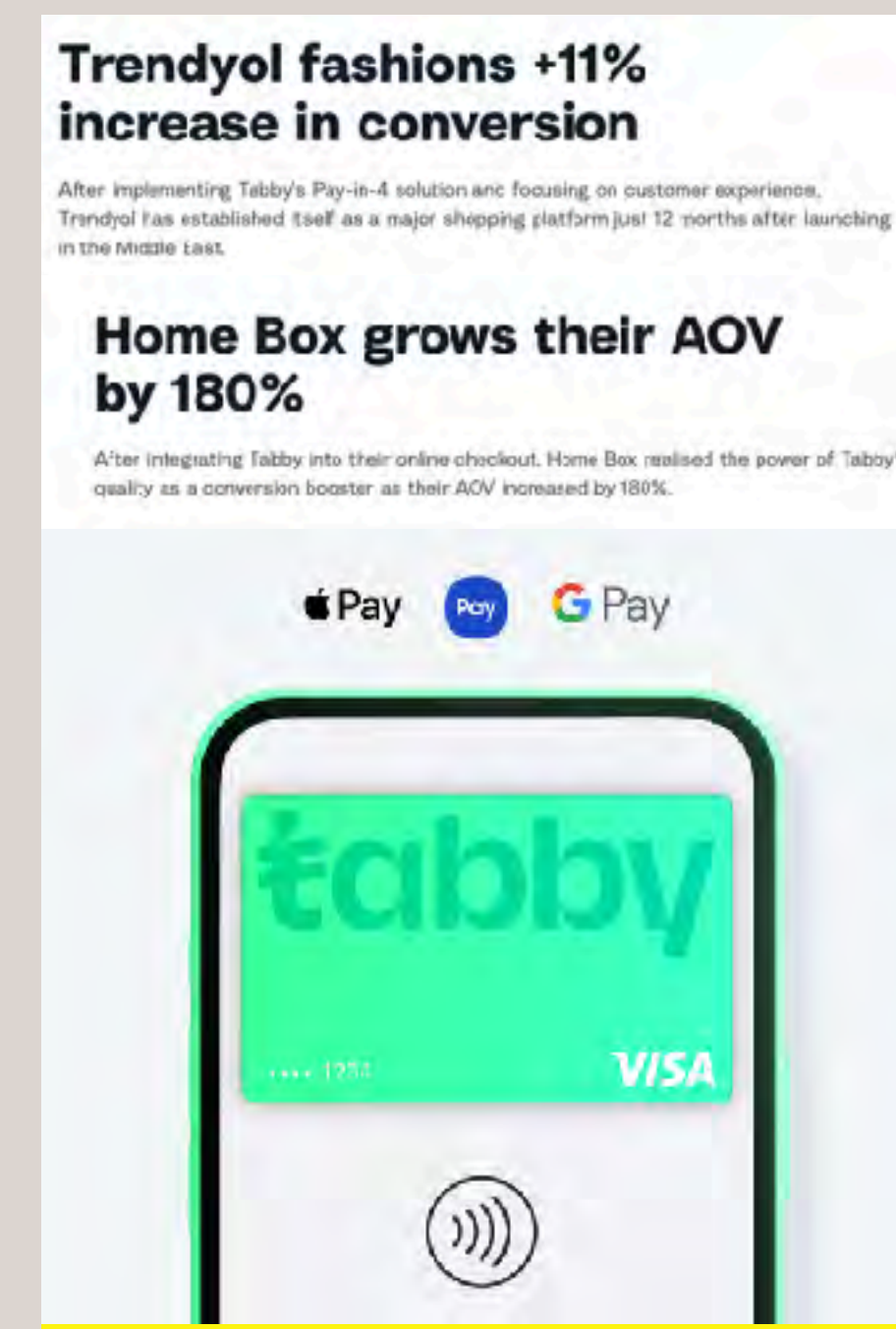
What used to be reserved for big-ticket items like cars and houses is now the norm for almost anything. Apps like Tabby have made split payments mainstream. From gym memberships to a new pair of shoes, nearly everything can be broken into four installments. Tabby has even introduced a physical card, allowing shoppers to use it in stores just as easily.

Even food delivery apps are following suit. Talabat now offers a postpaid option, letting users order a meal and pay later. It is yet another example of how speed and flexibility are driving today's habits.

