

THE RETURN TO RHYTHM

SEIZING OPPORTUNITY IN THE
BACK TO SCHOOL SEASON 2025



Every advertiser in MENA knows Back-to-School (BTS) is a tentpole event. It is, above all, a 'Return to Rhythm' for consumers across the region. The critical questions for advertisers then become: How do you deeply integrate into their daily journey to capture demand as it peaks? And, how can this window provide invaluable insights that inform your year round strategy? Discover the answers in our 2025 BTS report.

Konstantin von Wedel
Strategy Director, Platformance



THE RETURN TO RHYTHM SEIZING OPPORTUNITY IN THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL SEASON

As the warmth of summer begins to wane, a new energy emerges across the Middle East. For marketers, this period from mid-August to mid-September has long been recognized as 'Back-to-School' (BTS) – a crucial window when families return from holidays and a fresh academic year commences. It's a prime opportunity for advertisers to connect with the highly sought-after parent demographic, driving purchases with strategic offers and gaining a vital head start on the competitive Q4 retail landscape.

But at Platformance, we understand that BTS is far more than an isolated event. What has often been perceived as the tail end of a quieter quarter, especially in the Gulf, actually represents a dynamic return to the daily rhythm of life for everyone, not just parents. From late August onwards, a palpable energy sweeps across the region. Conferences and work events reignite across industries, business development and sales surge, and cultural celebrations, particularly around Saudi Arabia's mid-September National Day, draw larger, more engaged audiences. It's a season of immense potential.

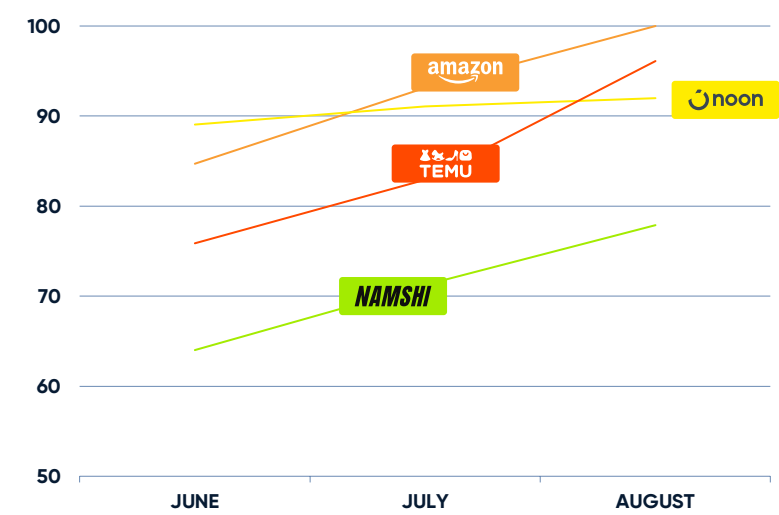


WHAT DOES THE RETURN TO RHYTHM MEAN FOR YOUR ADVERTISING STRATEGY?

➤ It signals opportunity. The early days of this renewed season present audiences who are physically and mentally refreshed, ready to tackle the second half of the year with renewed bravado. They're actively seeking new routines, fresh starts and innovative solutions. As consumers, particularly parents, dive back into full work mode, their schedules become packed, making convenience an invaluable currency. They're acutely aware of their needs and are primed to purchase to fill those gaps. Crucially, data on search and purchase behavior across categories emphatically confirms this surge in consumer intent, not just closely related to schooling:

➤ As summer draws to a close, users flock back to marketplaces. With many product searches starting within retail environments, it's little surprising that we see users across the Gulf increasingly searching for and mentioning marketplaces such as **Amazon, Noon, Namshi, Temu, Sharaf DG or Jarir**. Brandwatch data confirms that brand volumes increase by 3x in this period. Search data (Ahrefs 2024) suggests an increase of 15-20% in search volumes across platforms. That's a strong signal of people being in a position primed for purchasing.

