

MY PAGE  
KHURSHID VAKIL

RETAIL THOUGHTS  
MOHAMMAD A. BAKER

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION  
FACES

CEO TALKS  
CAMERON MITCHELL

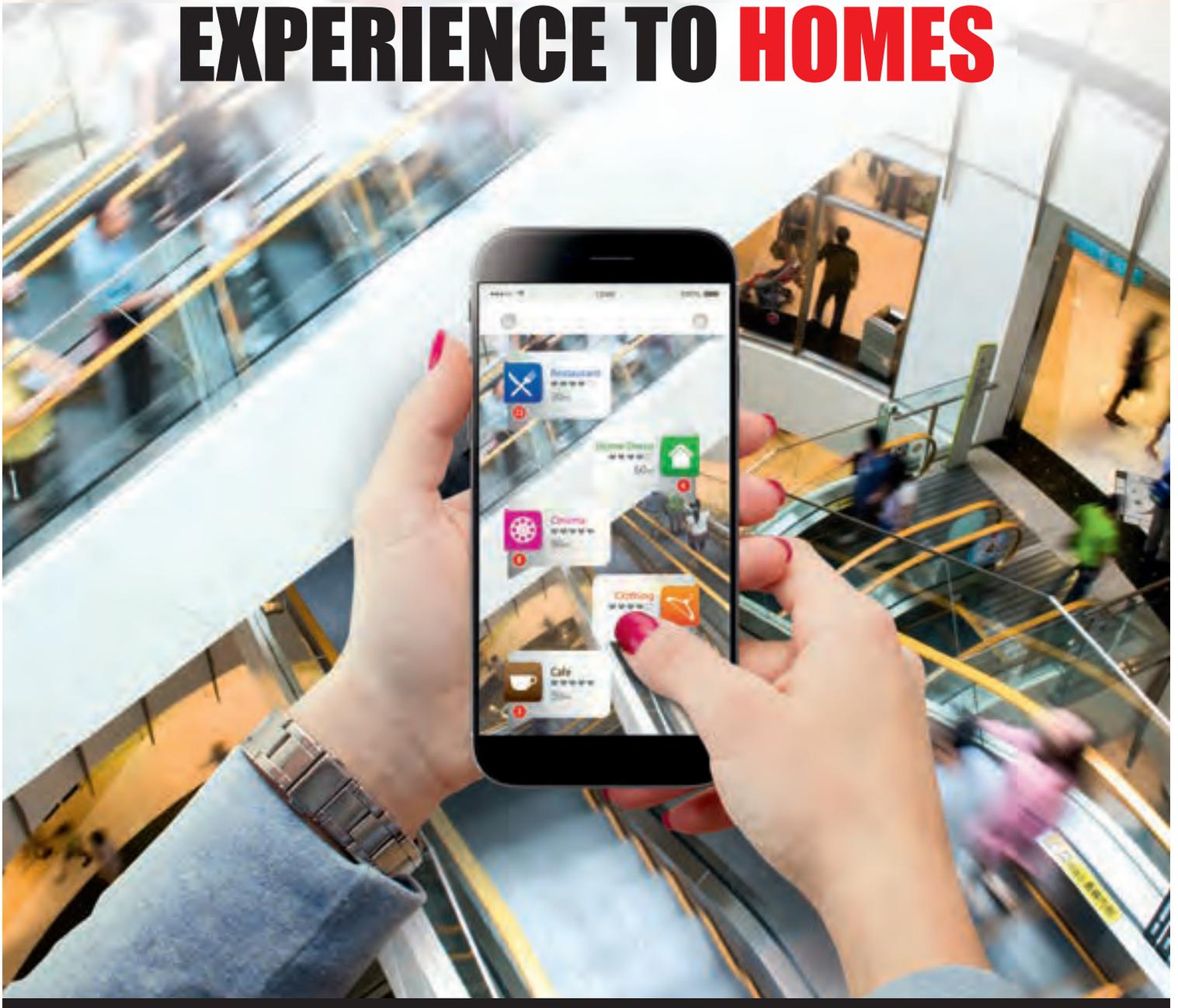
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July 2020