Talabat Post Paid



Tabby





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

If you are not focused on lowering barriers for your customers, whether it's time, cost, or effort, you risk falling behind. The demand for instant everything is here to stay, and brands need to adapt now.

1

MAKE IT INSTANT

Prioritize faster delivery, checkout, and service to match expectations for instant solutions.

Brands need to consider DTC channels, and shoppable content on social especially with new features going live in the region for the first time

2

FLEXIBLE PAYMENTS

Provide split-payment and post-paid options to make purchases easier and more accessible for mid to high range goods and services.

3

GET ON THE FRONT FOOT

Social listening used to be about trendjacking, but now brands need to understand the longer mid-term shifts that are changing behaviour to create new revenue streams and protect existing ones.



TREND + 6

PROUDLY DUPED!

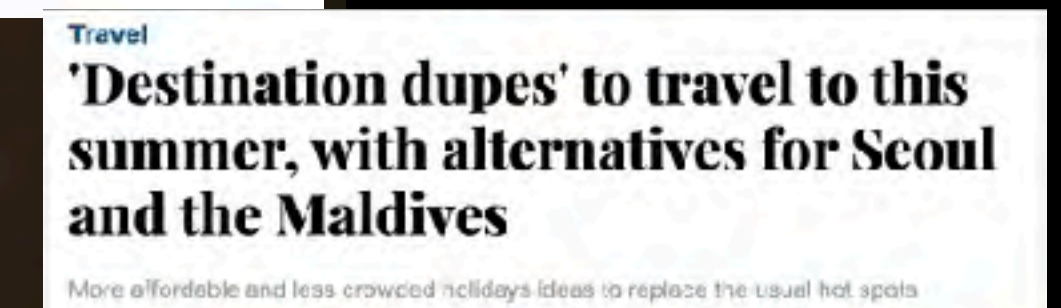
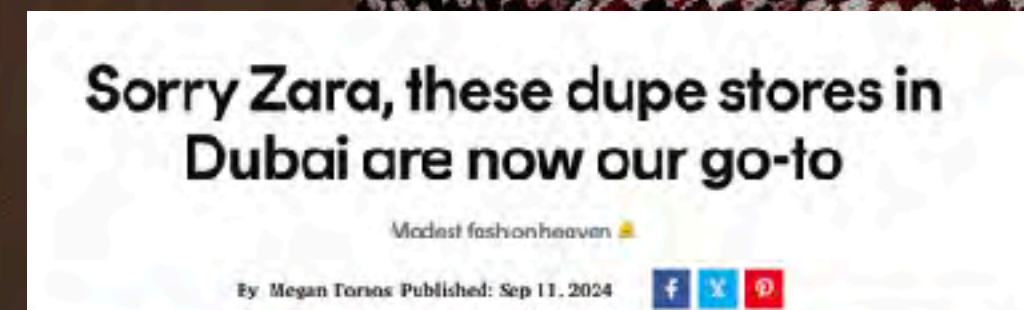
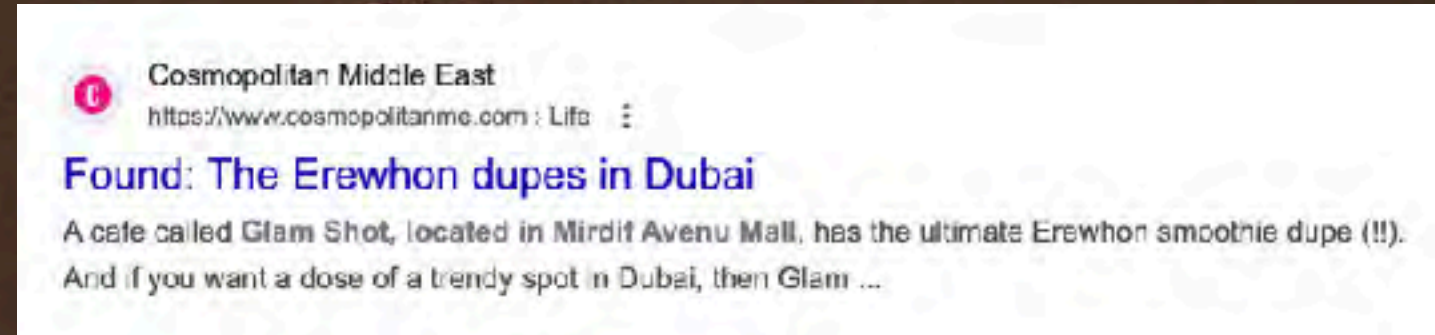


