Google | VISA

State of Commerce: Search and Spend Decoded

UAE and Saudi Arabia, 2024-2025

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Executive summary

This in-depth analysis of Google Search data and Visa purchase volume data offers a powerful lens through which to anticipate and shape the nuanced and rapidly evolving consumer behaviour across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. By grasping the dynamic interplay of online and offline spending, the increasing significance of cross-border e-commerce, and the predictable yet shifting patterns of seasonal peaks, businesses can strategically prepare and enhance their future marketing plans.

To truly capitalise on these insights, a proactive and agile approach is key. Leveraging this understanding will be critical for future-proofing investments, optimising marketing calendars, and tailoring offerings to resonate with specific consumer segments during pivotal peak moments. By embracing a data-driven understanding, businesses can confidently navigate the UAE's and Saudi's thriving economies and unlock considerable future growth potential.

Meet the authors



Basel Hijazi

Product Lead — Google,
Middle East and North Africa

In our new AI-driven world, unique market insight isn't just valuable, it's paramount for truly effective AI application. Hijazi is committed to leveraging these macro trends to sculpt impactful marketing strategies.



Shivani Jain

Industry Manager — Google,
Middle East and North Africa

Driven by the dynamism of the Middle East and North Africa, Jain thrives on collaborating with brands to uncover new strategies for success, grounded in deep market insight.



Amjad Darwish

Director — Visa

Darwish leads Visa's marketing advisory and measurement function. Partnering with financial institutions, he helps to catalyse impactful marketing outcomes and empowers clients to unlock growth through data-driven solutions and strategic advisory.



Vanisha Khanchandani

Marketing Manager — Visa

Khanchandani drives impactful digital marketing initiatives and offers strategic advisory to key financial institution clients throughout the GCC. She leverages her deep expertise in marketing technology and data-driven insights to deliver measurable results.

The Middle East opportunity: A region primed for prosperity

Countries in the Middle East are witnessing an incredible transformation, fuelled by a wave of ambitious mega-capital projects and investments in technology.

These are powerful indicators of the region's future, embodying cutting-edge innovation, a commitment to sustainability, and a clear drive for dynamic economic growth. Such massive undertakings are key to reshaping and diversifying the region's economies.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia are demonstrating a strong future-forward vision, notably highlighted in the We the UAE 2031 vision, and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. These nations are also actively exploring AI's integration across industries, including legislation and education, to boost smart governance and promote innovation. The UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and Saudi's own unique AI vision clearly recognise this technology's potential to drive progress across various sectors.

On the back of this, the private sectors in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia are also keenly looking to transform business processes by utilising AI.

65% **of organisations in the Middle East are planning to increase investment in AI this year.[1]**

This broad wave of development is clearly reflected in the rising populations of these countries, with more people drawn to the region's exciting future. **The UAE's population has grown to around 11.35 million in 2025** from 9.89 million in 2020, and **Saudi Arabia's has steadily increased, adding 6 million people between 2020 and 2025** to reach 36.96 million.

With these growing populations becoming ever more digitally engaged and demonstrating an increased propensity to search and spend online, we wanted to get a better understanding of how consumers in these countries behave.[2] So this year, alongside analysing Google Search trends, we had the opportunity to analyse spend data with card services corporation, Visa. This allowed us to identify evolving trends in local, cross-border, and e-commerce activity and better understand the periods when heightened activity culminates. We call these busy moments 'peaks' — short periods that see sharp growth in searches and spend due to a seasonal, cultural, or promotional period, followed by decline.[3]

By deep-diving into these peaks and providing a comprehensive view of consumer behaviour across both search interest and spend, **we aim to cut through the noise and pinpoint exactly when people are searching, and when they're opening their wallets.**

Adding another layer to this picture, we see unique trends developing during these peak moments in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Because peak moments in these countries are evolving, with consumer demand spiking and dipping based on cultural events, shopping trends, and sales periods, it can be challenging for businesses to identify the most promising avenues for growth. This is something that our new research, based on a year-long analysis, aims to solve.

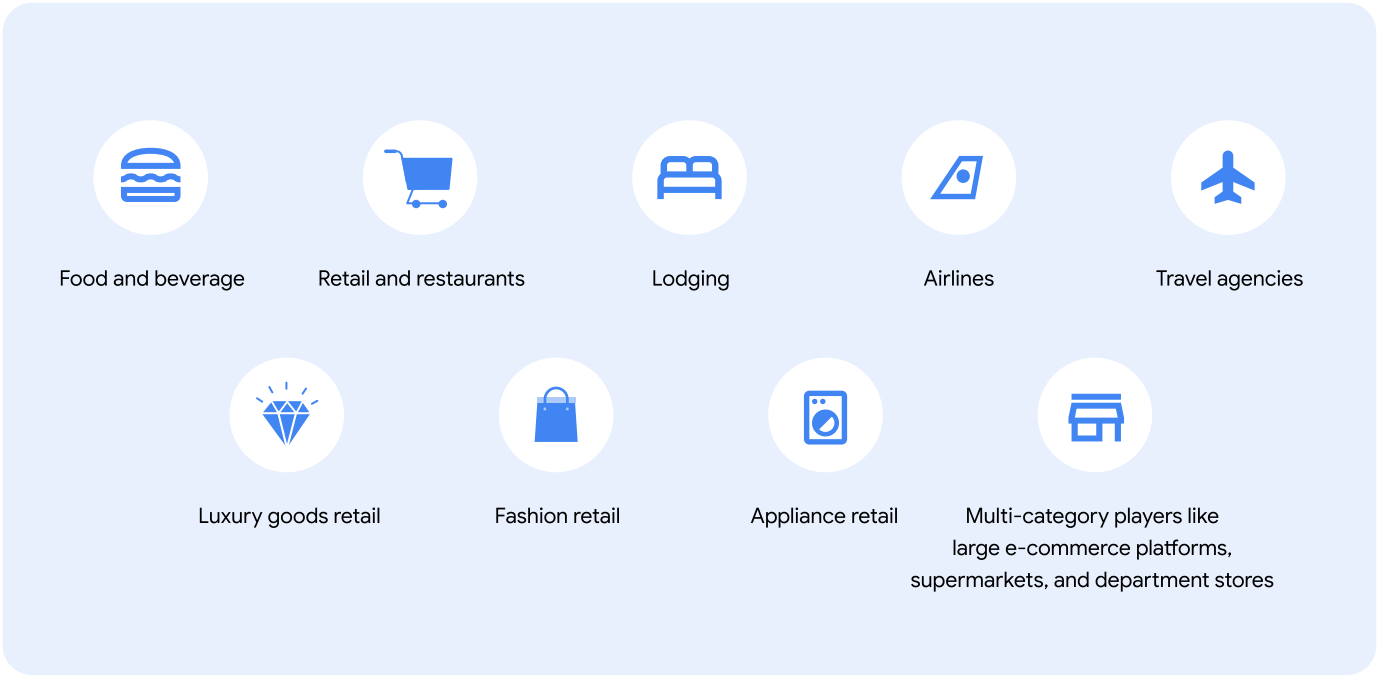
These unique insights present a formidable opportunity for you. Armed with a clearer picture of actual consumer habits, you can:

Strategically plan for the year
Pinpoint exactly where and when to engage consumers for maximum impact and minimal wasted effort.

