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INSIDE

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Ashraf Ali MA, Executive Director, Lulu Group International





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Well into 2023 already, brands are increasingly thinking of innovative and creative ways to stay on top of their target consumers' mind by curating authentic and impactful offerings and experiences. While marketing trends are ever-changing, a few rules of the game will always be relevant. Some trends that are expected to remain ever green include:

- Creating content that resonates, leads to conversations and sometimes evokes a sense of nostalgia. An example that comes to mind is the integration of Dubai's foodie scene with the growing sneaker culture through a unique collaboration between adidas and Ravi, one of the Emirate's restaurants that evokes nostalgia for many. adidas launched a limited-edition sneaker dedicated to Ravi as part of its effort to celebrate community-focused restaurants in several cities around the world.
- Finding new ways to interact with consumers to understand their needs and deliver what they want. A study found that 73% of Gen Z find memes helpful in expressing themselves and want brands to be relatable, cool and funny.
- An AI-powered study found that a single bad experience can drive away 76% consumers from a business...Focusing on customer experience is, thus, crucial.
- Brands are becoming more mindful about impact-driven and inclusive initiatives, clearly communicating about it with consumers to build a sense of community. 'The Homecoming' campaign by Landmark Group's Home Centre was one such. A unique, and first-of-its-kind, campaign that tackled the subject of adoption and fostering through the launch of a digital platform in November 2022 on World Adoption Day.
- Leveraging digital platforms and social commerce is non-negotiable. "Social feed is the new storefront," Deloitte indicates – a market that's expected to surpass \$1 trillion globally in 2023.

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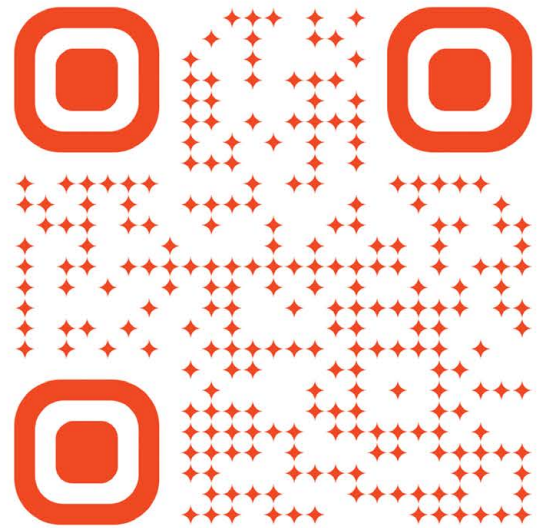
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Presents



INTERNET COMMERCE SUMMIT 2023

16-17 March 2023, Conrad Dubai

Organised by IMAGES RetailME the debut edition of the Internet Commerce Summit (ICS) MENA took place at the Conrad Dubai on March 16 & 17, 2023. It was a powerful gathering of industry experts and insiders. A platform that examined technology-driven transformation, innovation and disruption across the e-commerce domain for several business categories ranging from retail to banking & fintech and healthtech, among others.

ICS MENA brought together more than 150 speakers who shared their knowledge and insights on digital transformation and the growth of e-commerce with over 500 delegates and 300 companies. Keeping in mind the rapid evolution of consumer buying behaviour the two-day summit focused on future opportunities for industry stakeholders to benefit from.

In Part 1 of this report, we have covered key information and insights on how digitisation of businesses is reshaping every industry segment within and beyond retail.



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KSA: On a purposeful journey of growth

The Retail Leaders Circle MENA Summit that took place from March 7-8 in Riyadh, KSA brought together great minds and powerful voices from the industry to discuss how the sector can best meet the evolving needs of the region's consumers and develop for the future.