Search volumes for large e-commerce platforms and marketplaces in GCC:
(indexed to period June - Aug 2025, max = 100)



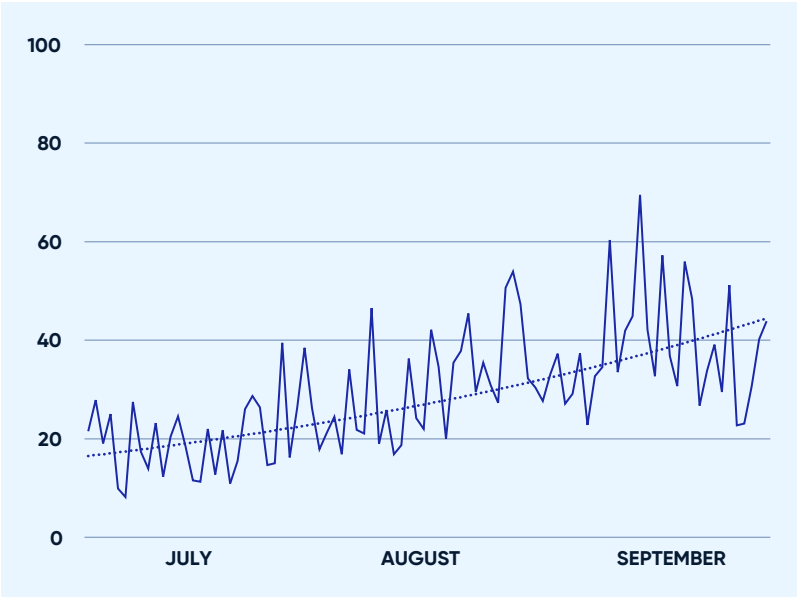
Source: Ahrefs, 2025



3X

Brand Volume Increase

Brand volumes for large e-commerce platforms & marketplaces in UAE & KSA:
(unweighted average across 4 platforms, indexed to Q3 2024)

