Photo by Ross Perkins
Kearney, London

GCC e-commerce unleashed: a path to retail revival or a fleeting mirage?

KEARNEY

Just five years ago, the GCC e-commerce sector was a small channel with a big future ahead of it. Despite the sector contributing just 0.4 percent of the region's GDP in 2015, we predicted it would more than quadruple in value by 2020 to become one of the world's fastest-growing e-commerce markets—if retailers could shake their inertia. Since then, many have leaped into action, and compared with a mere **$5 billion** in 2015, the sector has grown phenomenally with revenues of about **$24 billion** today.

This would be worthy of a report in its own right, however with COVID-19 having steamrolled its way into our lives and across industries, the outlook for e-commerce now looks even brighter and is thriving under this pandemic, thanks to the new purchasing behavior and habits that have materialized in response. In this paper, we examine what has changed since 2015, and lay out what the future might hold, detailing likely key categories that will expand as e-commerce grows further, and likely implications and imperatives for three key actors within the retail ecosystem: large retail groups, real estate developers, and small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs).

A half-decade of headway

E-commerce takes off...

In our last e-commerce outlook for the GCC, we forecasted growth at an increase of 35 percent CAGR, which was essentially more than a four-fold jump in value for the sector between 2015 and 2020 (see figure 1 on page 2). By the end of 2019, it was worth just short of $18 billion.[1] The average percentage of households that have bought goods online has sprung from 2 percent to more than 8 percent. Given the range in developed markets such as the US, China, Korea, and Germany sits at 16 to 25 percent, there is still significant room to grow.

There have been several decisive outcomes here:

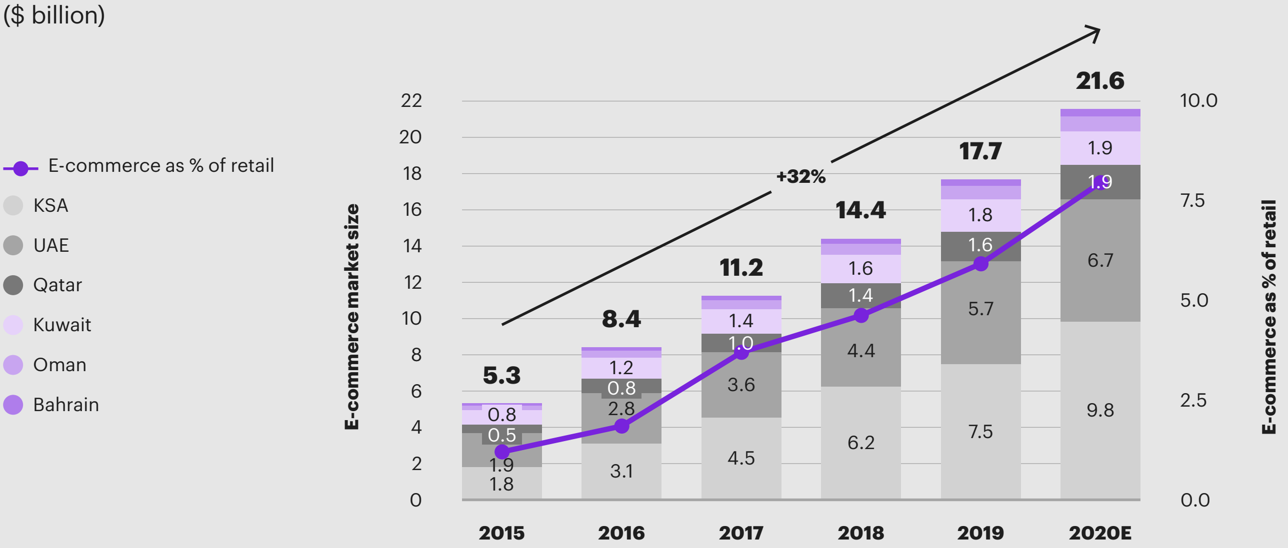
1. **Greater e-commerce trials.** Visits to the region's top five e-commerce websites have seen annual growth of more than 50 percent since 2015, going from 3 million to 21 million users per month. Simultaneously, the total number of websites offering e-commerce has tripled from about 45 to more than 150 in the same period. Social media has reached the majority of residents (for example, jumping from 54 to 90 percent in KSA between 2017 and 2020 alone) and digital marketing has created a pull with ad spend per Internet user rocketing from $8 to $20 (a growth of 150 percent) during the past four years.[2] Total screen time is higher than ever, with users browsing sites such as Amazon, Namshi, and Noon for 9 to 12 minutes on average, and looking at 7 to 8 pages each time.

2. **More conversions per visit.** E-commerce companies have introduced a number of features that are extremely attractive to consumers, such as multi-category product ranges that are globally available, access to ratings and reviews, discounted offers, fast and affordable delivery to domestic and international markets, free exchanges and hassle-free returns, and competitive pricing. Add in 24/7 availability and it's no wonder conversion rates have soared. On average the conversion rates of top online retailers are 2 to 3 percent, however the dominant e-commerce players such as Amazon and Noon boast conversions of 3 to 5 percent and even achieve as high as 15 percent across categories, especially during events and promotions (for example, Black Friday sales and Yellow Friday sales).

[1] Statista; Euromonitor; Kearney analysis
[2] Data reports portal

Figure 1
E-commerce in the GCC has grown rapidly since 2015

E-commerce market size historical growth 2015–2020
($ billion)



Note: The data includes all B2C e-commerce spends across the following categories: fashion, electronics and media, toys, hobby and DIY, furniture and appliances, food, beverages and personal care, food delivery and e-services, digital music, and video games. However, it excludes airline travel and accommodation, B2B markets, resale of used goods, and sales across private persons. The graph doesn't include impact of COVID-19 for 2020.