By Anurima Das



The gate of the Plenary Hall

COVID has changed the way consumers shop and today shoppers across age groups and categories demand a lot of experiential support each time they head to their favourite store online or offline. “While on the one hand we have highly transactional e-commerce portals like Amazon, where the look and feel does not matter much but the user-experience leading to quick transactions matter. On the other hand, the concept of shopping malls is

evolving, and we want people to visit malls to spend some time at our property. We want them to access the Wi-Fi, tackle their work or social commitments from the property and then shop, eat or just engage in window shopping. We eye shopping malls as a destination today where we want customers to spend the day. That’s why it is important to make the experience immersive and very lifestyle focused,”

said **Mohamad Mourad, Managing Director & CEO, Cenomi Group** while talking about how he eyes the evolution of shopping malls in the region.

To accelerate retail in the right direction and engage more purposefully with consumers brands need to put the right processes in place and build a robust customer journey. In this path, technology plays a big role and payments too is becoming a very strong node across retail journeys.

Three decades on, currently Giordano Middle East operates **275 stores** across the region with a strong online presence.

Giordano completes three decades in the Middle East



By **Rupkatha Bhowmick**

Global fashion brand Giordano known for its everyday wardrobe essentials entered the UAE in 1993. Back then there were two major malls Burjuman and Al Ghurair Centre and then came City Centre Deira in 1995. There were some strong local brands and a few global retailers in the market at that time which made it easier for Giordano to get into strategic locations, recollected Ishwar Chugani, CEO and Managing Director, Giordano Middle East and Member of the Management Committee of Giordano International.

Chugani was Giordano's first employee in the region who was involved in everything from buying, site selection to recruiting people in the early days. "I spent a lot of time on the shopfloor that helped me gain invaluable knowledge about what customers needed," he shared.

The support from "forward thinking partners" drove Giordano's rapid expansion in the UAE, foray into Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries within two years of opening the first store in Dubai.

Three decades on, currently Giordano Middle East operates 275 stores across the region with a strong online presence.

So, what's the recipe for success?

"In our business, it is essential to have a 'merchant' mind set as opposed to a 'corporate' way of thinking," Chugani responded. "A merchant looks at life, trends, cultures and certainly products in a very different way than the rest of the world. A merchant can get inside the skin of their customers, identify their needs and develop a deep understanding – you could also call it sixth sense – of products their customers' desire."

The combination of deep understanding of customers, coupled with intuition and market knowledge make merchants risk takers who also [sometimes] have the courage to walk away from a product even when numbers indicate demand. "A merchant is willing to make mistakes, but one who plans for blunders and manages to find profitable ways to get out of a problem," Chugani explained.

Some of the ingredients that drive Giordano's success in the region include first and foremost its people – both staff and shoppers, consistent quality of products and services and support from partners and stakeholders including government and local authorities in each country where it operates.

Having said that over the past three decades Giordano Middle East has also confronted and navigated multiple challenges in a market that's crowded,

LUSH has set a target to become carbon-neutral by 2030.

Driving a conscious beauty revolution



Flip a soap bar or a bottle of body mist to check the label and you will see the face of the person who made the product, when it was made and by when it should be used. While purchasing a LUSH product a customer knows that no animals were harmed and that farmers are paid fair wages and that they played their part in reducing the use of plastic by purchasing an unpackaged product. That's how LUSH Cosmetics is driving a conscious beauty revolution.

Almost 70% of LUSH products have an alternate “naked” or packaging-free version available, which isn't a recent endeavour. Way back in 1989 LUSH invented its bath bombs, a package-free alternative to bubble bath or bath salts. The brand launched its package-free shampoo bar in the following year in 1990. For understanding one shampoo bar saves three 250-ml bottles that would otherwise be wasted.

In the past year LUSH introduced reusable containers made from recycled plastic for some of its products.

Customers can bring back pots to be recycled with Tadweer in the Middle East and they get incentivised. Meanwhile, the Cork Pot used to store LUSH products is a carbon-positive piece of packaging removing over 33 times its weight in carbon dioxide for every single pot. Sourced from southern Portugal they support rewilding projects in the region while helping shampoo bars stay dry and last longer.

LUSH is also committed to using ethically sourced ingredients in its products with a focus on sustainable farming practices and fair trade. From the Lebanese Neroli oil to Turkey's refugee rose pickers, the brand has worked to expand its partnerships with suppliers who share its commitment towards ethical sourcing.