Boost market share
Proactively capture new segments and fortify your brand's position against competitors.

Fuel growth
Unlock new avenues for significant and measurable expansion.

Our analysis focuses on the top discretionary consumer spend categories in the UAE and Saudi in 2024, online, in-store, locally and internationally.



These categories represent a substantial portion of search interest on Google, including searches that indicate a person's intent to make a purchase, find a service, or engage in other commercial activities.[4]

They also represent around **50%** of the total purchase spend that Visa sees in the UAE and Saudi.[5]

These largely fall under discretionary consumer spending, as opposed to essential outlays like housing, utilities, and schooling. A focus on discretionary spending provides a clearer picture of consumer responsiveness to market dynamics and marketing initiatives, especially during key peak moments.

The UAE and Saudi: Where growth meets opportunity

Delving into the performance of these top discretionary consumer spend categories, we saw:

10%
Approximate search volume increase in both the UAE and Saudi.

17%
Growth of purchase spend with Visa in the UAE.

11%
Growth of purchase spend with Visa in Saudi.

Source: Google internal Search data, Visa purchase volume data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2023-2024.

This performance dramatically outpaces the single-digit growth of retail-related search interest in other international markets. It also suggests an underlying consumer optimism in the UAE and Saudi — distinct from inflation-driven increases — with people possibly feeling secure enough to spend more on these top discretionary categories.[6]

Consumer habits in the UAE and Saudi are shifting

It's no secret that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are digitally savvy, with smartphones in nearly every hand.

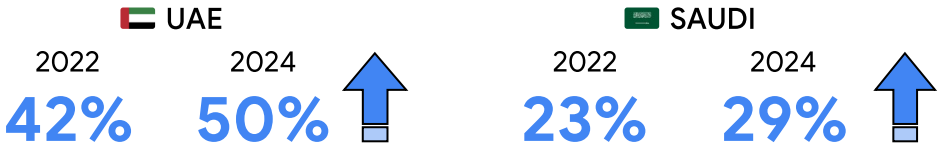
By early 2025, the UAE had around 21.9 million active mobile connections — nearly twice its population. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, had a staggering 48.1 million active mobile connections.

This always-on digital life fuels a vibrant online shopping culture and a preference for paying digitally. Let's dive into how people in the UAE and Saudi search and spend to give you a clearer understanding of their consumer behaviour.

E-commerce on the rise

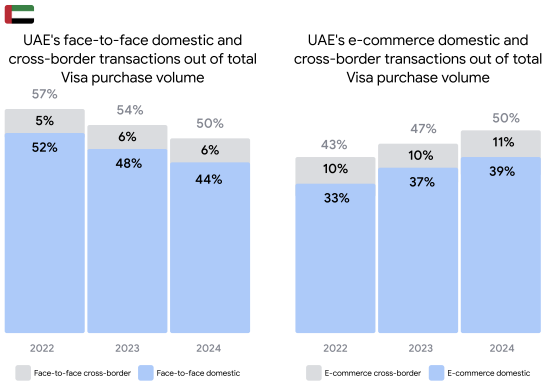
When we look at the combined domestic and cross-border e-commerce spend as a percentage of all spending across all card transactions, the UAE sees a larger increase.[7] Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has grown, indicating more headroom for expansion.[8]

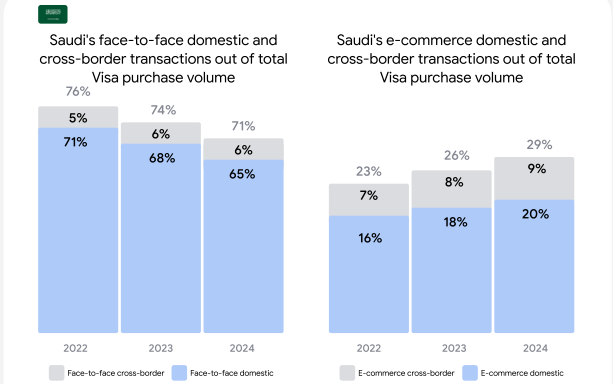
E-commerce spend as a percentage of total spend

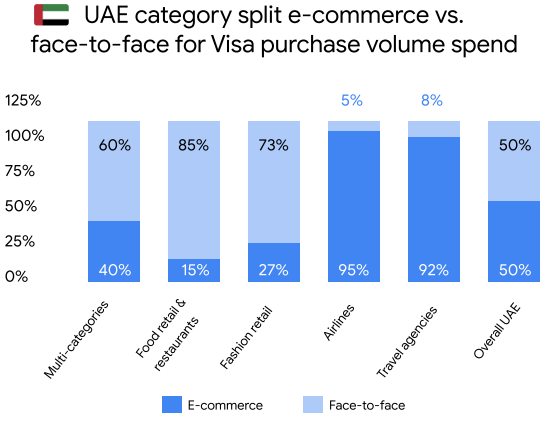


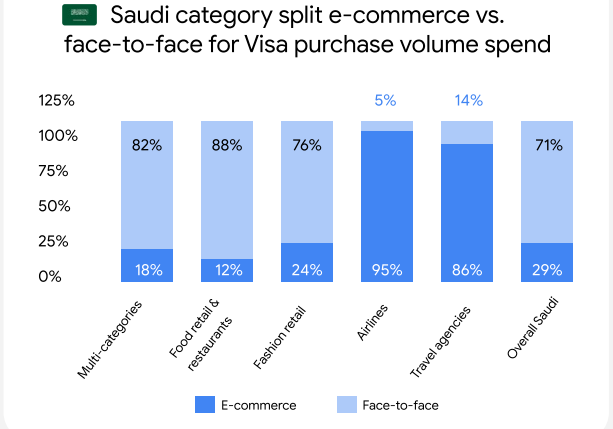
Source: Visa purchase volume data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2022-2024.