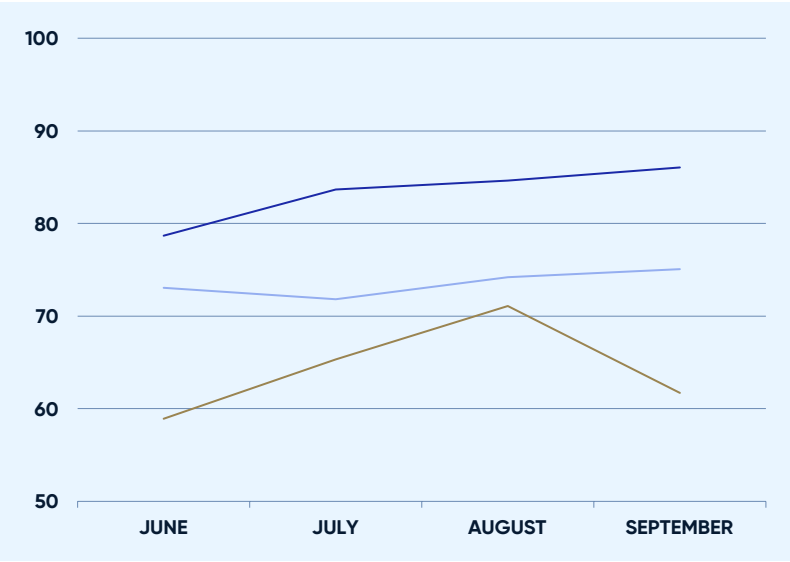


Source: Brandwatch, 2024



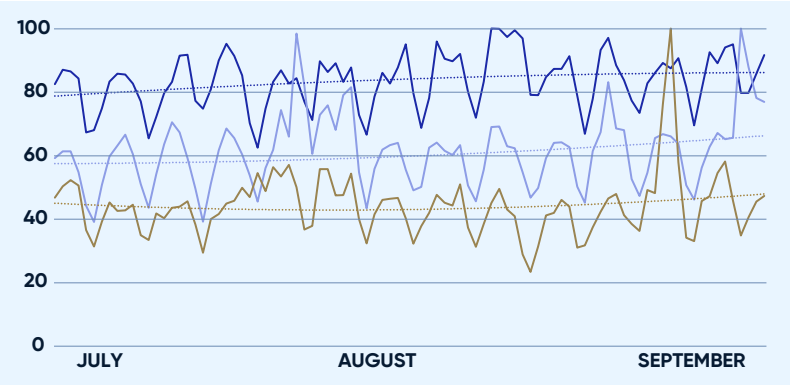
- Hand-in-hand with retail searches, volumes related to deals, offers and discounts are also up across MENA, as early as mid August (Brandwatch 2024). The MENA region always emphasises a good bargain when it comes to a purchase - little wonder that this is reflected in the consistent uptick in search volumes for related terms over the course of Q3 and moving into the BTS period. There are also other indicators of strong consumer intent, with mentions of terms such as buy, sign up or reserve consistently up over the course of Q3 (Brandwatch 2024).
- A 14% increase in educational app installs in August compared to H1 numbers (Adjust 2023). Educational and general learning tools become highly desirable with the return to the academic school year.
- Globally, an over 50% increase in school supply sales (Afterpay 2024) and 65% growth in backpack sales vs. the rest of the year. Viewed across the year, searches for school supplies peak in mid to late August in the UAE and a little earlier in Saudi Arabia (Google Trends 2025). Clothing and accessories are a category that see increased demand, as parents buy for their children and professionals stock up on their work wardrobe.
- Increase in searches for consumer electronics like laptops and tablets (Microsoft Advertising 2022), with this being the most lucrative and fastest growing segment of the Saudi BTS market (Grand View Research 2024). Over the past 5 years, searches for laptops in both the UAE and KSA peak around BTS time (Google Trends 2025). Beyond just university students returning to or starting their studies, more than 70% of back-to-school shoppers allocate budget to buying electronics (Monetate 2024).
- Searches for 'lunchbox' and other lunch or snack-related terms peak in the UAE and KSA in the two week period at the end of August (Google Trends 2025). Late summer is one of the key periods across the year, together with the New Year and post Eid, where consumers look into healthy food options and snacks.

Search volumes for terms related to savings on purchases in GCC:
Discount, Offer, Deal (indexed to period June – Sept 2024, max = 100)



Source: Ahrefs, 2025

Volumes for signals of immediate intent in UAE & KSA: Buy, Sign up, Reserve
(Indexed to Q3 2024, max = 100)



Source: Brandwatch, 2024



14%

Increase in educational
app installs

50%

Increase in school
supply sales

65%

Growth in backpack
sales



MAKING BTS WORK TO YOUR ADVANTAGE: REAPING WHAT YOU HAVE SOWN

The 'great return' to everyday post-summer life offers a bountiful harvest for those who've prepared. Just as September and the end of summer have historically been times of harvest in cooler Middle Eastern climates, so too is BTS your moment to reap what you've sown. Advertisers who have strategically planted their brand within the fertile ground of potential customers – generating demand through emotional storytelling, building category leadership and enhancing brand salience – will find themselves with a significant competitive edge.

Equally, those who dedicated their summer months to running creative and audience tests, discerning what truly resonates, trialing emerging channels for faster and more impactful audience reach, and meticulously building audience pools for future refinement and re-engagement – these are the advertisers poised for an advantage in the BTS season. As outlined in our **Summer Narrative Report**, setting yourself up for success early in Q3 pays dividends.

With demand for your products and services already seeded, the BTS period becomes your prime opportunity to capture and convert that demand. This involves effectively tapping into the audience pools cultivated through increased brand exposure. It also means leveraging powerful signals that capture not just high user intent, as evidenced by rising search volumes, but also identifying and re-engaging those high-opportunity consumers.



MAKING BTS WORK TO YOUR ADVANTAGE: REAPING WHAT YOU HAVE SOWN

BTS is about transforming every opportunity into decisive action, ideally boosting revenue and sales well ahead of the typical Q4 shopping surge. A deep understanding of consumer values is key here. 2022 research by Digital Turbine reveals that in this 'return to rhythm' period, consumers prioritize convenience and quality above many other factors. In fact, more than 1 in 2 consumers consider these elements over price when making their BTS shopping decisions. While strategic discounts remain valuable, the emphasis is increasingly shifting towards highlighting product quality, seamless convenience and unique offerings. For advertisers, this translates into a dual imperative: making it effortlessly easy and convenient for buyers to find you, even with your ad placements, and consistently delivering relevant, quality-assuring content that compels consumers to act now. These crucial considerations directly inform your optimal media mix for this opportune period. Let's delve deeper into that.

More than

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Over price when making their BTS shopping decisions.