Sources: Statista, Euromonitor, PRPO; Kearney analysis

3. **Bigger baskets.** Since our last report, the number of e-commerce players has jumped significantly, and more than 25 multiple-category leaders have established themselves in GCC by offering unique products, third-party sellers, and introducing their own branded online platforms. Additionally, the vast array of goods has brought more shoppers online and increased the average basket size. As an illustration, the average annual spend per user in KSA and UAE jumped by about 30 percent between 2018 and 2019, reaching $600 and $1,280 respectively.

Further, there have been several factors driving the increase in online visits and purchases:

4. **The adoption and rise of omnichannel.** This has seen rapid growth in the region, mainly due to the consumer desire for convenience, and new, data-driven technologies that have boosted sales and competitiveness, enabling retailers to offer product ranges that are customer-led rather than supplier-driven. By setting up "brand.com" websites in tandem with physical stores, retailers are now able to offer a smooth transition between the online and offline experience. New services such as buy online, collect in store and all permutations on this have also significantly increased both reach and revenues.

5. **A boost in fashion and beauty and online food/ grocery delivery.** Fashion and beauty is one of the fastest-growing, most competitive and attractive categories in e-commerce. Over the past five years, it has grown at an annual rate of 18 percent (almost four times faster than traditional retail) and is now a roughly $5 billion market in its own right, with multi-brand platforms increasing traffic, conversion rates, and average order value. Meanwhile, online food delivery and grocery has been growing at more than 20 percent each year since 2017 and has become a $3 billion+ market. Online grocery retail penetration is a modest 2 percent, compared with developed economies where it ranges from 6 to 8 percent. While last-mile models (for example, flexible delivery slots and live price comparison) for grocery have significant room to evolve, the growth in the segment has already brought many big names to the region with more than 45 companies now offering grocery services.

Nonetheless, Amazon and Noon are in prime position, with in excess of 50 percent share of e-commerce sales. Given the investment of their operations and impressive customer service, others will find it a significant uphill task to compete with them effectively (see figure 2).

Over the past five years, e-commerce sales in the fashion and beauty sector have grown at an annual rate of 18 percent (almost four times faster than traditional retail).

Figure 2
The fashion and beauty and online grocery segments have shown tremendous growth

Source: Kearney analysis

...But no guarantee of success

However, all of this is not to say that e-commerce companies are **immune to failure**. In fact, due to the sheer amount of competition and the need for continuous investment, the path to profitability can be a treacherous one. In the GCC, Nisnass is in the midst of shutting down and Awok has seen its online traffic plummet by more than 70 percent in the first quarter of the year. While this can be partly attributed to the pandemic, in the same period Kul has fared well, gaining customers and market share thanks to lower delivery charges, paid marketing efforts, and a willingness to invest.

To increase their chances of turning a profit, organizations must be alert to **three major stumbling blocks**. One is **inefficiencies in the supply chain**, which lead to problems such as sourcing issues, late deliveries, higher return volumes, and a low level of integration between suppliers, fulfillment centers, and delivery companies. Another is **changing consumer behavior**. As demand increases it becomes more difficult to retain customers. Larger e-commerce outfits with more funding are making it more difficult for others to make a profit, forcing a hyper-competitive environment in which the risk of failure is higher for companies that lack a clear value proposition.

Finally, companies should be aware of an excessive focus on **boosting demand through marketing and promotions**. While offering discounts, holding large sale events, and investing in online ads can increase customer numbers, we found that it can also inadvertently add 3 to 5 percent to selling, general, and administrative expenses (SG&A). With the same customers often chasing bargains, and firms continuing to offer free delivery on low-ticket items, this also bumps up fulfillment costs. Taking both scenarios into account, businesses can easily slash their own profits by up to 5 to 10 percent or even go into the red, which happened at two major GCC companies, eventually leading to a shareholder exit in one case.

An unforeseen push

COVID-19 short-term impact

In the first few months of the year, e-commerce, like every other industry, was thrown into turmoil by the arrival of COVID-19. However, rather than grinding to a halt, the sector was pushed into overdrive as customers were driven online and bricks-and-mortar outlets struggled to adapt and survive. As the crisis unfolded, we created an economic growth forecast in which more optimistic scenarios support an increased push for e-commerce due to increased digitization in retail; the extensive use of data analytics for personalized marketing; and the continuation of social distancing measures, limiting capacity in physical stores. **As a result, we believe consumer consumption patterns will change permanently, especially in the absence of an effective vaccine.**