A visible decline in face-to-face transactions can be seen across the years for both the UAE and Saudi, while e-commerce continues to grow. What's important to note is that, as e-commerce grows, so does the share of cross-border e-commerce.









Source: Visa purchase volume data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2022-2024.

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E-commerce vs. in-person purchases depend on what people buy

Interestingly, while **online-only stores are seeing increasing search interest** in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, brick-and-mortar shops are holding their own, with **"near me" and Google Maps searches also showing strong double-digit growth.**[9] However, when it comes to the final purchase, the platform — digital checkout or physical till — often depends on the specific product consumers are buying.

We see a clear preference for e-commerce when it comes to familiar items like clothing, probably driven by the convenience, extensive choice, varied pricing, and straightforward returns that online shopping provides.[10]

Building on this demand for convenience in the digital space, the region's dynamic e-commerce landscape is also seeing the rapid emergence of Quick Commerce (Q-Com). This provides ultra-fast delivery and convenience, often in as little as ten minutes. Unsurprisingly, **the convenience of quick delivery is a hot topic, with search interest around it growing by 35% in the UAE** in the first half of 2024.[11] This buzz is also reflected in increasing search interest around the quick commerce delivery brands providing these services, up by 12% year-on-year.[12]

Shifting from everyday online buys, when it comes to splashing out on luxury goods retail purchases — meaning jewellery or watches — the experience of a physical store becomes key.

The vast majority of luxury goods retail spend, meaning jewellery and watches, happens in person, whether locally or while travelling abroad.[13]



In the UAE, **92%** of luxury goods retail spend, and **97%** in Saudi, happens in person, whether locally or while travelling abroad. In this case, luxury goods retail spend means jewellery and watches.

Luxury goods retail also drives travel spend, with Visa data indicating that **15%** of luxury-related spend from the UAE and **22%** from Saudi Arabia occur in physical stores abroad.[14]

On the other hand, e-commerce penetration for luxury goods spend across local and international e-commerce players is 9% in the UAE and 3% in Saudi.[15]

"What we're seeing isn't a simple channel shift, but a deliberate choice driven by the product. People want a high-touch, physical experience for big purchases. In fact, 50% of Visa's purchase volume in the UAE and 71% in Saudi Arabia goes to face-to-face transactions. But for everyday needs, they're choosing digital convenience, from online shopping to near-instant delivery via Quick Commerce. This shows the new reality of retail: to succeed, you need an integrated omnichannel strategy that offers the right experience for every type of purchase."

Ziad Chehade
Vice President of Marketing, GCC, Visa

Cross-border search and spend continue to grow



90%

surge in Google search interest for top international e-commerce brands in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia in 2024, a trend that continues its upward trajectory.

Source: Google internal Search data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2024.

This substantial interest is amplified by the performance of some new global e-commerce entrants, experiencing triple-digit growth in search interest for two consecutive years. This indicates a sustained and significant rise beyond initial lower volumes when they first entered the market.[16]

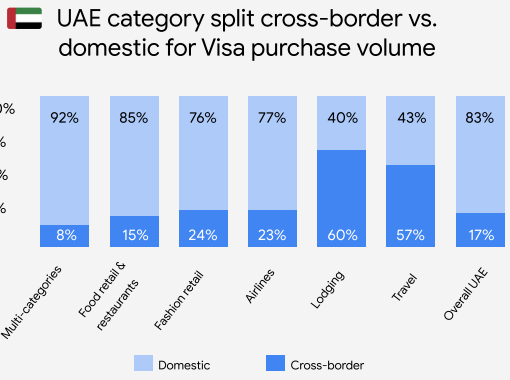
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of all transactions in both countries are with cross-border sellers.

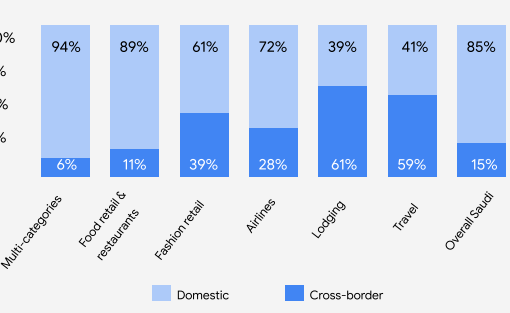
Source: Visa purchase volume, UAE, KSA, Jan. - Dec., 2024.

We see a growing appetite for cross-border offerings

Spend volume for cross-border merchants is growing by around 10% in the UAE and Saudi year-on-year.[17] Cross-border spend volume is defined as those transactions made using locally issued cards on e-commerce sites or physical merchants based outside of the issuing country.[18]



Source: Visa purchase volume data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2024.

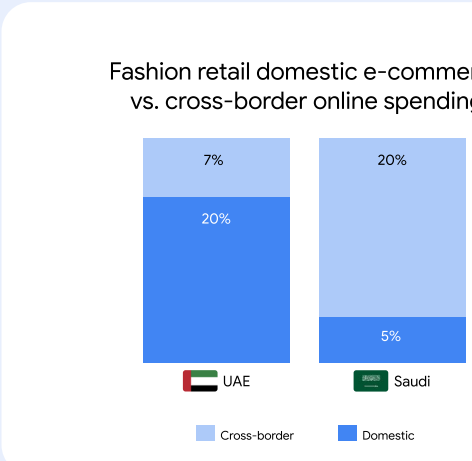


Source: Visa purchase volume data, UAE, KSA, Jan.–Dec., 2024.



Fashion spotlight

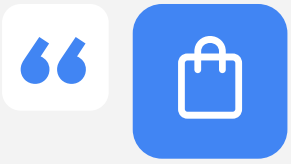
It's striking that **for fashion, 20% of Saudi Arabia's online spending goes to international e-commerce sites,** making up the largest chunk of discretionary spend for cross-border shopping. **Meanwhile, we see only 5% going to local e-commerce fashion merchants.**[19]



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This appetite for international fashion also appears to be linked to travel, with people tending to shop more for clothes when they head for their summer holidays. This is reflected in the share of face-to-face cross-border spend on fashion during the summer months, which **increases from 13% to 23% in the UAE, and 14% to 27% in Saudi.**[20]

While various factors, including possibly price and quality, might play a role when shopping for fashion across borders, the increasing search interest in premium fashion retailers — some of whom now rank among the top five fashion e-commerce brands in the UAE and Saudi Arabia when it comes to search interest — points to a deeper motivation.[21] It suggests that consumers are also actively seeking out trusted international brands, a wider array of styles, and the convenience that global platforms offer, often valuing these aspects as much as, if not more than, just a bargain.