The Return to Rhythm: Back To School 2025

RIDING THE RETURN TO RHYTHM WITH THE RIGHT MEDIA MIX

The BTS season is all about nurturing and converting demand for your products and services. To truly excel, you'll need a potent media mix capable of swaying opinion, driving product-specific interest, enabling high-precision targeting, and capturing demand in the moment. We recommend focussing on three strategic channels that seamlessly guide consumers from consideration through to conversion, via a similar unified platform approach as we outlined for summer:

Influential Voices

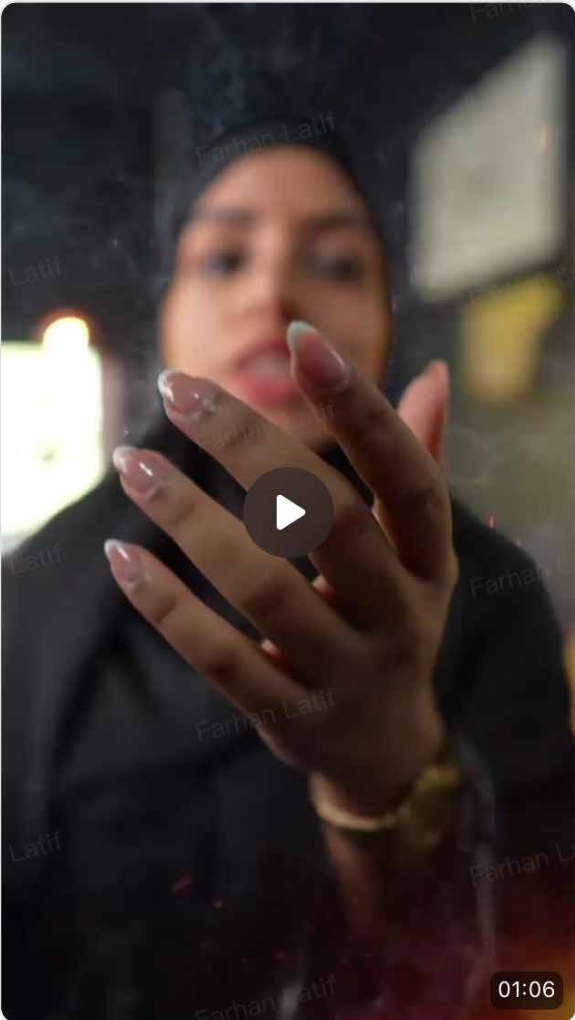
- 01 Harness the power of influential voices that deeply resonate with your target audiences – whether they are discerning parents of young children, convenience-seeking families, or time-poor professionals. These voices possess the unique ability to build resonance and cut through the noise via socially powerful, curated communities across platforms like Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp and X. The key lies in collaborating with influencers who not only speak at their audience but actively engage them in authentic conversations. Consider diversifying your influencer partnerships to highlight different facets of your offering; for instance, mid-tier influencers excel at delivering authentic product recommendations, particularly through engaging "haul" videos and "edutainment" content, which can be highly effective for connecting with the parent demographic.

➤ Top Tip from our Influencer Marketing team:

"Prioritize creators who are parents themselves or deeply embedded in family-focused communities – their content drives stronger relatability and engagement. Always co-create rather than prescribe content to maintain authenticity and allow the creator to stay true to their persona"

Reem Barakat

Senior Manager Creator Monetization



RIDING THE RETURN TO RHYTHM WITH THE RIGHT MEDIA MIX

Retail Media

02 Step into environments where users are already in a purchase mindset. Retailer platforms, quick-service and e-commerce apps, as well as online pharmacies and grocery delivery services, are prime examples. Consumers arrive here with a clear intention to buy, offering unparalleled opportunities for conversion. These environments also empower you with high-precision, deterministic data – from logged-in user information to rich behavioral signals. Map out your consumer's typical day and select platforms that seamlessly integrate into their journey. For example, if you're targeting parents of primary school-aged children, you can leverage ride-hailing data to identify those on the morning school run, utilize online pharmacy data for insights into who's purchasing child-friendly cough syrup (for the inevitable BTS flu), and tap into online grocery apps to segment and target those healthy snacks for their children's lunchboxes. A broad presence across these platforms will enable you to close any remaining gaps in targeting specific sub-sections of your intended audience.