Photo by: Omar Khalil

**IN THIS PART OF THE
WORLD, STATUS WAS
EVERYTHING. FOR YEARS,
DUPES WERE DISMISSED,
AVOIDED, AND EVEN
LOOKED DOWN ON**



Photo by: Omar Khalil

**The rise of local and copycat brands is no longer
looked down upon, it's embraced**

But that mindset is changing. Across the Middle East, these polished, high-quality alternatives are now seen not as compromises but as smart, intentional choices.

You have brands that are proudly positioning themselves as dupes, no longer seen as lesser than luxury labels but instead standing out as smart, accessible, and, at times, even better than the original.

It's a shift led by a new generation that values style and substance, prioritising quality, affordability, and individuality over status.

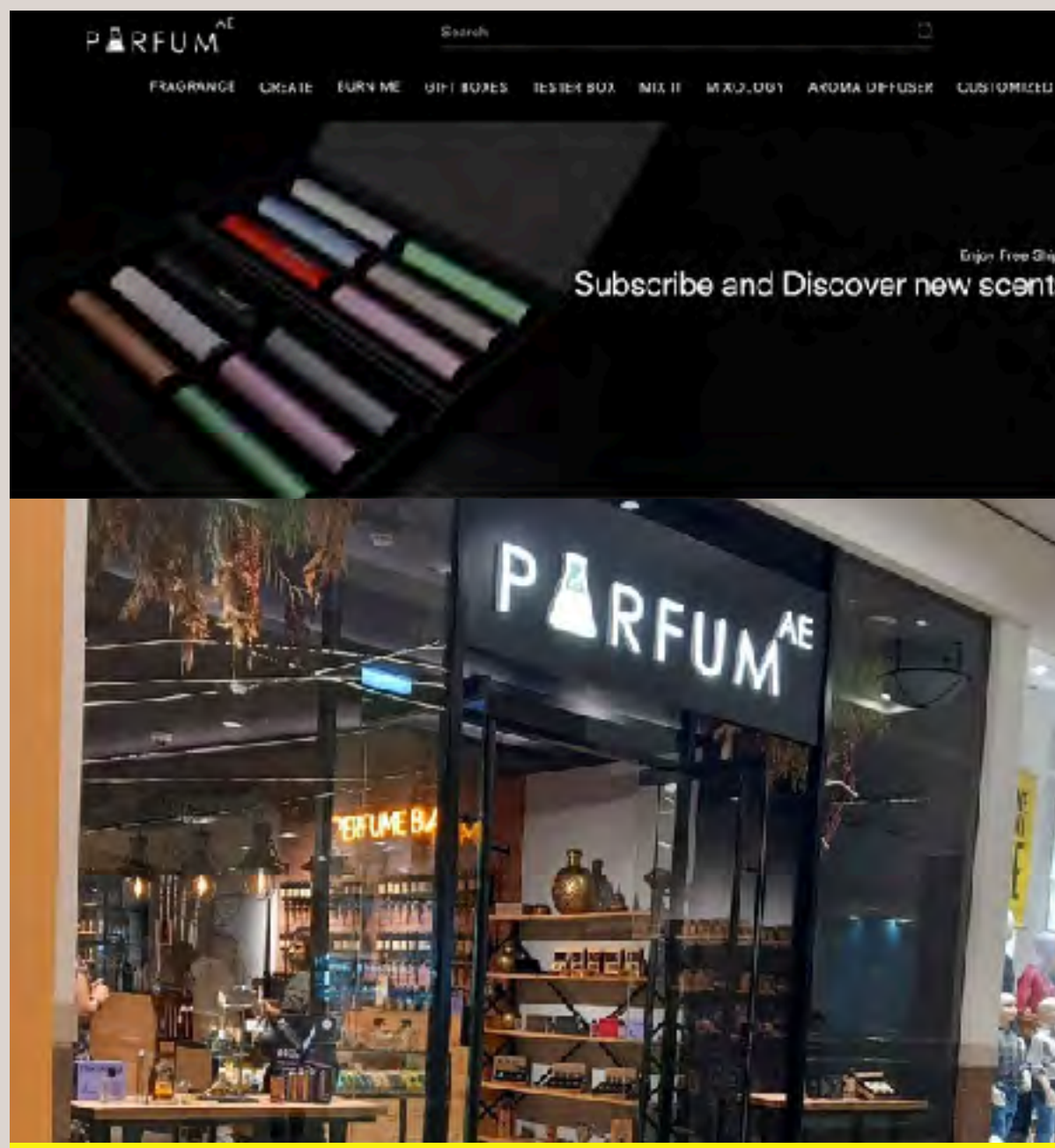
TREND IN MOTION

The trend is gaining momentum in OG categories like perfumes, handbags, and shoes. These have long been the go-to items for dupes.

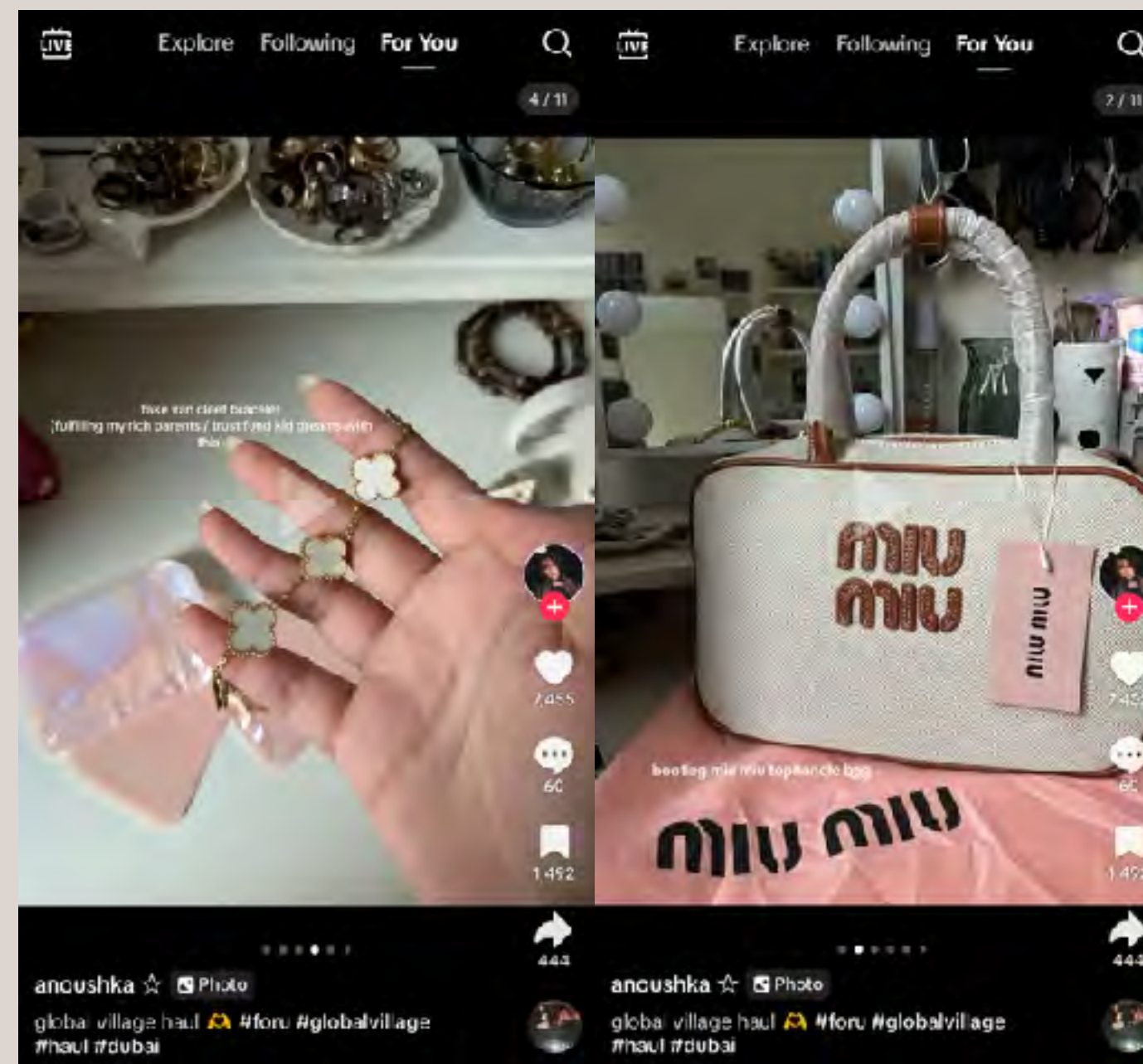
In the UAE and KSA, Parfum has made waves with its viral alternative to Baccarat Rouge, offering the same luxurious scent without the premium price tag.