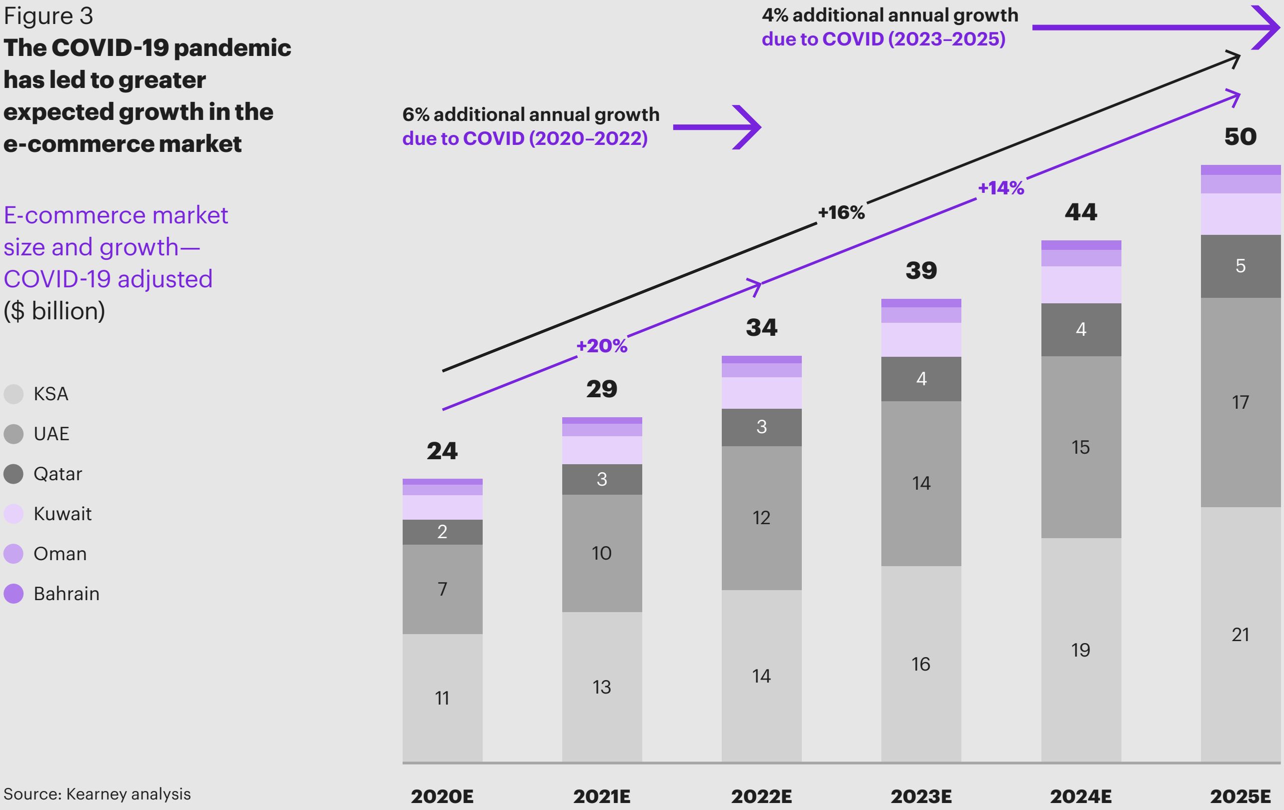
COVID-19 long-term consequences

All things considered, the outlook for the e-commerce sector is that it will become the new source of growth in retail, becoming almost a **$50 billion** market by 2025. Initial indications confirm the shift to online: Amazon's sales in the Middle East grew by 26 percent to $76 billion in Q1 2020. Mumzworld saw staggering growth of 800 percent during the same period, while Namshi's sales grew by 40 percent in 2019. By Q1 2020, 45 companies offered e-grocery across the GCC. UAE-based Instashop has recorded a 70 percent spike in app downloads, an increase in orders of 53 percent, and an average basket value increase of 70 percent. With about 2,500 retailers (based on Noon's press release) actively pursuing e-commerce capabilities, the future for suppliers also looks healthy.

Our model shows that there will be a larger acceleration in e-commerce between 2020 and 2022, at 20 percent CAGR, and a gradual growth at 14 percent until 2025. Without COVID-19, the same growth was projected at 14 and 10 percent respectively. For businesses with a physical footprint, this could mean bumps in the road as current trends show a significant drop in store sales vs. 2019, while online sales have tripled or even quadrupled (see figure 3 on page 5).

Figure 3
The COVID-19 pandemic has led to greater expected growth in the e-commerce market

E-commerce market size and growth—COVID-19 adjusted
($ billion)



Source: Kearney analysis

Framing the future

Two key factors will drive this new growth.

1. **More, newer, and digital-savvy shoppers.** Across the GCC, most e-commerce users are digitally savvy. Millennials account for more than 45 percent of the base, which is growing at 6 percent CAGR. About 60 percent of millennials shop online, where they spend an average of $1,500 each year on electronics, clothing, and travel.[3] They use multiple types of e-payments and are motivated by discounts, cashbacks, rewards, and convenience. Additionally, the pandemic has also helped educate the older generations about the potential of e-commerce, increasing awareness and creating a new customer segment. Even though GCC population growth is expected to flatten post-2023, leading to future user growth reaching the mainstream, the e-commerce users may continue thriving.

2. **More growth in key segments.** Continuing the trend that we observed between 2018 and 2020, online food delivery and grocery are expected to lead the pack here, growing by 30 percent each year until 2025. The average $ per e-grocery order, currently ranging from $25 to $40, is projected to double in two years. Margins will also increase as orders are placed more frequently and delivery charges go up. Lastly, vast supplier networks—which include large supermarkets, specialty stores, and cloud kitchens—will increase companies' product portfolios and the potential for organic growth, making this a highly attractive sector.

Over the same period, fashion and beauty—which includes apparel, footwear, bags, and accessories—is forecast to experience annual growth of 18 percent. In the GCC, this segment is fragmented and competition for market share is intense. Today, Shein, Namshi, Centrepoint, Jollychic, and H&M have around 8 to 10 percent each. Finally, the toys, hobby, and DIY segment is poised to grow at 15 percent CAGR. This includes sports and outdoor equipment, care entertainment systems and goods for pets, as well as toys, baby food, and babywear (see figure 4 on page 6).

[3] Visa Report 2016

Figure 4
Several key segments will see increased growth due to COVID-19

E-commerce market size by category and its growth (COVID-19 adjusted)[1]
(KSA, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, $Bn)

● COVID-19 adjusted

	2020		2025			Estimated e-commerce penetration (%)			
						GCC (2020)		**GCC** (2025)[2]	**Developed markets**[3]
Electronics, appliances, and media	5.1	**5.4**	8.6	2.9	**11.5**	28%	**— 1.2x →**	32%	>40%
Fashion and beauty	4.6	**4.9**	8.4	2.3	**10.6**	6.2%	**— 1.6x →**	10%	17–20%
Toys, hobby, and DIY	4.4	**4.7**	7.4	1.5	**8.9**	Not available		Not available	Not available
Digital services (food delivery, events, fitness, and services)[4]	4.0	**4.3**	6.4	2.2	**8.6**	40%	**— 1.3x →**	50%	Not available
Food (e-grocery included) and personal care	1.7	**2.3**	3.5	2.7	**6.1**	2.2%	**— 2.7x →**	6%	7.5%
Digital music and video games	0.9	**1.1**	1.9	0.6	**2.6**	Not available		Not available	Not available
Furniture and home products	0.9	**1.0**	1.2	0.4	**1.6**	3.4%	**— 2.0x →**	6.8%	11.5%