This preference for international online fashion, particularly in Saudi Arabia, highlights a **significant opportunity for local players to strategically capture a larger slice of that online spend.**

By understanding that consumers aren't only driven by price, but also by seamless shopping experiences with fast delivery and return, local e-commerce fashion merchants can focus on building trust and strengthening their brand, expanding their selection to remain competitive.

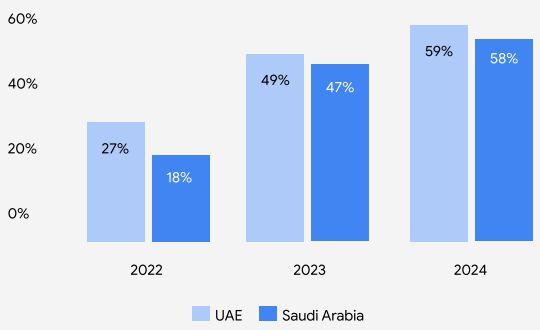
This ensures a seamless and convenient online experience, and effectively showcases any premium or unique aspects of their collections."

Basel Hijazi
Product Lead, Google

International apps top app downloads in the UAE and Saudi

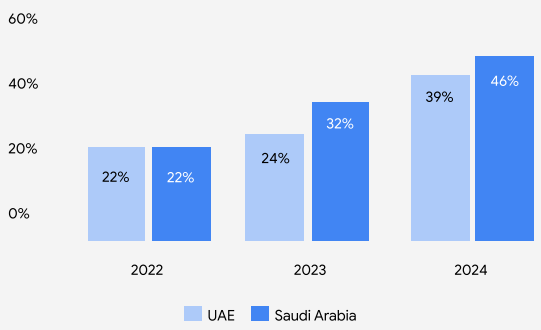
The cross-border shift in purchase preference is also clearly visible in app downloads. Today, **international players' apps increasingly dominate the app landscape in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.**[22]

Global players' share of the top ten shopping app downloads in the UAE and Saudi Arabia



Source: Sensor Tower, UAE, KSA, 2022, 2023, 2024.

Global players' share of the top ten active shopping app users in the UAE and Saudi Arabia



Source: Sensor Tower, UAE, KSA, 2022, 2023, 2024.

Interestingly, global players have expanded their presence at a different pace in these two markets. In the UAE, their share increased from **22%** to **39%** over the past two years, while they've shown a stronger trend in acquiring market share in Saudi Arabia, growing from **22%** to **46%** during the same period.[23]

Multi-category brands act as key drivers of growth

Looking at where people spend the most, multi-category brands like large e-commerce sites and supermarkets account for a large portion of overall purchase spend in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[24]

- Multi-category retailers capture **16%** of all spend in the UAE and even more in Saudi Arabia, at **21%.**[25]
- The value of spending within these multi-category retailers is up by **20%** in the UAE, and by **26%** in Saudi Arabia.[26]
- The food and groceries category is seeing search interest rise by **13%** in the UAE, and **10%** in Saudi Arabia.[27]

Saudi consumers love to spend on restaurants and travel

Fashion retail and restaurants have consistently been key areas for discretionary spending in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[28]

While fashion retail traditionally accounts for a similar portion of overall purchase spend in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, at around 6% to 7%, a shift happens when we look at experiences.[29]



Saudi consumers clearly favour experiences, and their love for eating out is a prime example. A significant **13% of Saudi consumers' total spend goes to restaurants** — compared to 8% in the UAE — with that Saudi figure climbing rapidly **with 36% year-on-year growth.**[30]

This preference for experiential spending is even more pronounced when we look at growth in travel-related spending.

UAE

Category	Overall spend (domestic and cross-border)	Annual growth
Food retail and restaurants	8%	3%
Airline	4%	25%
Travel agency	2%	44%
Hotels	3%	5%

Saudi Arabia

Category	Overall spend (domestic and cross-border)	Annual growth
Food retail and restaurants	13%	26%
Airline	2%	38%
Travel agency	2%	66%
Hotels	2%	31%

Travel categories top cross-border e-commerce spend

As expected, travel — with its major players often based internationally — sees considerable cross-border e-commerce spend.

- In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, cross-border e-commerce airline spending makes up **22%** and **27%** of the total Visa purchase volume for airlines. Lodging follows closely behind, accounting for about **23%** of the total in both countries.[31]
- Travel agencies experience the highest cross-border spend, with **55%** to **57%** of online transactions happening with international players in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[32]

The consumer journey has shifted in the AI era

With a clearer picture of consumer purchasing habits in hand, it's time to look at how AI has reshaped the shopping journey. Today's consumer fluidly navigates the digital landscape across four key behaviours: searching, streaming, scrolling, and shopping.



Searching

We see over **5 trillion** searches on Google annually.



Streaming

YouTube on CTV is the **#1 streaming service in Saudi**, with over 12M people over 18 in Saudi on Connected TV in October 2024.



Scrolling

When it comes to feeling like their time is well-spent, **Gen Z viewers rank YouTube as the top platform**.



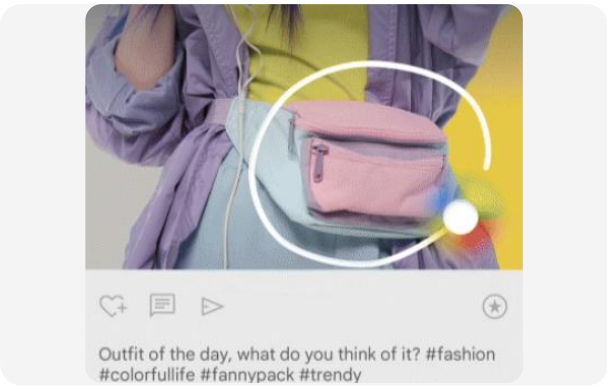
Shopping

When making online purchases involving multiple touchpoints, logged-in consumers turn to Google and YouTube **twice as often** as the leading social media platform.

