

# WHAT CONSUMERS WANT

Using Google Trends to Drive Business Decisions



# Introduction

2020 was a year unlike any before.

Businesses charged towards adopting technologies that would help continuity in the newly-established contactless digital landscape. Simultaneously, operations were rearranged to accommodate a workforce that performed remotely.

Marketers were left to reimagine how to better serve customers effectively within the new construct of a digital-first, socially distanced journey without losing out on a personalised relationship. Customers changed too.

During the last year, customer behaviour changed. At first, as a reaction to the lockdowns and economic slowdowns, they focussed on safety and touchless drop-shipping experiences. Some of these short-term changes will carry through and are here to stay. As marketers navigate incorporating the broad strokes of the new normal, regional-specific insights into customer behaviour help act with empathy and add meaningful dialogue to customer interactions.

This report acts as a guide to understanding customer search trends and delivering them through cross-functional business actions.

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Consumer Demand Will Remain Dynamic



With more than 3.5 billion Google searches conducted every day, this is a powerful tool you can't ignore. Google Trends analyses the popularity of top search queries in search across various regions and languages. For years now, it has empowered content marketers to find relevant topics that are trending, optimise their keyword research, create meaningful content calendars and tap into local shopping trends.

But it's not just content. Earlier this month, Google shared retail Search trends and insights from 23 markets across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa on Google Trends to identify five key consumer trends expected to sustain in 2021 – or even longer.

Retailers will do well to take note. Search is vital information that can inform your content and promotional offers, product extensions, and influence business strategy for the near future.



## **Trend 1 :** **Consumers are Taking Window Shopping Online**

Provider of product reviews and user generated content (UGC) solutions Bazaarvoice found that not only are 61 per cent of consumers globally more likely to browse for new products online compared to in-store but that they also find it easier (64 per cent) and more enjoyable (54 per cent).

The physical stores aren't out of business just yet. The research conducted among more than 9,000 consumers globally also revealed that although the majority are browsing and discovering new products online, people are more likely to make spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment purchases while shopping in-store. This is reiterated by another survey carried out by research group YouGov in UAE, which reported a higher incidence of brick-and-mortar purchases (85 per cent) versus online (79 per cent), in the last three months

### **Action points**

Marketers must work on discovery of the product/ service to tap into this behaviour. If you are an established brand, this may mean highlighting a new product or promotional offer to jog consumer's brain cells. If you are a small or medium-sized brand, you will need to work harder by sharing more information about the offering to introduce customers to your offering. SMEs must focus on content that answers all the customer's questions in a premeditated manner.

## **Trend 2 :** **Consumers are Carefully Considering Who they Buy From**

According to the EY Future Consumer Index, a total of 70% of consumers in the MENA region believe brands have a responsibility to positively impact the world, with purpose mattering more than ever. There is a growing mindfulness from MENA consumers about the importance of sustainability and creating a positive impact on society. More than half – 57 per cent – said they will prioritise the environment and climate change in how they live and the products they buy.

Facebook pointed out this trend in their Ramadan Insight's report as well. Here, we learned that 78 per cent have engaged in activities to support local businesses, 75 per cent of people are in favour of brands giving back during Ramadan while 60 per cent of them became interested in a brand after knowing about their business practices. This is not a trend isolated to the Holy month. Around 63 per cent of MENA consumers are more likely to buy from companies that ensure what they do has a positive impact on society. In addition, 48 per cent will buy more from organisations that benefit society, even if their products or services are priced at a premium.

### **Action points**

Brands who can adopt a hyper-local strategy in media planning and messaging stand to gain from this learning, suggest experts at Facebook.

Consumers prefer to see their good deeds in action. So, marketers will need to adapt to the various ways in which people in different countries and towns prefer to give back and show support. It's a fine line between coming off as empathetic versus opportunistic.

Luxury brands who have experienced a slowdown during the pandemic months can take note. Customers have been more conscientious in their buying decisions lately. This leaves them on the edge about taking decisions about spending on luxury products.

Picking a local charity to contribute to during the pandemic adds conscience to what otherwise may be perceived as an indulgence. Consumers may seem conservative but emotions are driving more of their decisions nowadays. Caring about causes your customers feel for is the key. You'll also be able to raise awareness and support for the causes your business cares about.