[1] Market size excludes airline travel and accommodation and ride-hailing apps.
[2] The retail market size assumption for 2025 is adjusted to COVID based on Statista report (estimated $310 billion by 2025).
[3] Developed markets refers to US, UK, Germany, and South Korea.
[4] Online food delivery only refers to restaurant and other platforms delivery to consumers.
Notes: Includes KSA, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. Numbers may not resolve due to rounding.
Sources: Statista, Ardent Advisory, Euromonitor, Appsamurai; Kearney analysis

A $50 billion market in five years

E-commerce will take center stage for growth

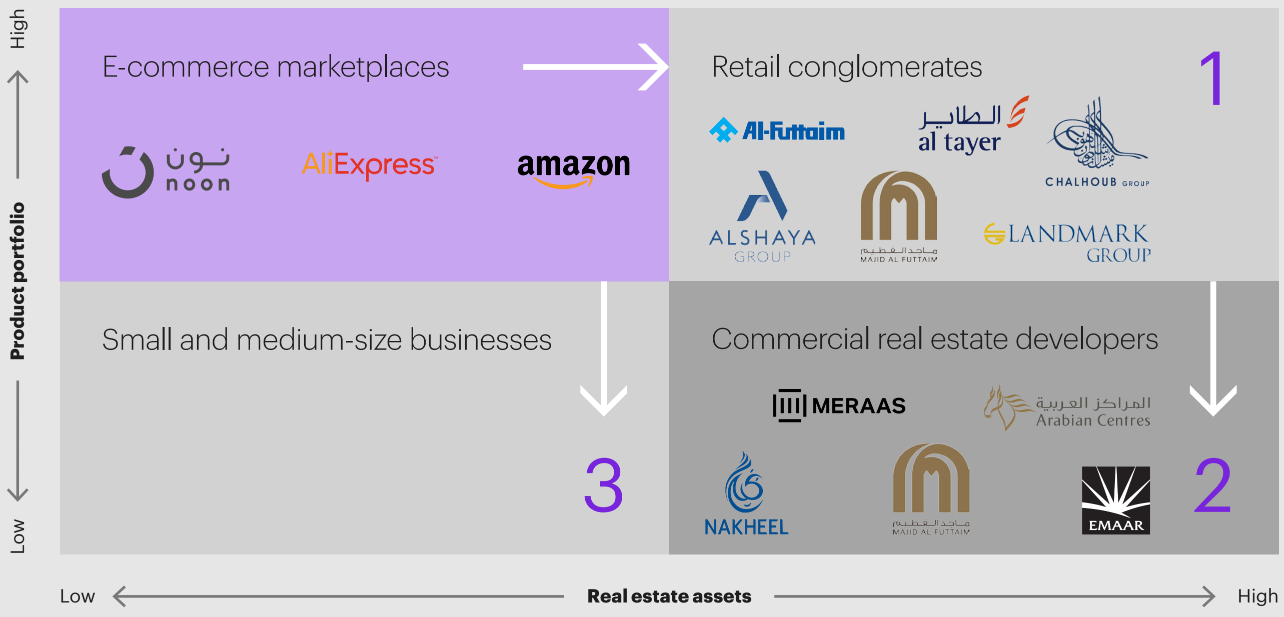
With e-commerce set to take on even more prominence in the coming years, the effects of a more definitive shift to online will **ripple through the entire retail ecosystem**. In addition to major retail groups, these will be felt by real estate developers and SMEs. We have reviewed the key challenges and implications in each area, focusing specifically on two distinguishing characteristics for the sector: the product portfolio and real estate assets (see figure 5 on page 7).

Implications and imperatives for the retail sector

1. Retail groups
These typically have an extensive footprint, with some owning a portion of the real estate, and a broad brand portfolio developed through franchises and joint ventures. They act primarily as distributors for major global brands and their own private labels.

Implications
The rise of pure play e-commerce marketplaces is already challenging retail groups. Along with the many conveniences they offer, excellent customer service and technology-driven recommendations and personalization are now entry-level requirements. As the online market grows, extensive product ranges, easy purchase journeys, and constant sales and promotions will put even more pressure on traditional retailers' margins and continue to eat away at their market share.

Figure 5
Players will face challenges in respect to their product portfolios and real estate assets



Source: Kearney analysis

The physical store (as we know it) will lose relevance, leaving assets underused or abandoned. While the push to launch proprietary online channels could lead to organizational friction as organizations attempt to balance investment across potentially competing objectives, the retail physical store can still have a crucial role to play in the new normal, provided they reinvent themselves and bring synergies with online channels through innovation.

Imperatives

a. A clear channel strategy

Many major regional retailers have already moved to establish e-commerce channels, with varying degrees of success. This flurry of activity means any retailer contemplating a similar move must step back and develop a clear channel strategy for the long term, with consideration on several fronts:

How much control to retain. Certain products and brands lend themselves to a very particular purchase experience, especially in the high-end and luxury categories, which typically means keeping a hand on the tiller at all times. At the other end of the spectrum, using third-party marketplaces and e-distributors can help get brands online and make money more quickly, however they risk losing control over time as direct contact with consumers—and their data—erodes. **Ensuring consistency across channels is paramount.**

Potential profitability. A study we led in the GCC indicates that EBITDA contribution from offline stores is highest at **12 to 16 percent**, compared with marketplaces where it is in the range of 10 to 15 percent, while owned "brand.com" websites contribute just **6 to 11 percent**. While these differences are primarily driven by economies of scale, especially in the logistics space, it's important to know that **chosen channel mix will directly impact profitability**.

The level of investment and effort required. Launching a multi-brand marketplace is a viable option for some retail groups, however an upfront assessment of the product portfolio and customer base should be carried out first. For this type of channel to be profitable and drive economies of scale, both the range of products and number of consumers have to be right. Getting the right balance could require additional investment in acquisitions, joint ventures, or equity.