Source: Google Search internal data, 2024-2025.

AI is transforming consumer behaviour online, making it easier than ever for people to discover and make decisions.

They search more **naturally** | They search **more** | They're more **satisfied**

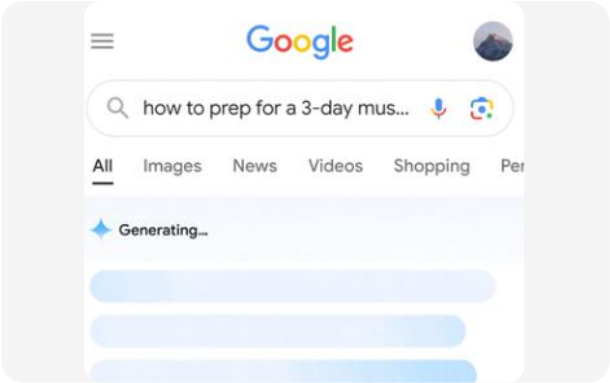


Google Lens

Helps people search what they see

Lens is now at more than
25 billion
queries a month.

Younger users who have tried Circle to Search now use it to start more than 10% of their searches.



AI Overviews

Helps people find information quickly for complex questions

AI Overviews has more than
1.5 billion users
in more than 200 countries and territories every month.

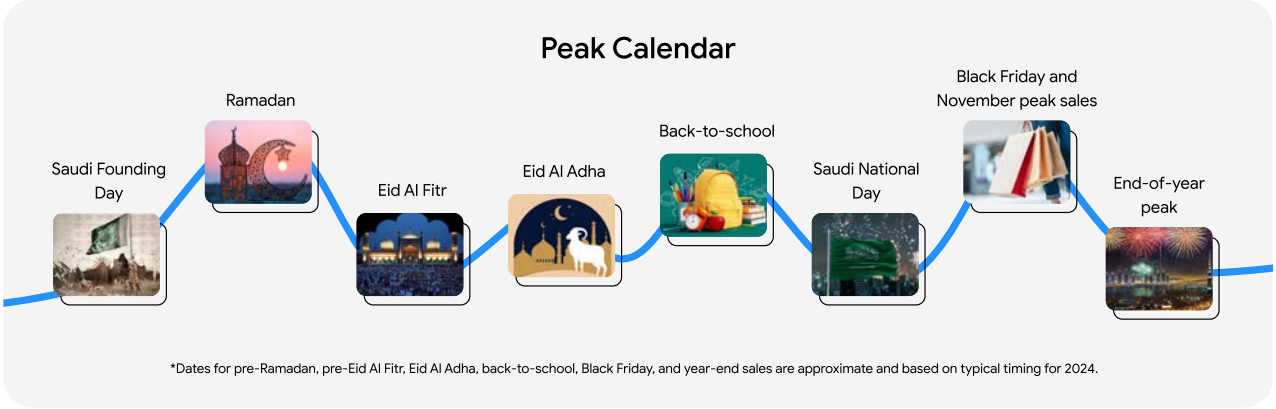
AI Overviews brings generative AI to more people than any other product in the world.

Source: Google Search internal data, 2024-2025.

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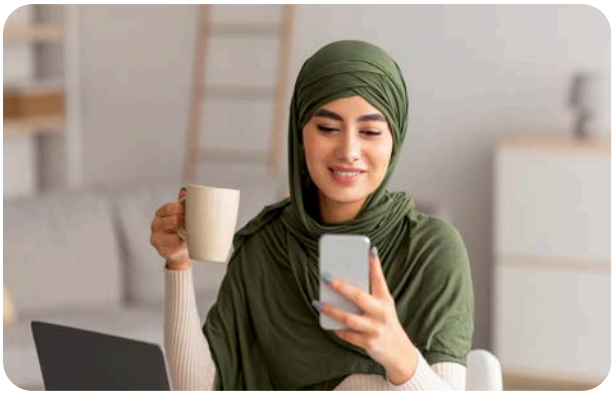
Peak moments of searching and spending, for both local and international players, are often driven by local events

Peak moments in the UAE and Saudi Arabia are triggered by a diverse range of factors, from religious to cultural to commercial.



To really get a handle on and compare these peaks, we used a metric called 'peakiness'. This looks at how much bigger a peak moment is compared to a regular, quieter time of year without any major seasonal, cultural, or promotional events. We call these quieter periods ‘non-peak’ moments.

We've identified 6 key peak moments



Across the UAE and Saudi Arabia, we've identified six key peak moments, some of which have been combined due to certain peaks being close together.

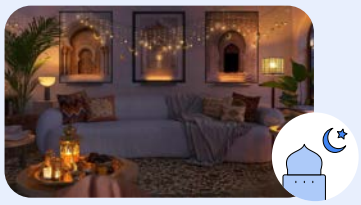
We've broken them down into 'major' and 'growing' peaks based on:

- Their relevancy across top discretionary consumer spend categories
- How much bigger they are compared to non-peak moments
- How long interest around them lasts

Major peaks

Here we see heightened activity across most top discretionary consumer spend categories, with a larger volume of purchases occurring around these moments:

1 The Ramadan and Eid Al Fitr peak (dates vary)



While the timing of Ramadan, an important cultural moment, shifts slightly each year, its impact on retail across the region remains constant. In the UAE, Ramadan retail search peaks come in a close second to Black Friday.[33] In Saudi Arabia, the biggest search peaks we see are Ramadan and Eid Al Fitr.[34]