## **Trend 3 : Consumers Expect Better Value than Ever**

Following the pandemic-induced lockdown and the subsequent economic slowdown, consumers started to show more conservative behaviours while spending. Economies are opening up now, but consumers must still work towards shedding the learned behaviours of the past year. They are still eagerly looking for contact-less journeys and more value-for-money from their purchases.

At the same time, brand loyalties have gone through considerable changes in the last year. The lockdown pushed consumers to experiment more in their brand choices and methods of purchase. According to a report by Bazaarvoice, 39 per cent of respondents worldwide said they had made a purchase from a new brand during the lockdown. Younger consumers were keener to experiment with 55 per cent of people between the age of 18 and 24 buying a previously unknown brand. Among mature buyers, those between the age of 55 and 64, fewer owned up to doing so, only 27 per cent.

This means that brands need to hold on to existing customers but it's also fair play to attract new customers looking to experiment. Of consumers who bought a new brand, 83 per cent said they would keep buying those products, an early indication that they had formed longer-lasting loyalties.

### **Action points**

Marketers often segment shoppers based on their attitude and behavioural tendencies. Traditional value seekers originally made up 24 per cent of the pie.

But that share seems to be growing. Understanding these shoppers' approaches can help retailers identify what matters most. Catering to this behaviour can eventually drive hundreds of dollars of spend per family.

Simply put, deal seekers love a bargain. It may not be their only motivation, but an irresistible deal is often what pushes them over the edge to make the purchase. This particular shopper seeks knowledge to make smarter buying decisions. They dive into research and always compare prices on other platforms that sell the same products. According to a Google report, a little more than half said they visit multiple websites before settling on what to buy and who to buy from.

Deal seekers are also a mobile-heavy group: more than half use a mobile phone to shop even while they're in a store. Overall, six in 10 of their online purchases are made with mobile. Go to where the customer is. There is a high sense of community within such shoppers, dedicated Facebook groups call out deals and how to snap them up.

The tendency of consumers to try new products is good news for brands looking to woo new customers. Show up when customers are looking for you. Make sure you rank on searches in the Near-me feature for customers looking to shop local. Think of promotional deals which highlight value-for-money benefits of the product as an investment that encourages consumers to try your brand for the first time.

## **Trend 4 :** **Consumers Expect Extensive Delivery Options for Everything**

Consumers seeking safety and avoiding crowded aisles at the supermarket may have started the trend but it's here to stay. As eCommerce penetration increases across the Middle East region, service providers are focusing on ways they can offer flexible delivery options which are convenient, safe and secure. Providing a seamless last-mile delivery experience to the consumers is a top priority for leaders of the largest eCommerce players like Amazon, Wadi and noon.

There is a quiet revolution underway in the logistics industry. More and more eCommerce sites boast same-day, next-day delivery along with multiple payment options such as COD, payment plans, 'buy now pay later' options, delivery where you want it. These are all testaments to the evolving last-mile delivery in recent years, accelerated in the past year.