The omnichannel dilemma. COVID-19 has put many omnichannel strategies into question. Retail groups now need to think about how to—or whether to—continue using their large real estate assets. Our own research indicates that offline channels still play an important role when customers are researching products, and also when they want to buy. This indicates an opportunity to continue using physical stores in a meaningful way. From our own experience with clients, when omnichannel is done well, sales in offline stores can increase by as much as 4 to 8 percent—but this has yet to reach its full potential across the GCC.

b. Optimum delivery and fulfillment

Delivery has become a battleground between traditional retailers and e-commerce businesses. With market leaders such as Amazon and Noon investing heavily to place distribution centers close to sources of demand, and running their own last-mile fleets, they can make delivery promises most other retailers are unable to meet.

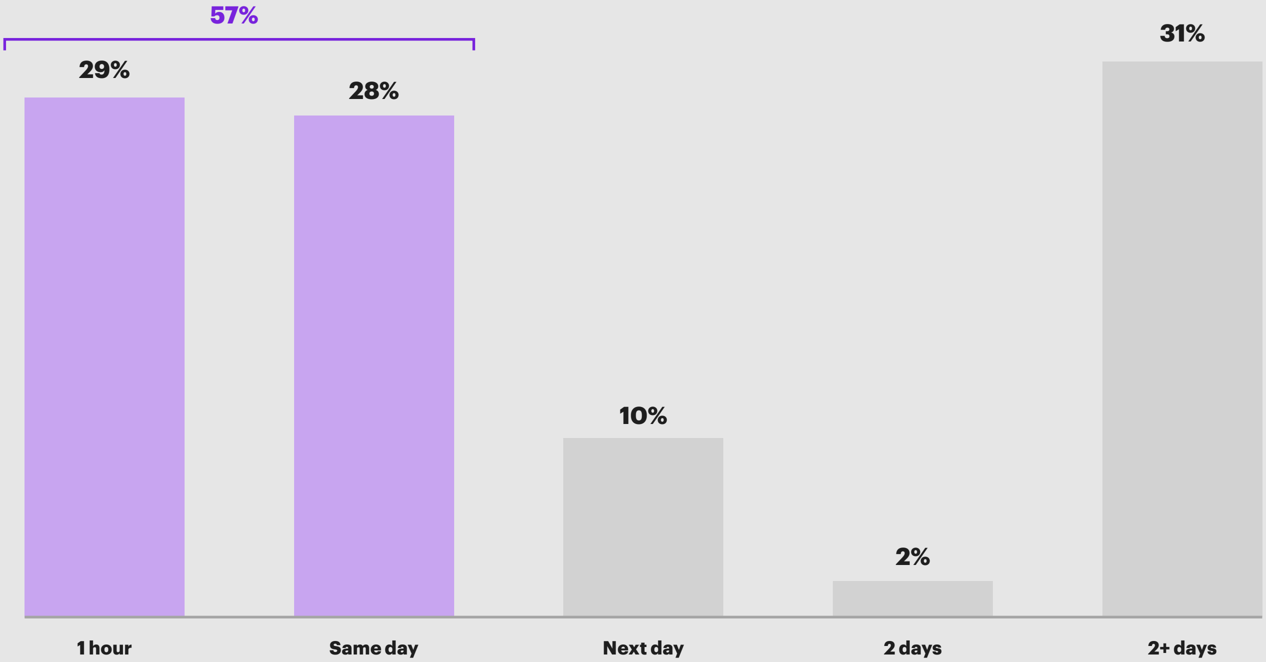
A recent consumer survey that Kearney carried out in the GCC revealed that delivery expectations are on the rise here. **In fact, around 30 percent of respondents expect even faster response times. If retail groups are to have any hope of competing, they will have to use stores as their own distribution centers to get to customers faster** (see figure 6 on page 9).

The fine margins in e-commerce make it imperative for retail groups to assess their cost structure and identify improvement opportunities. The cost of goods sold (COGS) is generally locked in through long-term contracts with host brands, while SG&A expense is driven by customer acquisition and retention. However, as we touched on earlier, fulfillment can make the difference between profit and loss, as it accounts for anywhere between **13 to 18 percent** of sales. Done correctly, shipping from stores can cut fulfillment costs by up to 40 percent, and boost EBITDA by more than **5 percent** (see figure 7 on page 9).

Delivery has become a battleground between traditional retailers and e-commerce businesses.

Figure 6

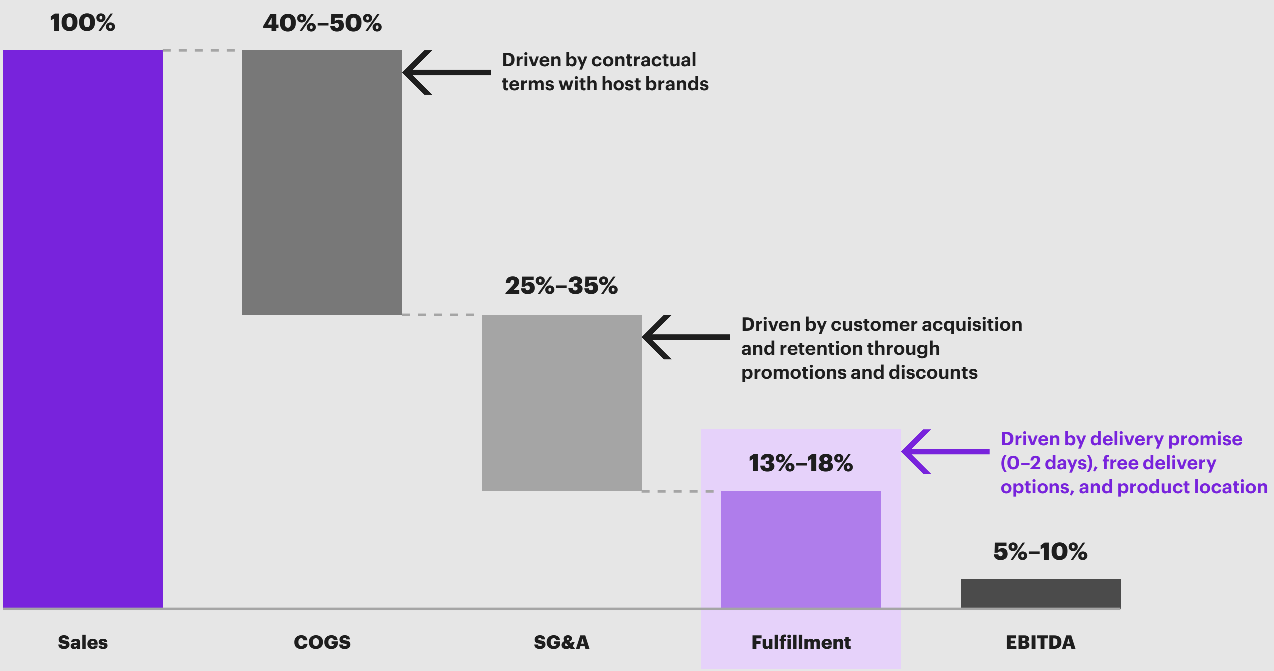
GCC consumers expect faster response times