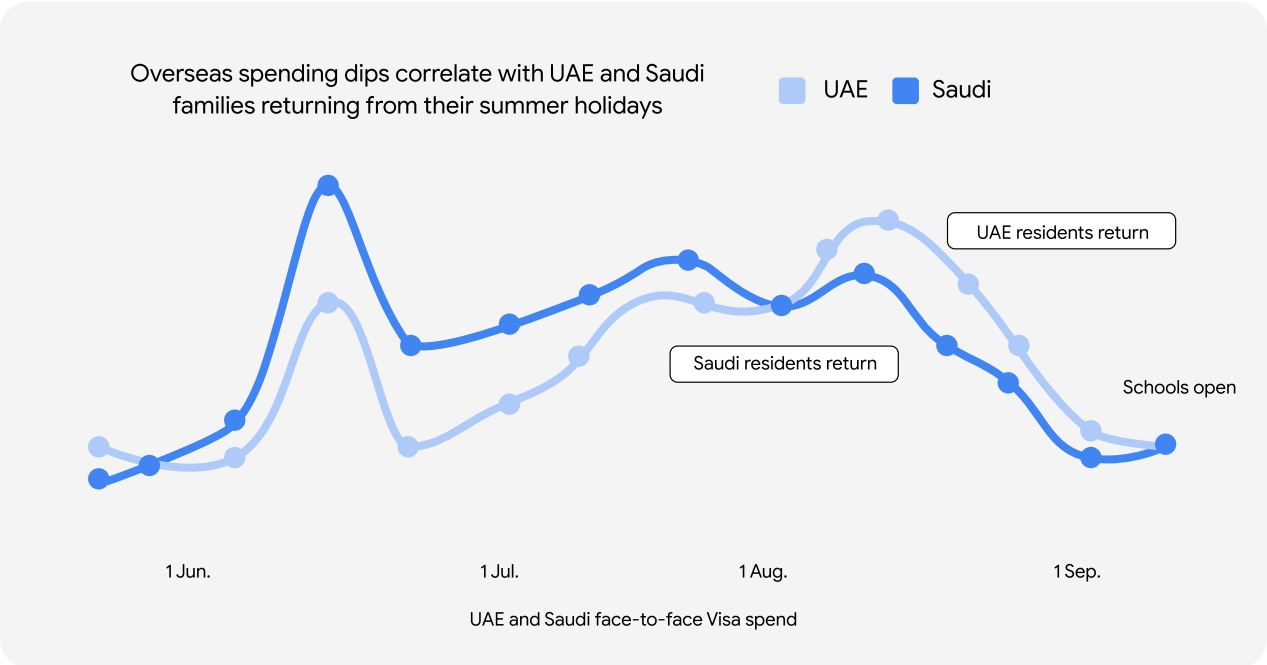
- Search interest for retail in Saudi Arabia jumped by around **13%** during Ramadan compared to non-peak times.[35]
- As Eid Al Fitr approached the kingdom — between week three and four of Ramadan — apparel-related search interest soared by **23%**, while beauty-related search interest saw an even bigger climb of **43%**.[36]
- High-end items were on people's minds, with luxury apparel-related search interest climbing by **21%** in the UAE and a significant **45%** in Saudi Arabia between week three and four of Ramadan.[37]
- When it came to opening wallets, the week before Eid Al Fitr saw a flurry, with overall spending up by **14%** in the UAE and **29%** in Saudi Arabia compared to non-peak moments.[38] Fashion played a starring role the week before Eid Al Fitr, too, with a **58%** increase in spend on fashion retailers in the UAE, and a **136%** rise in spend in Saudi Arabia.[39]
- The final two weeks of Ramadan, leading up to Eid Al Fitr, were typically the peak shopping period, as consumers prepared for the festive celebrations and gift-giving.[40]

2 The back-to-school peak (July–Aug)

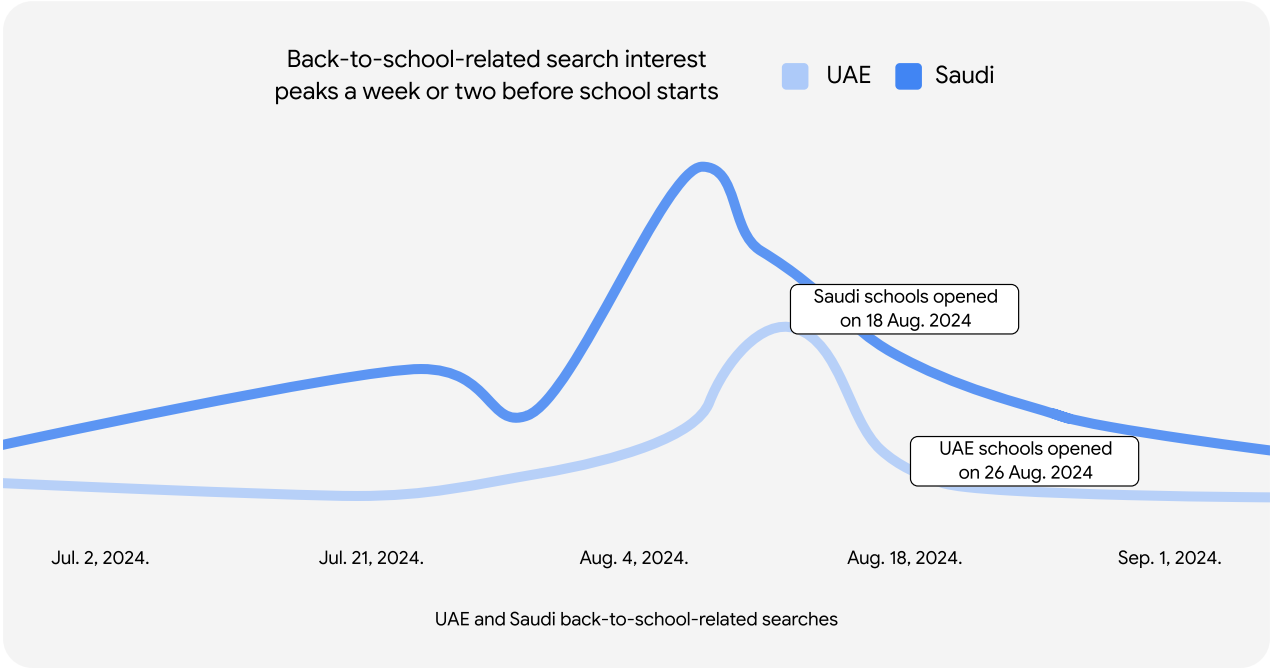


The shopping window during the seasonal back-to-school moment stretches out for around six weeks.[41] However, the start of this peak isn't the same in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with the kingdom typically seeing schools open a little earlier. This has a knock-on effect as to when the shopping buzz hits in each country, with back-to-school being a bigger event for Saudi Arabia.

Looking at where the money went, the UAE saw a drop in overseas spending in the week before schools started, suggesting families were returning later from their summer holidays. In contrast, Saudi Arabia saw a shift around the last week of July, where spending with overseas retailers dipped as families likely returned home. This coincides with increased overall spending in the month-end week leading up to back-to-school.[42]

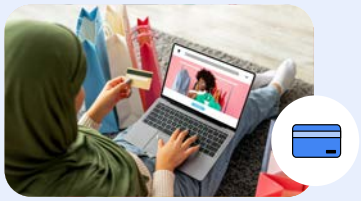


Even after the school gates swung open, Saudi Arabia still saw lingering back-to-school-related search interest for up to two weeks.[43] This could be down to schools flagging last-minute needs or parents simply forgetting a few essentials in the initial rush.