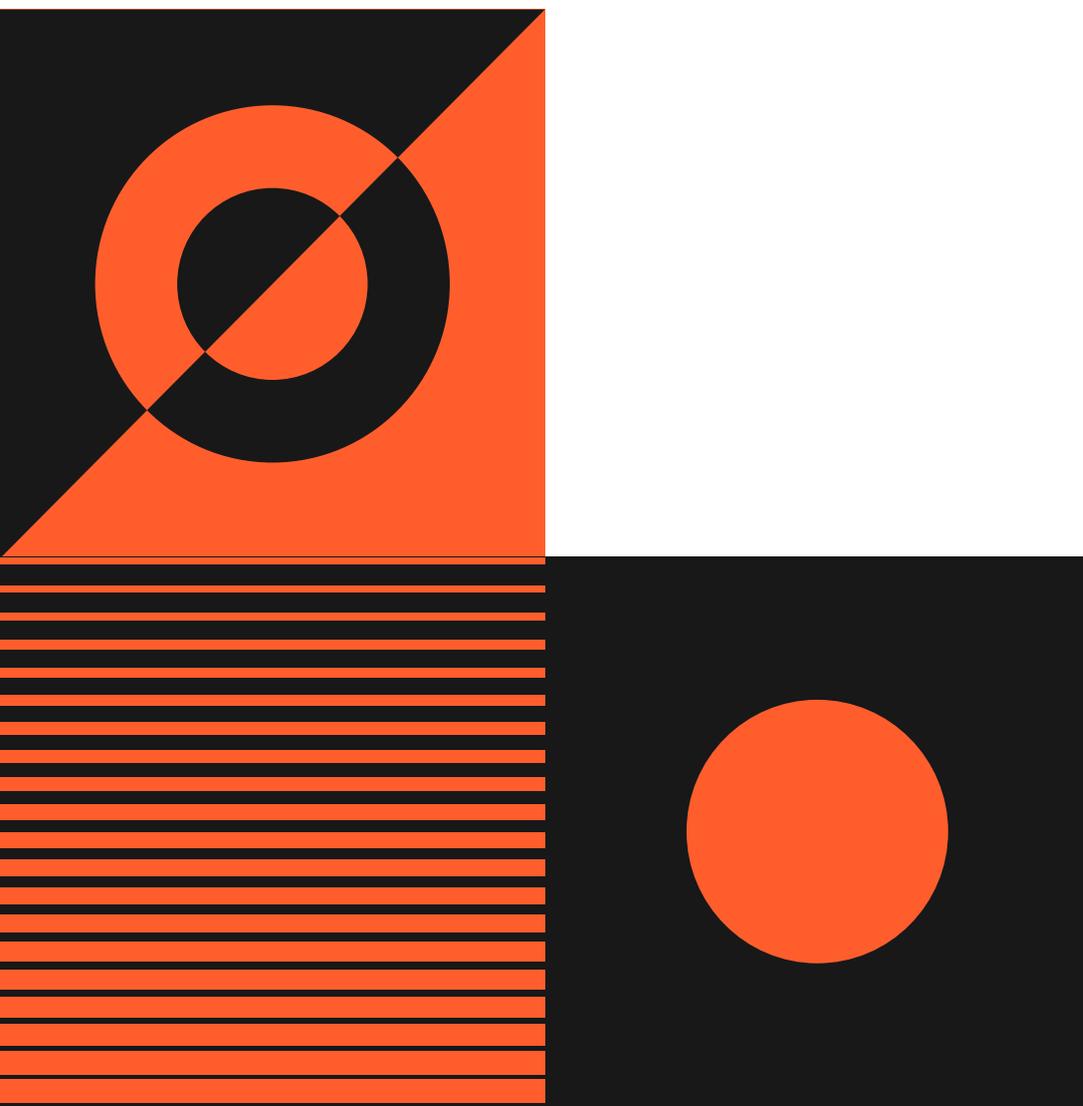
To increase convenience for their customers, Middle East's homegrown online marketplace – noon – deployed hundreds of noon Collect lockers across the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In Dubai, they launched autonomous vehicles, driverless vans using AI technology, stocked with F&B essentials for on-the-go consumption. They have also been working closely with retail partners to incorporate a better collection network including drop shipping and more localised processing hubs. The latest news is that they are testing drone deliveries for future last-mile developments.

## Action points

At the back-end, technology is enabling last-mile delivery channels to go the extra mile. These solutions include click and collect, digital locker boxes, micro-distribution centres, and delivery automation.

Adopt automation to ease delivery options and look for delivery partners that are tech-focussed. Customers are spoiled for choice and even smaller players must deliver to the new standard of delivery options. But SMEs need to be keen to keep track of costs so that they aren't losing on profitability. Customers will not pay extra for quick delivery if they are getting it for free elsewhere. Automation like AI and tracking software help keep costs down and aids more efficient use of resources.

Digitalised solutions will see a larger role in the regional e-commerce ecosystem as operators seek to streamline shipments in the last leg.



## **Trend 5 : Consumer Demand Will Remain Dynamic**

Customers are allowed to change their minds. Data is the only credible informant on trends that are short-term or show longer sustained change. But brands need to be quick to spot a trend and tweak their messaging or offering to deliver to that end.