Source: Kearney analysis

Figure 7

E-commerce cost allocation waterfall



Source: Kearney analysis

2. Real estate developers

Real estate developers are extremely dependent on leasing units and collecting rent. They have an extensive real estate footprint, however either a narrow or non-existent diversification in client portfolio. Most of their clients are providers for shopping, food, and entertainment, and most have been heavily impacted due to the pandemic.

Implications

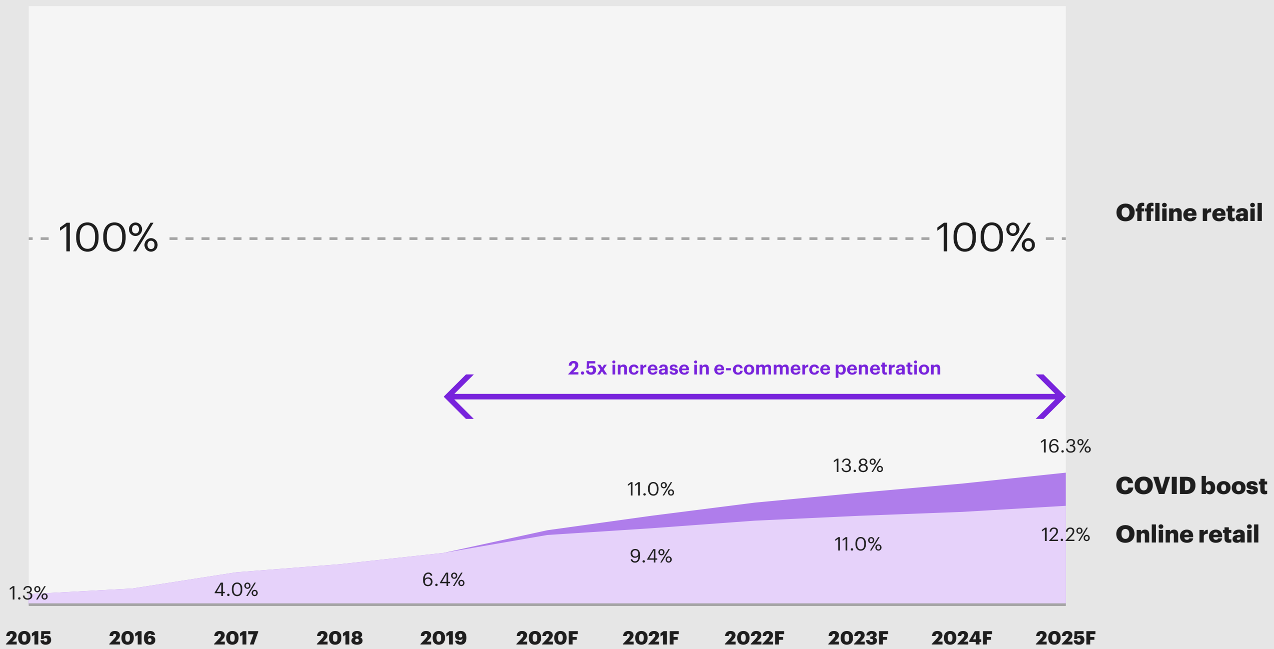
As the prevalence of e-commerce continues to grow rapidly, online retail will continue to take share from offline channels. The resulting decline in store sales will exacerbate the existing pressures on commercial real estate. Occupancy levels and rental revenues will shrink as retailers refocus their investments and rationalize store presence. Tenants will be forced to keep asking for rent breaks or discounts, while major retailers will use their weight to press for heavy fit-out investments. Receivables and collections will also decrease as retailers continue to defer payments and seek better terms (see figure 8).

Imperatives

a. Prioritizing the consumer experience to increase footfall

It will no longer be enough for real estate developers to sit in the background watching rental revenues come in. With sweeping changes for retail premises ahead as tenants adapt to continued social distancing requirements and look for new ways to attract nervous consumers back in store, developers will have to play more of an active role in mapping out the consumer journey and making sure their properties are fit for a new purpose. Younger consumers will continue to favor experiences over products, meaning extra emphasis on the food and beverage, entertainment, and services categories. **Real estate developers have to curate and own many of these experience creations.**

Figure 8
Online retail is expected to continue to take share from offline channels



Source: Kearney analysis

To adapt effectively, the mall owners will need to invest more in digital platforms to make things simple for shoppers. **Dubai Mall and Mall of the Emirates have their own apps that allow visitors to view movie timings, store details, and restaurant menus; book activities; and take part in the events each mall organizes.**

b. A new landlord-tenant relationship

With developers more involved in designing the end-to-end consumer experience, the relationship between them and their tenants will move away from being a transactional one to become more of a partnership.

Strong cooperation will be vital, for example through profit sharing or revenue-oriented leases, and more collaboration on mall-wide events and promotions.