In fashion, brands like Lime and Hanger are stepping up with pieces that rival high-end labels, delivering standout aesthetics and, in some cases, better quality or a stronger sense of purpose.

Parfum proudly marketed as a dupe for branded ones (UAE & KSA)



Global Village Accessories and bags Dupe Hunt 2024



Massimo Dutti and Zara dupes are going viral (Lime & Hanger).



TREND IN MOTION

But it doesn't stop there. We're now seeing dupes appear in areas that were never part of the conversation before.

Food dupes are gaining popularity, especially after recent boycotts, offering alternatives that match taste and quality. Travel is following suit, with destination dupes attracting those looking for similar experiences without the cost.

Middle Eastern travelers are swapping European getaways for places like Zanzibar and Georgia, while Saudi's Red Sea is emerging as a rival to Bora Bora. Even cars are part of the shift, with models like the Jetour seen as stand-ins for the Defender.

Food! (Kinza Coke/ NotDonald's burgers)



Destination Dupe Trend
(Saudi Red Sea/ Georgia)



Cars (Defender dupe is Jetour T2)





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

The rise of dupes is forcing brands to rethink their approach. With consumers becoming more selective, relying on reputation alone is no longer enough.

TREND+6 PROUDLY DUPED!

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1

ACTIVATE INFLUENCERS FOR NEW PRODUCT REVIEWS

Labels no longer do the heavy lifting. Prestige alone is not enough to win over today's savvy consumers.

Brands need to find new ways to stand out and earn loyalty, and influencer reviews are a great way of building trust.

2

LEVERAGE THE DUPE CONVERSATION

Instead of ignoring or fearing dupes, brands can turn the narrative into an opportunity, whether through bold campaigns, side-by-side tests, or playful rivalries, addressing dupes can drive engagement and strengthen their position.

+

TREND +7

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Photo by: Cheb Moha

MICRO - WELLNESS

WELLNESS IS TAKING ON A NEW FORM



Photo by: Cheb Moha

**Gone are the days of massive health actions ;
enter the rise of micro-wellness moments**

While it has been a global trend for years, focusing on big lifestyle changes like dieting and exercising, a new approach is emerging in this part of the world.

People are now embracing wellness in smaller, more manageable ways, a shift we call micro wellness. This trend is about tiny habits and simple swaps that blend into daily routines.

It is less about drastic lifestyle changes and more about small, achievable steps that make wellness feel easy and sustainable.

TREND IN MOTION

Micro wellness is showing up in everyday choices. People are leaning toward products that offer small, health-conscious upgrades without requiring major changes.

You can see this shift in the rise of local dairy products like Almarai's protein-infused options and the buzz around Humantra, a brand that turned water into a functional wellness upgrade and captured attention across social media in this part of the world.

These examples show that wellness is moving away from extremes and toward simple, effective changes that fit into everyday life.