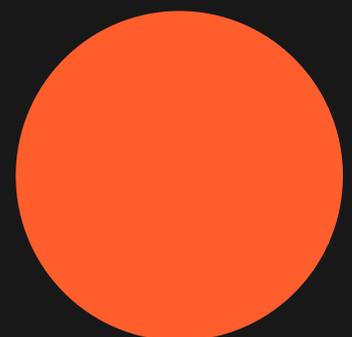
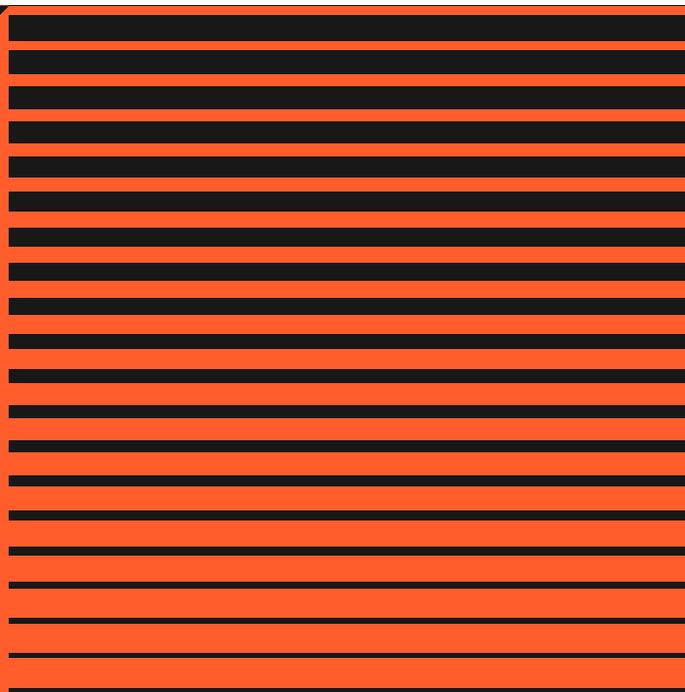
Take the case of Mondelez International who noticed an up-tick consumers focused on immunity-building vitamins during the early days of the pandemic. Consumer insight is important but brands need to measure actions that will reap benefits through ROI. As part of their innovation programme called CoLab, the snacking company is working on vitamin-infused hard candies, starting with dark chocolate.

Clothing brand ASOS had a surprisingly good turnover last year. They posted a 24 per cent increase in revenue for the first half of its fiscal year ending February 28, 2021. ASOS caters to a mostly Millennial and Gen Z customer base and is focused on Buy- now-wear-now products, a category that hasn't been doing too well during the pandemic. Occasion-wear was dead. However, the company was able to quickly expand to new product categories like casual and loungewear for young people who were home-bound but still looking to look-good. The company had to quickly pivot creating greater agility in the business model. According to company news, active wear and casual wear shot up 95 per cent and 69 per cent respectively. These categories earn smaller margins but also witness fewer returns.

## Action points

Agility is key in this category. Lean teams that aren't tethered to long-drawn bureaucracy work best to make quick changes that can cause deep impact.

Customer insights need to drive this agility. It can drive not just marketing decisions but also product development and service operations. But making sense of data isn't easy. Leaders will need to take an informed decision about whether an insight works as a trend or a short-lived fad before investing in it.



## Bonus

### Top Searched Queries in 2020

#### Saudi Arabia

e-learning platform “Madrasti” was the most trending search query, in fact it reached an all-time search interest high in 2020. “Cricket World Cup match between India and New Zealand”, the “Saudi Football League” table and “Sports” all made it to the top 10 trending queries across the country. The “US Elections” and “President Trump” also featured in the list.

#### UAE

Sports and elections attracted the interests of UAE residents. The “US Election 2020” ranked second in the top trending queries for 2020. There was also an interest in international sporting events with the “Indian Premier League”, “Champions League” (grew by 2x compared to 2019) and “NBA” ranking third, eighth, and tenth respectively on the list.

#### Egypt

Interest in High School National Diploma Results or “Thanawya Amma (ثانويات تجيبتن (اماع)”)” grew by 30% in 2020 compared to 2019. “E-Library” was also among the top trending queries as more people adapted to remote learning. Search results also showed interested in football matches particularly the “Egyptian Football League”. On the entertainment front, “Al Ekhtiyar” and “El Brins” were amongst the top searched queries.



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