Savvy Saudi shoppers started their product research about four weeks before school started, with back-to-school-related search interest peaking a week or two before the school bell rang. School-related search interest tended to peak closer to the school start date in the UAE, hitting its high point just a week before and during that first week back.[44]

3 The November sales peak



November has become a monumental discount-driven moment across the region, with e-commerce sales being 44% higher than the monthly average. This is largely driven by the month's biggest peak, the prodigious Black Friday — a moment that sees more than half of UAE shoppers revealing an intent to buy.[45]

On the back of this growth, many local and international retail players offer promotions throughout the month, creating a sustained shopping frenzy. The moment itself continues to grow as well. Black Friday-related search interest saw an increase of around 15% in the UAE and 14% in Saudi in the third quarter of 2024.[46]

- In the UAE, Black Friday was the biggest moment, with a significant rise in spend in the week of Black Friday compared to a non-peak moment. During Black Friday week, deal-related search interest leapt by **69%**.[47]
- Black Friday was the second-largest peak in Saudi after Ramadan, unleashing a **36%** spending increase during the week of.[48]
- Luxury apparel- and beauty-related search interest also rose during Black Friday, at **5%** in the UAE and **12%** in Saudi.[49]
- Spending followed suit, surging by **31%** during Black Friday in the UAE and a substantial **36%** in Saudi Arabia compared to non-peak times.[50]
- Aligning with an end-of-month payday spending pattern that we see in Saudi Arabia, we believe that the kingdom is poised for a wave of search interest and spending during Black Friday in 2025, with this moment falling on 28 Nov.

Growing peaks

These tend to have a shorter duration of heightened activity and see concentrated interest within particular top discretionary consumer spend categories:

4 The Saudi national holidays peak (Feb and Sep)



Saudi Arabia pulses with pride twice a year, during Saudi Founding Day (22 Feb.) and Saudi National Day (23 Sep.). These national-day discount moments ignite a powerful retail surge, with Saudi Founding Day, in particular, unleashing growth in both online searches and consumer spending.[51]

While celebratory-related search interest around topics like national songs and gifts rises around these days, they're also prime bargain-hunting territory. We saw deal-related search interest surging by around **70%** compared to non-peak times.[52]

Saudis embrace the spirit of these celebrations by dining out, with restaurant and food retail-related search interest growing by **9%**.[53]

Spending during Saudi Founding Day — a moment that landed about two-and-a-half weeks ahead of Ramadan in 2024 — saw a remarkable **44%** surge compared to non-peak moments. Categories like apparel, beauty, and home — often early indicators of Ramadan shopping — saw a boost.[54]

Saudi National Day drives a significant lift in consumer spending. For the week of the holiday, spend with Visa increased by 21%, marking a 32% year-on-year growth between 2023 and 2024.[55]

5 The Eid Al Adha peak (dates vary)



The timing of Eid Al Adha — a special celebration of togetherness — shifts slightly each year. When Eid Al Adha landed in the summer of June 2024, it sparked a clear uplift in search and spend activity, with people across the region likely gearing up for celebrations, family gatherings, and potential travel.[56]

Given its summer timing in 2024, increased Eid Al Adha-related search interest may have been fuelled by people planning and researching their summer travels.[57]

The festive atmosphere boosted overall retail-related search interest, with a distinct buzz around categories such as apparel and beauty. Apparel-related search interest in Saudi rose by **9%** and beauty by **11%**. Meanwhile, luxury apparel- and beauty-related search interest rose by **11%** in the UAE and **15%** in Saudi.[58]

There's a clear interest in experiential leisure during Eid Al Adha. Over 375,000 people visited Dubai Municipality's parks, public facilities, and entertainment venues during Eid Al Adha holidays in 2024.

6 The end-of-year peak (Dec)



The end-of-year season — including Christmas and New Year's Eve — is an ever-expanding moment. It's gaining traction as a discount bonanza, with more Saudi retailers, in particular, unleashing clearance sales. This propels the entire period into a major shopping event across the kingdom.

Interestingly, end-of-year-related search interest differed between the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE saw search interest rising two weeks before Christmas, while Saudi Arabia's search interest surged in the final two weeks of the year.[59]

Spending, meanwhile, increased by **17%** in the UAE and **29%** in Saudi Arabia compared to non-peak periods.[60]

Two categories that shine at the end of the year are luxury apparel and beauty. Related search interest witnessed a **12%** jump in the UAE in the last two weeks of the year compared to the preceding fortnight, with Saudi Arabia at **11%**.[61]

This is also a time when the social scene buzzes, reflected in restaurant-related search interest increasing by **10%** in the UAE in the last two weeks of the year versus the two weeks before, and **8%** in Saudi.[62]

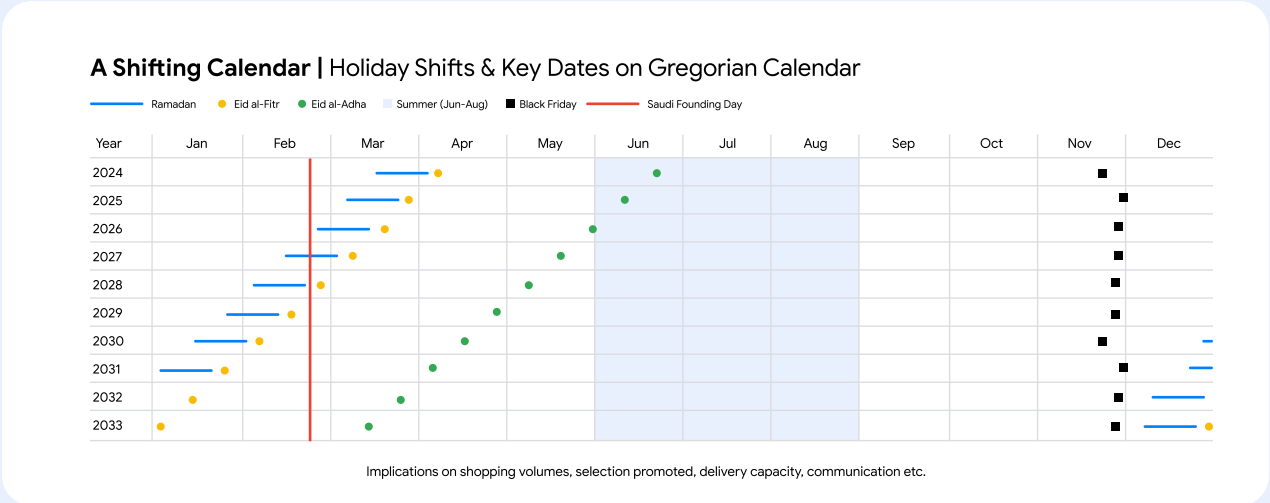
Super peaks: Don't miss these mega search and spend moments

The MENA region follows both the Hijri and Gregorian calendars. That means important dates like Ramadan and Eid shift by about ten days each year, making it paramount to understand these high-activity periods.