## TAKING THE **IN-STORE** EXPERIENCE TO **HOMES**



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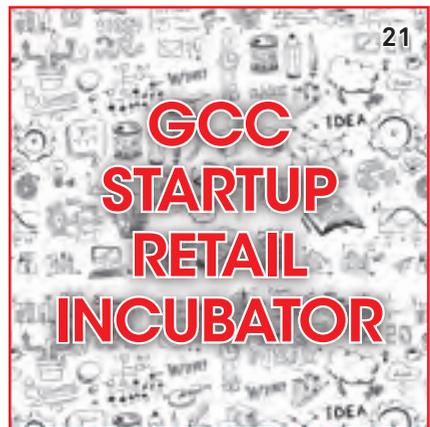
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## COVER STORY

Globally, online shopping adoption has gained traction, thanks to improvements in infrastructure – speed and cost – participation, transparency and trust. The pathway for adoption is a familiar story around the world...

Dear reader

## The road to recovery

The month July has sent out strong signals of recovery with the return towards normalcy in most sectors, including tourism, in the coming months.

"This is a crucial period for all retail businesses – especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), start-ups and entrepreneurs – to regain confidence. I am happy that we are on the path to recovery," says Mohammad A. Baker, deputy chairman and CEO of Gulf Marketing Group (GMG), in this month's Retail Thoughts.

"The return to normalcy will depend on when footfall will return to a certain acceptable level, which will possibly be towards the end of the first quarter of 2021," says Mark Tesseyman, CEO, LIWA Trading Enterprises. "However, there could be a recovery in the region towards the fourth quarter of 2020," he adds.

"What normal meant in the pre-COVID days is quite different now," says Ashish Panjabi, COO of electronic retail brand Jacky's Retail LLC & Jacky's Business Solutions LLC. "Adapting to the new normal will require recalibration. The whole economics between revenue and cost need a relook."

Delivering a rewarding shopping experience, creating opportunities in a challenging business environment and sustaining the brick-and-mortar model are some of the burning issues confronting the retail industry currently.

Khurshid Vakil, co-founder, Marina Home Interiors, shares his views in this edition's My Page. "Like all other business categories, furniture and homeware industry also had its fair share of setback since the global pandemic started. However, we are observing a gradual but consistent trend of increased footfall into our showrooms since the markets opened," he states.

At a time when the retail industry is at the cusp of massive change, the need for digital transformation has accelerated. The luxury beauty brand Faces has already been on this journey for a while. "We had rigorously prepared for Ramadan, and that's when the stores closed temporarily. We launched three more online stores in Kuwait, Qatar and Egypt within four weeks," says Nick Vinckier, head of growth for Faces.

At a time when several gyms have had no choice but shut down, UAE-based fitness brand GymNation is not only sustaining operations but also pursuing growth. What's more, GymNation invested AED1.5 million to launch a new concept called Blitz within its Al Quoz facility. It has also absorbed members from other fitness concepts that did not survive the pandemic.

Look out for our next edition for more insights and converging trends.

*Lawrence Pinto*

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# Taking the in-store experience to homes

Lawrence Pinto

The uses of augmented reality (AR) has infiltrated across many more sectors than the use of MARTA app by Volkswagen in their car manuals in 2013. A year later, Google Glass was made available for consumers. The Google Glass wasn't as successful as developers hoped it would be, but it did show the potential of what wearable AR could be.

Apple's ARKit, launched in 2017 with its operating system, iOS 11, allowed AR access to iPhone users. Soon after, the Landmark Group embedded AR on the Home Centre app to enable users to virtually preview furniture in their desired space before purchasing the furniture or visiting the store.

The same year IKEA partnered with a Dubai-based technology provider specialising in artificial intelligence (AI), AR and virtual reality (VR), to develop a VR shopping POPUP concept throughout the Middle East. In 2018, IKEA launched its campaign in the UAE by digitising their catalogue, which allowed the customers to interact with products virtually through AR to enhance the customer experience.

Fast forward to 2020 and the rapid spread COVID-19 pandemic across the globe turned out to be a rather late wakeup call for many retailers. None of us could foresee the coming of an epidemic of such magnitude, bringing the entire world to a standstill. As the

shopping centres and stores remained shut, retailers who were early starters on digital transformation within their organisations leveraged AR which let their customers see how a particular product will look on their person or in homes before they buy it.

Challenges arising from the spread of COVID-19 are likely to accelerate the use of existing and new technologies and tools as consumers confronted with lockdowns, millions forced to work remotely with digital connectivity taking even more of a hold on everyday habits.

Nielsen expects consumers may have greater motivations and fewer perceived barriers to more



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