“With the recent climate crisis, climate change awareness campaigns are trendy, at LUSH these are not trends for us; they were infused into the business from the beginning. We have been conscious of our carbon footprint, and we do not leave the environment, animals or indigenous people as afterthought,” emphasised **Anita Baker, Managing Director – MENA, LUSH Cosmetics.**

By Rupkatha Bhowmick

Carbon-neutral by 2030

As a signatory of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) LUSH has committed to aligning its operations and strategies within the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. For instance, LUSH has set a target to become carbon-neutral by 2030 and has made significant progress towards this goal in recent years. The company has invested in renewable energy solutions, implemented energy-efficient technologies and worked to reduce emissions from its supply chain.

LUSH has also been implementing sustainable design principles in its stores using recycled and repurposed materials, energy-efficient lighting and other eco-friendly features. For instance, in the past year LUSH opened its first-ever carbon-neutral store in Milan.

We built a Metaworld to launch BeautyVerse right here in the Middle East through our VR-backed podium that popped up at Mall of the Emirates.



Aiming to create more immersive beauty experiences

The pandemic has led to massive shifts in consumer behaviour – be it shopping for food, fashion or beauty products – as consumers have become careful about how and which brands they shop at. Staying with beauty, research indicates that consumers have become conscious about their beauty habits leading to a shift towards clean beauty brands. A market segment that’s estimated to surpass \$11,558.5 million in 2027 according to BrandEssence.

“Absolutely, consumers today lay lot more emphasis on clean beauty, and are now choosing quality over quantity. They also prefer the convenience of multifunctional, hybrid products that they can use while on the move which offer the same efficacy. For example, our foundations double up as makeup with nourishing skincare benefits,” said **Nerissa Low, Founder, Liht Organics.**

By Rupkatha Bhowmick

Tech-fication of beauty experiences

Besides a definite shift towards clean products, there is growing interest among beauty brands to leverage tech pieces such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).

For instance, Liht Organics recently brought its first (VR) beauty experience to the Middle East. The brand’s VR-backed podium that popped up at Mall of Emirates could analyse consumer features and lifestyle needs in order to make personalised recommendations from Liht Organics’ portfolio. In addition, the podium enabled consumers to try on Liht Organics’ makeup on a VR avatar to experiment with looks and gauge outcomes without having to physically try them on.

“We wanted to explore an innovative way to help women experience the metaverse a space that is typically male dominated. So, we built a Metaworld to launch BeautyVerse right here in the Middle East. This channel is vital as consumers are looking for interactive experiences in retail and education, and it is all about the balance between bringing this innovation to the masses and still keeping a personalised element in our services,” Low explained.

Etika Jewels is so far digital, but growth plans include creating physical retail spaces and increasing customer touchpoints over the next few years.

As the global jewellery market is estimated to surpass \$330 billion [according to Statista] the demand for ethically made jewellery is increasing with consumers wanting to make informed choices. Being aware of this demand and having a deep knowledge of how e-commerce works, Basma Chaieri forayed into the world of entrepreneurship launching an ethical jewellery brand called Etika Jewels.

Asked about what really led her to start an online jewellery brand, Chaieri recounted, "Like many women around me I was looking for high-quality, fashionable jewellery that instantly elevates any look. But I wasn't comfortable with the idea of mined diamonds. So, I started my research on eco-friendly, ethical and conflict-free alternatives and lab-grown diamonds that are chemically, physically and visually identical to mined ones, but are sustainable, conscious and more accessible in terms of pricing."

A journey that recently culminated in Etika Jewels collaborating with Diamond Foundry – a California-based lab-grown diamond manufacturer with investment from the likes of actor and environmentalist Leonardo Di Caprio – to offer unique, carbon-neutral, lab-grown diamonds made using renewable energy.

In numbers the business is recording "fast" and "healthy" growth. "Since inception in 2021 our product range has doubled. Currently we offer more than 150 styles including our capsule collections and customised items. Our customer base has tripled since year one," Chaieri shared.

