



## Retail

# EXCLUSIVE: Unilever boosts investment, plans major push into premium beauty business in Middle East and beyond

Global FMCG giant outlines strategic plans to tap booming beauty demand across the Middle East, Turkey, Pakistan, and Bangladesh

**James Mathew**

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The plans follow Unilever identifying the UAE and the wider region, along with Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as a 'high-potential region' for growing its beauty business. Image Shutterstock

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Unilever is sharpening its focus on the UAE and wider Middle East, with investments aimed at boosting growth in its beauty business, its regional top executive said.

The global company will also roll out a major expansion in its innovation pipeline, launching premium and hybrid beauty products to cater to the fast-changing consumer aspirations in the region.

It will also undertake a major talent development programme to build local capability, which will involve nurturing the next generation of beauty leaders across all markets in the region.

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The plans follow Unilever identifying the UAE and the wider Middle East region, along with Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as a 'high-potential region' for growing its beauty business to the "next level".

"The vision is clear: to grow the Unilever beauty business by making our brands more desirable, more premium, and more digitally connected than ever before," Manan Gupta, the newly appointed General Manager for Unilever Beauty & Wellbeing across the Middle East, Pakistan, Turkey, and Bangladesh, told *Arabian Business*.

"All of this [will be] supported by strong execution and talent," he said.

Gupta revealed that the company will be investing in digital commerce, building more responsive platforms and personalisation engines so that consumers can interact with its brands in more meaningful ways.

"At the same time, I want to empower our teams across

the PTAB region to move with speed, take ownership, and lead from the front. This is a high-potential region, and we have all the building blocks to shape the future of beauty here,” Gupta said.

Significantly, Unilever’s plans come at a time when the beauty industry in the region, estimated to be valued at \$7.5 billion, is projected to hit a robust growth trajectory in the wake of rising disposable incomes and aspirational lifestyle changes.

### **Expanding beauty innovation pipeline**

Gupta, who is based out of Dubai, said the company will be expanding its innovation pipeline, bringing in premium and hybrid beauty products that reflect changing consumer aspirations.

“Whether it’s new formats, or skin/hair care technologies, we’re focused on staying ahead of the curve using the power of science to create desire,” he said.

He said the company will continue to lead in hair and skin care by combining cutting-edge science with strong brand purpose.

“We’re scaling innovations that deliver superior consumer experiences, while making our go-to-market models more agile and responsive.”

Gupta said looking ahead, the region combines strong macroeconomic tailwinds – like urbanisation and a young population – with consumer trends that are ahead of the curve in many ways.

“Some of these markets, like the UAE are a metaphorical doorway between the East and the West on trends.

“The cultural diversity of the region also means we can test and scale innovations in real-world conditions that reflect a broad spectrum of beauty needs and preferences,” he said.

“From Turkey to Bangladesh, each market is unique, and our ability to tailor global brand power to local relevance is what is setting us apart.”

## **Unilever’s aggressive beauty expansion**

Gupta said the company’s aggressive growth plans follow it seeing a significant shift in consumer behaviour in the region, especially among younger, digitally native audiences who are redefining how beauty is consumed.

This impacts most levers of the industry to bring alive the experience sought for beauty, he said.

According to the Unilever regional chief, two trends that are secular in this region are premiumisation and the surge of e-commerce.

He said consumers continue to increasingly look for products that combine performance with personalisation, and are willing to invest more in high-quality, differentiated experiences around them.

On e-commerce, especially in the GCC and Turkey markets, he said consumers today want an endless digital shelf to discover the 'new' in beauty, tailored recommendations and instant access.

“At Unilever, we are answering this with sharp actions across the consumer journey – from portfolio to all the way building digital-first capabilities across our offerings.”

Gupta said they are also seeing strong momentum in markets like Pakistan and Bangladesh, where rising incomes and increasing internet penetration are unlocking new growth opportunities across both mass and premium segments.

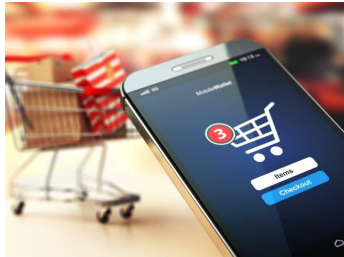
“These markets are ripe for the next round of category building where a connected and aware consumer is seeking the best of the world for herself,” he said.

Gupta said the Middle East, Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh region houses some of the strongest brand positions in the market and is one of the fastest-growing units for Unilever’s global beauty and wellbeing business.

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**ITP Media Group**

**Phone: +971 4 444 3000**

**Email: [info@itp.com](mailto:info@itp.com)**

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