Almarai/ Nada Protein infused yogurt drinks



Humantra

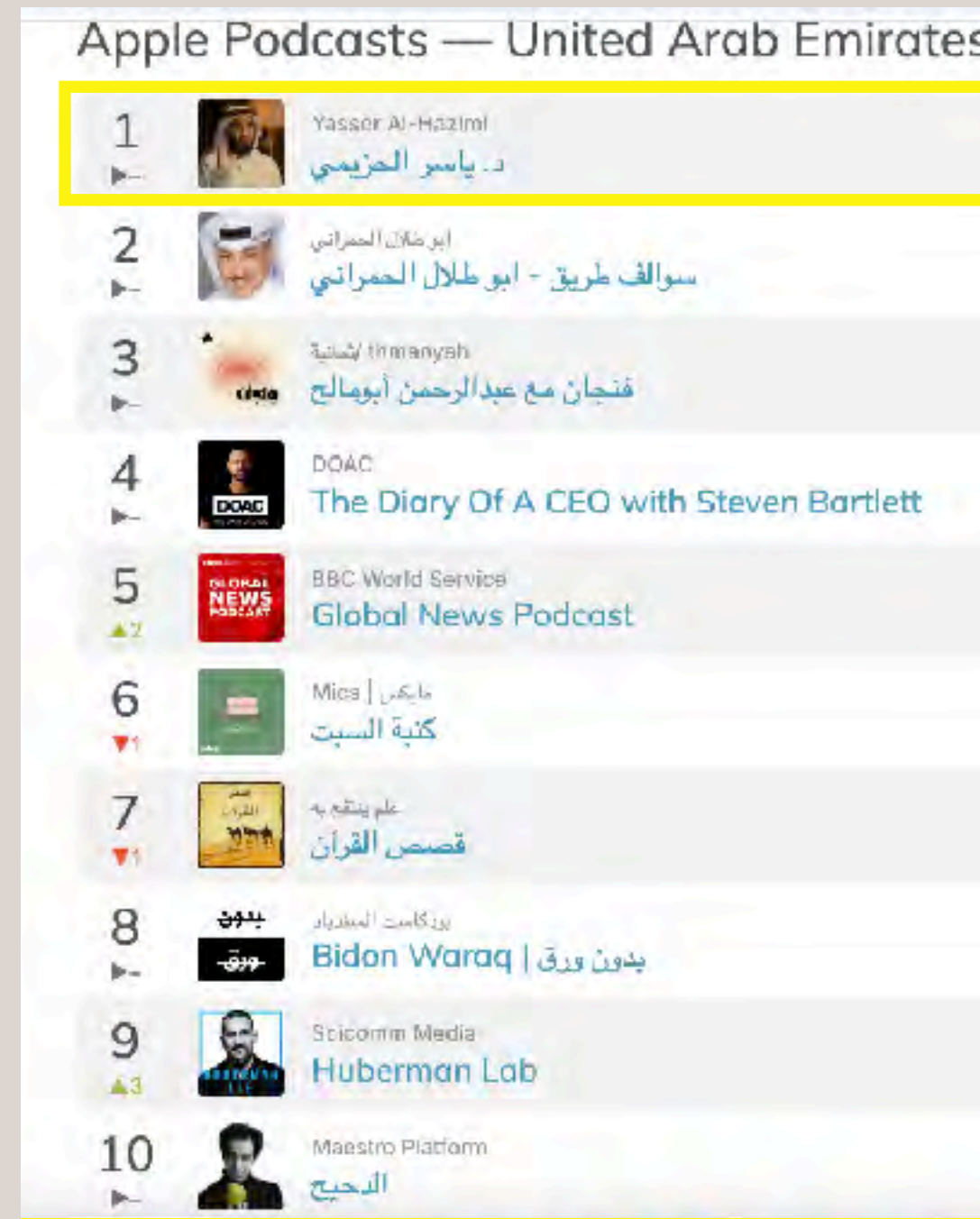


TREND IN MOTION

This is also showing up in how people here approach mental well-being.

Rather than committing to therapy or formal programs, people are turning to simpler ways to focus on their mental well-being. Tuning into self-help and personal development podcasts during commutes or daily routines has become their own way of exploring mental wellness.

Popular podcast in KSA and UAE





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS?

Brands can position themselves as enhancers by offering smarter, healthier alternatives that **complement existing habits rather than replacing them.**

1 POSITION PRODUCTS AS MICRO-HEALTH MOMENTS

Focus on products that fit naturally into existing routines, making wellness an effortless and repeatable part of everyday life.

2 SHOW UP IN RELEVANT HEALTH FOCUSED PODCASTS & MEDIA

Launch campaigns that highlight the power of micro habits. Inspire consumers to build healthier lifestyles one simple step at a time.

IN SUMMARY

Photo by: Omar Khalil



1 CRAVING
CONNECTION



2 REMIX
CULTURE



3 GCC: GAMING
COOPERATION
COUNCIL



4 LOCAL
GOING
GLOBAL



5 INSTANT
EVERYTHING



6 PROUDLY
DUPED



7 MICRO
WELLNESS

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

Winning in GCC means embracing
our culture, values & vision

LET'S TALK



Photo by: Omar Khalil

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If you're interested in building Cultural Power
for your brand in The GCC, get in touch...

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