3. Small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs)

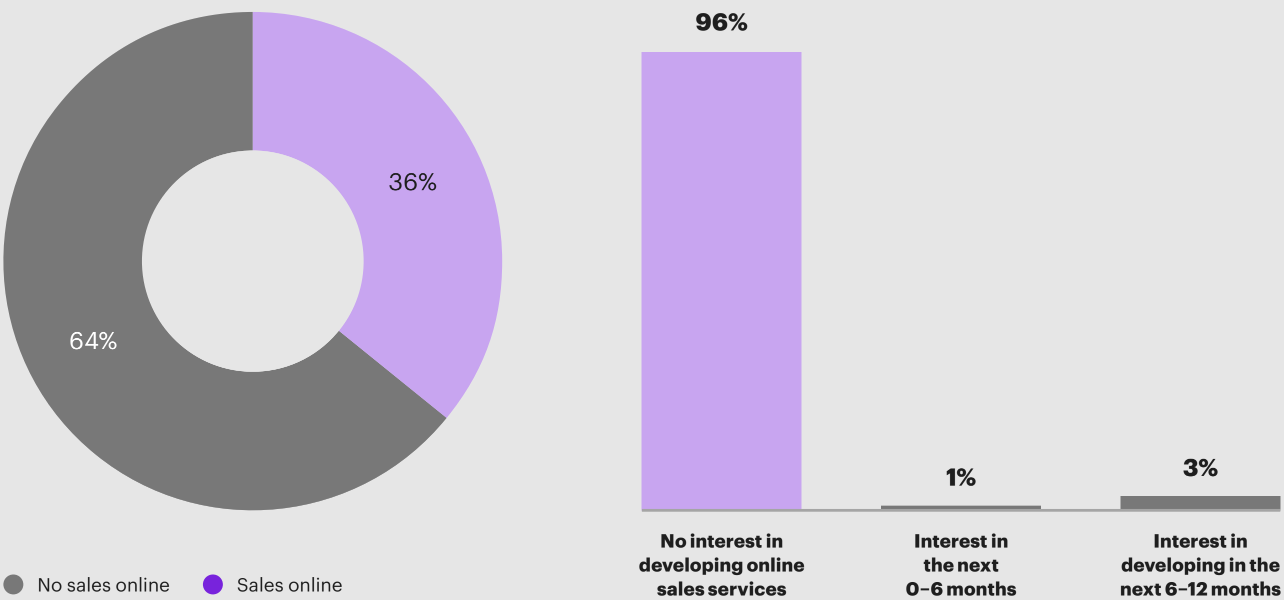
These businesses have a small real estate footprint and a narrow brand portfolio, focused mainly on single stores and specially selected product ranges. They play a crucial role in the retail ecosystem. The SMEs contributed more than 50 percent of UAE's GDP in 2019 and were responsible for employing around 55 percent of the population.

Implications

The message is clear: many SMEs that have not yet adopted online sales channels will need to do so if they are to survive. However, a survey carried out by Kearney in the UAE indicates that just 36 percent have made the investment so far, while only 4 percent plan to sell online in the future (see figure 9). This shows a clear disconnect between trends in consumer behavior and the response from SMEs. Something will have to give, and it's unlikely to be buying patterns. Another study from KSA reveals that the greatest challenges facing SMEs are lack of technical skills and the availability of skilled labor, which explains why many are unable to jump on the e-commerce bandwagon (see figure 10 on page 12).

Figure 9
Just 4% of SMEs plan to develop online sales services in the next 12 months

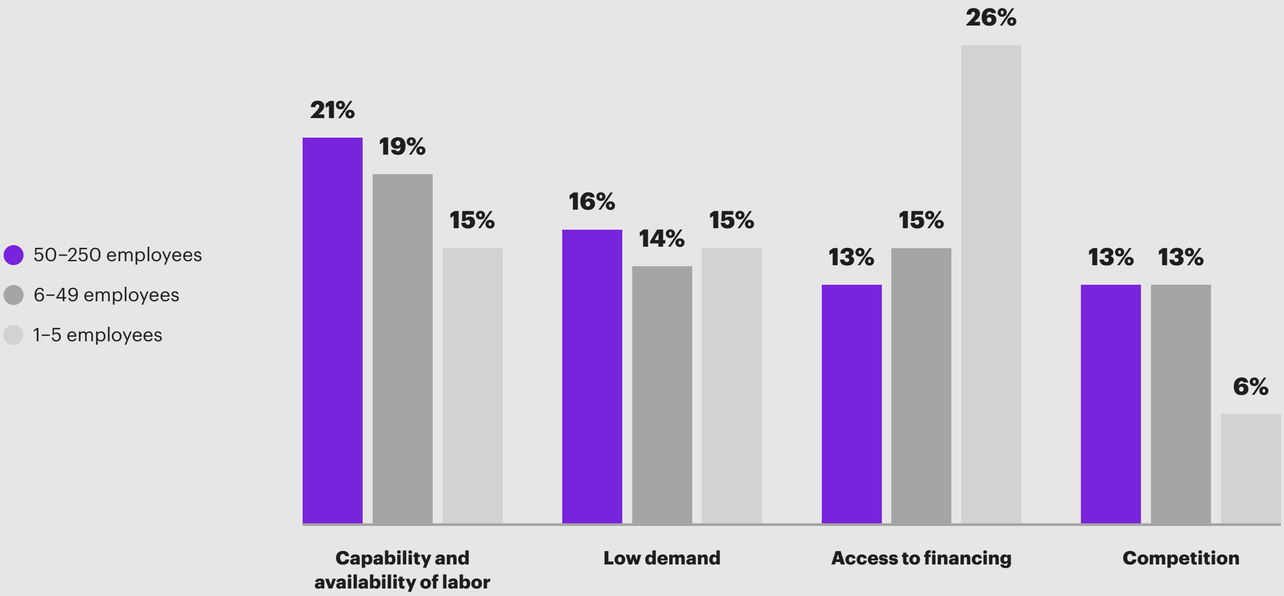
Interest in developing online sales services (UAE)



Source: Kearney analysis

Figure 10
The greatest challenges facing SMEs are lack of technical skills and the availability of skilled labor

Percentage of establishments according to most important problem faced (KSA)



Source: Kearney analysis

One way of getting a foothold is by joining regional or international marketplaces, which provide access to a broader consumer base and new markets without the need for physical expansion. By tapping into sellers' own services, such as logistics, customer support, payments, and marketing, SMEs can also reduce their overheads. However, this route also effectively brings more competition from different geographies, putting a premium on pricing. High vendor fees, commission on sales, and strict terms and conditions—such as having to maintain a minimum holding inventory—can also squeeze margins uncomfortably.