With this in mind, every few years, two major peak moments coincide, creating what we call a super peak. In 2026, for example, Ramadan and Saudi Founding Day will overlap, likely leading to a significant surge in search interest and spend.

Looking further ahead, in 2033 we're expecting a potentially unprecedented super peak when Ramadan and Black Friday coincide.

We also see a super peak occur when either of the Eid celebrations — which are public holidays — line up with holiday periods. When Eid falls over summer and people head overseas, we see a jump in search interest for international travel as well as cross-border spending. And when Eid falls during the Middle East's cooler winter months or weekends, local travel-related search and spend often see a boost, with residents more inclined to explore destinations closer to home.



Google | VISA

Build an agile peak plan

Now that you're up to speed on the power of peak moments, it's time to transform that understanding into tangible business wins, connecting directly with the eager Middle Eastern consumer. By strategically aligning your campaigns with the unique characteristics of each peak, crafting culturally resonant content, and ensuring your offers hit the right note at the right time, you can drive significant growth for your brand.

Here are 3 ways to build a winning peak plan that will help you tap into heightened demand

1. Cater for nuances between the UAE and Saudi



Month-end shopping spike

In the UAE, average month-end Visa purchase volume increases by around **15%**, right after payday.[63] Whereas in Saudi Arabia, the rise is more significant with an average **35%** jump in overall spending during the last week of the month, increasing to **40%** when it aligns with major events like Ramadan or Black Friday.[64] This isn't only about topping up groceries. It's a prime window for bigger buys, especially electronics.



E-commerce vs. offline preference

In the UAE, online shopping reigns supreme, with e-commerce channels seeing around **50%** of Visa purchase volume, with the country's e-commerce market set to surpass $13.8 billion USD by 2029. This is quite different from Saudi, where only **29%** of Visa purchase volume was on e-commerce, although this has grown from **23%** in 2022.[65]

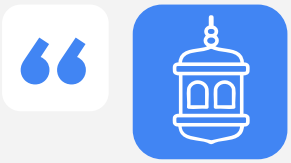


Saudi national days have evolved

Saudi national days have evolved into discount moments in addition to cultural moments. This may impact how yearly consumer savings and purchase decisions are made.

2. Adapt communication to consumers' needs, and differentiate ads

The Middle East's peak moments are a diverse mix, stemming from religious and cultural celebrations to purely commercial events. This unique blend means that a one-size-fits-all marketing approach simply won't cut through.



To nail your marketing, you need to adapt your communication to what people are looking for during each peak. Sometimes a discount is what people expect, but at other times it's about seeing a new collection or joining in on a celebration. Don't always assume a deal is the answer."

Giannis Kollias
Creative Strategist, Google

For example, around a day like Saudi National Day — when appliance retail search interest sees a 13% rise and deal-related search interest grows by 70% — prioritising a message of national pride over a commercial push and promotions could help your brand stand out.[66]

The ability to cut through the noise during peak moments is crucial, as ad creative is the biggest driver of advertising effectiveness, influencing nearly half of incremental sales. This is far ahead of brand recognition, targeting, reach, or recency. And contextual ads — those that fit naturally with a customer's needs and expectations — are 50% more likely to get clicked than those that don't. However, the competitive pressure of peak moments often leads brands to gravitate towards price-focused campaigns.

While marketers are encouraged to move beyond price alone, discount advertising does become important in some instances. However, using generic, template-driven discount ads — for example, a fancy product on a bright background with a massive discount number — makes it easy to get lost in the noise. When it comes to implementing discount campaigns, marketers should prioritise differentiation, crafting unique and creative messaging that stands out from competitors, ensuring the brand remains visible and memorable even while offering deals.

Generative AI offers an alternative to relying on generic, one-size-fits-all creatives. Brands can use AI tools, like Veo 3 and Imagen, to achieve genuine brand differentiation and significant cost optimisation at speeds that were previously unimaginable.

AI serves as a great creative partner, coming up with innovative ideas to re-imagine landscapes, products, or anything in between. For example, Gemini brought Saudi's iconic جبل الفيل (Elephant Rock) to life in a new way, reimagining it as a real elephant, complete with tusks. This could be easily adapted and used for marketing a travel or children's brand, for example, creating highly relevant, culturally resonant content that goes beyond generic ads, forging a stronger connection with a local audience and increasing the potential for engagement.



3. Embrace the AI Search revolution to master visual discovery and connect with next-gen consumers

In the relentless pace of digital change, fuelled by AI, the way consumers search and shop has fundamentally transformed. Along with longer queries answered with AI, today's consumer navigates a fluid digital world, moving seamlessly and simultaneously across searching, streaming, scrolling, and shopping. This dynamic demands a new understanding from brands.



At the heart of this evolution is AI, reshaping Google Search. We now see over **5 trillion searches annually**, and AI Overviews, along with features like Google Lens, are profoundly changing how people discover and decide. This enables a new era of visual search, making 'searching what you see' more powerful than ever. Google Lens alone has grown 65% year-on-year, **processing over 100 billion visual searches this year**, with a remarkable 1 in 5 carrying commercial intent.[67] Circle to Search, allowing people to search by highlighting, scribbling, or tapping text or images anywhere on their screen, is already used by younger users to start more than 10% of their searches.[68]

This shift means brands must adapt. Consider a person pausing a creator video to circle something in the background. Is that streaming, scrolling, searching, or shopping? Today, it could be all of them at once. Meeting customers where they are means understanding these new, blended interactions. By being present for consumers at the right moments, which we've identified above, and across the channels where they are present, brands can unlock unprecedented opportunities to connect with them exactly when intent is highest.

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