➤ Top Tip from our Retail Media experts:

"Think about how insights gathered via on-platform data and activations can also inform your strategy off-platform, for instance via audience look-alikes. If you sell via 3rd party retailers, use off-platform channels to focus on driving users back to the retail environment, where conversion intent is highest"

Hamza Madi
General Manager Emerging Markets & Solutions

Commission-Based Commerce

03 Recognize that MENA buyers are discerning deal-seekers: UAE consumers for instance are 7% more likely than the global average to spend their time looking for the best deal. KSA consumers are 7% more likely than the global average to use discount codes (GWI data 2025). This reinforces the argument for commission-based commerce as a channel, which offers a powerful mechanism to convert fence-sitting buyers with compelling offers, whilst also allowing you to differentiate between new customers and re-engage lapsed ones. Partner with an expert who can craft tailored content, using a strategic mix of banners and discount codes, ensuring a qualitative selection of sales partners and affiliates. Remember, busy consumers may not be able to purchase immediately or click on your link right away. This is precisely where well-placed discount codes become invaluable, serving as a persistent incentive.

➤ Top Tip from our Affiliate team:

"Time your affiliate pushes around key triggers like salary week or peak shopping days (i.e. the end of the work week) and ensure your discount codes are evergreen or easy to recall to capture delayed conversions.

Hala Mohamed
Associate Growth Director

Consumers in the UAE and KSA are
7% more likely than the
global average



FITTING BTS SEAMLESSLY INTO THE REST OF THE YEAR

At Platformance, we've highlighted that BTS is far from an isolated event. Rather, it's about remaining relevant to the audiences, primarily although not exclusively parents, who are most active during this period. It's part of what we capture through our idea of Always Relevant – it's not about being live for the sake of it or because all your competitors are. Instead, it's about doing so mindfully and strategically, following some timeless truths, principles that hold strong not just during this period, but throughout the entire year:

- **Starting Early:** It's undeniably more cost-effective and allows you to cultivate rich audience pools and invaluable learnings. Now, more than ever, this proactive approach sets you up for unparalleled Q4 success.
- **Trust in Iterative Processes:** Whether refining your targeting or optimizing creative, the power of platforms to micro-segment and tailor your messaging for conversion is now equally potent across the open web as it is within walled gardens. Adapting to the evolving consumer landscape is best achieved by iterating and harnessing AI-powered algorithmic learning for maximum impact and superior conversion results.
- **Data-Driven Personalization:** As we have consistently emphasized, the crucial role of both first and third-party data in delivering personalized, impactful and truly relevant messages cannot be overstated. A core strength of the programmatic channel, particularly within mobile apps, and retail media environments is their ability to empower advertisers to segment audiences by age, children's grade level, preferences, and budget, enabling the delivery of perfectly tailored offers.



YOUR PARTNER FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH: DRIVING IMPACT NOW, BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

The Back-to-School season is a pivotal moment, a distinct period for accelerated demand capture and conversion. Unlike the foundational demand generation focus of summer, BTS is where strategic preparation translates directly into tangible results. The acute needs of consumers returning to their routines create a unique window for driving immediate action.

At Platformance, we understand this critical shift. Our strength lies in seamlessly integrating the three pivotal channels we've discussed – **Influencer, Retail Media, and Commission-Based Commerce** – within a unified, data-driven framework. This isn't just about executing campaigns; it's about providing a comprehensive partnership that empowers you to drive and then transparently measure the results being driven right now via our dashboarding solutions, maximizing your revenue as the market re-engages.



YOUR PARTNER FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH: DRIVING IMPACT NOW, BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

By optimizing your presence and engagement throughout the BTS period, you're capturing immediate sales. In addition, you can generate invaluable, real-time learnings. These insights into audience behavior, conversion pathways and channel effectiveness are directly transferable, building a robust foundation for the crucial Q4 shopping season. The efficiency gains from refined targeting and the sustained brand salience achieved now will directly inform and amplify your performance during peak periods.

Consider BTS not merely as a standalone event, but as your strategic proving ground for Q4. It's the opportunity to refine your conversion strategies, solidify consumer relationships through immediate value, and ensure your brand is not only present, but truly positioned for impactful, sustained growth. Partner with Platformance to transform this pivotal season into a clear, measurable advantage, ensuring you're truly optimized for both immediate success and a dominant performance through the year's most competitive quarter.