Another viable and cost-effective option is using an online platform such as Shopify, which enables brands to build their own online store and take advantage of outsourced logistics support. Multiple governments have already supported a similar idea for the SMEs. India's trader's body CAIT (Confederation of All India Traders)—with 60 million members—has announced the launch of a national e-commerce marketplace (bharatmarket) to bring 95 percent of retail traders onboard the platform in 2020. Malaysia has launched a "national e-commerce road map" to promote a market for its SMEs. Thailand's "Thaitrade.com" is expanding from its current status as a cross-border platform for exporters running SMEs to become the national online business gateway with the full features of business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), and business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C) transactions. For the platforms to succeed, companies must have the appropriate knowledge and skills to manage an online channel, particularly digital marketing, merchandising, and order management—and this trade-off needs to be given serious consideration.

Imperatives

a. The right online strategy

The above examples aren't the only potential answers of course, and it's crucial for SMEs to pursue a strategy that delivers maximum benefit. Making the right choice, whether this is the marketplace or platform approach, selling through your own website, or pursuing more than one route, rests on a variety of factors including set-up costs and margins, user reach, time to market, customer satisfaction, and cross-border complexity.

b. Effective government support

As we have already seen, SMEs often don't have the capabilities or investment muscle to design and implement an effective online strategy that will give them the presence and visibility to compete effectively. Government help is essential, given their importance to the economy and employment market. Two success stories are Tojjar, an e-commerce platform launched by KSA's Human Resources Development Fund, which now hosts more than 1,300 retailers, and Dubaistore, a similar venture set up by Dubai's Department of Economic Development. To make further progress, specific policies targeting agreements with private-sector e-commerce players are needed to bring SMEs onto their platforms and give them the tools and support they need to thrive in the online environment.

Just as government bodies across Malaysia, India, and Thailand have planned to support the SME ecosystem, governments across the GCC also have a role to play in helping SMEs understand why e-commerce is so important, especially given what lies ahead.

"Last-mile" leverage

Just as the last mile holds the potential to make or break the customer experience, so the projected growth in GCC e-commerce rests on three crucial factors where government influence holds sway.

1. The logistics infrastructure

As online baskets fill and sales rack up, the logistics capability required to fulfill orders is becoming ever more complex. If the GCC's rapidly evolving e-commerce market is to succeed, logistics companies and government bodies will need to collaborate to enhance efficiency and build trust with customers and e-tailers alike. One way of doing this would be to adopt new scalable delivery methods such as parcel boxes and lockers and autonomous vehicles. Digital services such as live routing information, messaging app updates, and flexible delivery planning can also be used to good effect, especially when brought together on integrated platforms that cover everything from order fulfillment to completion. When used well, these significantly improve the customer experience. Finally, on a more practical note, standardizing postal codes across the GCC would also give the sector another helping hand and increase efficiency from both ends.

2. Flexible manpower models

Compared to other countries, where manpower is predominantly provided by citizens, in the GCC the majority of workers are immigrants from neighboring countries. The e-commerce companies are responsible for sponsoring and bringing them onboard as full-time employees. This limits the companies' flexibility in their workforces. Shifting the manpower model in e-commerce companies, where for example 60 to 70 percent of employees are full-time and 30 to 40 percent are recruited from outsourced vendors, would deliver two benefits. Firstly, it would be easier to ramp the numbers up or down depending on demand. Secondly, it would reduce SG&A expenses (for example, visa, travel, and insurance). Human resources ministries in the GCC could develop policies to encourage flexible labor models linked to sector demand, increasing competitiveness and market skill sets while reducing employer costs.

3. Centrally governed policies

As with any significant shift in consumer and business behavior, particularly when this is driven by new technologies, government policies are crucial to guide decisions and actions and deliver outcomes. As residents across the GCC interact with e-commerce companies on a more frequent basis, this means far greater volumes of personal data will be exchanged online. Although a new data protection law has recently come into force in the UAE, across the majority of the region the treatment of consumer data remains at the discretion of individual companies.

To ensure consumers gain the necessary trust and confidence to keep (or start) shopping online and fuel the potential that lies within the sector, more rigorous laws on the handling of personal and financial data will be a fundamental requirement.

With years of experience guiding ministries and institutions in the public and private sectors, we stand ready to offer strategic advice, practical support, and feet on the ground as the retail sector enters a new era.

In conclusion, e-commerce has undoubtedly emerged as the silver lining in a densely cloudy economic horizon. The global pandemic has given an enormous boost to regional e-commerce, with profound and lasting changes in consumer and enterprise behavior. All stakeholders should take note and revisit their strategies, operating models, and policies to make the best of this e-commerce-driven #newnormal. Those who have already made the investment have weathered the storm and are well positioned to lead in the post-covid retail revival. More than ever, those who fail to make the required changes and investments will be sidelined and put their very survival in question.

Authors

Debashish Mukherjee
Partner, Dubai
debashish.mukherjee@kearney.com

Adel Belcaid
Partner, Dubai
adel.belcaid@kearney.com

Mohammed Dhedhi
Principal, Dubai
mohammed.dhedhi@kearney.com

Sargun Bawa
Consultant, Dubai
sargun.bawa@kearney.com

Saurabh Shekhar
Consultant, Dubai
saurabh.shekhar@kearney.com

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