By **Rupkatha Bhowmick**

Making ethical jewellery accessible



Basma Chaieri
Founder
Etika Jewels

Etika Jewels at a glance

- **Year of launch:** 2021
- **Founder:** Basma Chaieri
- **Funding status:** Private equity funded
- **Top 3 business milestones since launch:**
 - Beginning of 2023, the brand launched an additional zero-impact diamond option based on renewable energy.
 - In May 2022 the brand relaunched its website to become more user-friendly with seamless logistics and highly responsive customer service.
 - Towards the end of 2021 the brand redesigned packaging to feature only eco-friendly and cruelty-free options such as vegan leather jewellery boxes and recycled cardboard boxes.

Farm-to-table:

Five trends shaping F&B in 2023

The F&B industry literally covers everything in between farm and table. This includes food producers, sourcing, processing, packaging, distribution networks, storage, food prep, hotels, bars & restaurants and a lot more.

Food trends are shaped by consumer preferences that are directly or indirectly influenced by varied lifestyles, advances in technology, shifts in the global economy, sustainability, carbon footprint and a host of other factors. In recent years, there has been growing awareness about the importance of sustainable and mindful practices within the F&B industry, including local sourcing, reducing food waste and use of biodegradable packaging.

For restaurants, home deliveries soared during the pandemic offering customers convenience and widespread choice at the tips of their fingers. World events disrupted supply chains forcing teams to plan much ahead than they would otherwise looking at alternative sourcing and more. Casual dining restaurants are seeing healthier additions to their menus. Quick service restaurants (QSR) can be seen using marketing messaging that talk about freshly made suggesting healthier or better choices. Trends come and go but some are here to stay for a while, stated Chef Roberto Senese, Executive Chef, Carluccio's GCC.

Five trends expected to dominate the F&B industry in the near future

Healthier choices with plant based and alternative proteins:

Health has become a major focus since the past couple of years (some would argue, since forever). Getting outdoors, staying fit, eating smart, personal training, use of smart watches, diets like Keto, OMAD [one meal a day], vegan and others dominate this space. As a result of this heightened awareness, the demand for plant-based and alternative proteins will grow and so will developments of new products that cater to these needs. F&B companies are introducing more vegan options to their menus. There is also a growing interest in new protein sources such as plant-based meat substitutes. On the beverage side, there are a host of traditional alcoholic beverages offering 0% alcohol attracting a whole new consumer base.

Sustainability and waste reduction: As the impact of climate change becomes increasingly apparent, there is a growing demand for more sustainable and eco-friendlier F&B practices. This includes reducing food waste, using biodegradable packaging materials and sourcing local and organic ingredients. Not only does sustainability make good CSR messaging, but it also makes real word impact when done collectively. We are in the nascent stages of sustainability. Some countries more advanced than others. But this is here to stay.



Roberto Senese

Executive Chef
Carluccio's GCC

Technology-driven convenience: Technology is transforming the F&B industry with innovations such as mobile ordering, self-service kiosks, pay-at-the-table and delivery apps providing new levels of convenience and efficiency. As technology continues to evolve, we can expect to see even more innovations that make the F&B experience more convenient and personalised.

Home-grown brands: Closer to home, in the GCC (KSA in particular) home-grown brands dominate the F&B scene. From cafés to casual dining local patrons flock to these brands more than legacy brands. While this is established in KSA, it is an emerging trend in the rest of the GCC with several locally inspired home-grown brands not only carving themselves a niche in their home market but some exporting their brand internationally as well. Home-grown brands are fresh, dynamic, agile, creative, bold and sometimes even cost effective – the perfect recipe to capture market share and dominate.

Experiential dining: Experiential dining refers to a type of dining experience that goes beyond just eating a meal. It involves creating an immersive and memorable experience for diners, often through the use of interactive elements, unique themes, theatrics, flair and creative presentation. Experiences may include dining up in the sky, blind tasting, intimate dining pods and chef-led workshops that offer a behind-the-scenes and an intimate look at the food preparation process, and so on. Experiential dining caters to a niche to those who desire much more than food and service. ●

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