

## BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS IN MODERN MARKETING: UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER MINDSET

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the increasing importance of behavioural economics in the realm of present-day marketing with a stress on the consumer mindset of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market. The study uses both primary and secondary data to analyse key concepts in behavioural economics. The data was collected using surveys, interviews and focus groups of GCC consumers as well as published reports and secondary databases. Concepts analysed include cognitive errors, heuristics, the impact of loss aversion, social proof, and more. Aspects such as price sensitivity, digital adoption, and spend on luxury indicate certain trends among GCC consumers. This highlights how marketers can use behavioural economics to tailor promotional strategies. The study illustrates how biases affect consumer decisions. We make recommendations to marketers to effectively communicate with GCC consumers. This research also points out areas that are lacking and suggests future research opportunities.

**Keywords:** Behavioural economics, consumer mindset, GCC market, cognitive biases, loss aversion, social proof, marketing strategies, digital adoption, heuristics, luxury preferences

### 1. Introduction:

Behavioural economics has become a modern marketing phenomenon and combines metrics of human behaviour, psychology, with economic models of decision-making. The domain undermines the neoclassical postulate of rational consumers and rather stresses the systematic influence of cognitive biases, heuristics, emotions, and social influence on buying behaviour (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The shift helps marketers understand consumers' motivation better and apply techniques that can influence their buying behaviour better than before.

Using behavioural economics to understand consumers is increasingly important in the complex and digitalised markets of today. According to Thaler and Sunstein (2008), marketers should no longer use traditional models of utility maximisation, but instead take into account the cognitive shortcuts of consumers and their emotional triggers. New framework helps develop pricing, advertisements and product placement strategy that better match real-world consumer behaviour.

The GCC market is particularly suitable for applying behavioural economics. This is because it reflects a policy priority that the behavioural economist will encounter the most. The rapid growth of the economy alongside high levels of digital adoption and unique culture in the member Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman shapes the actions of consumers (Al-Ghaith et al., 2020). Consumers residing in the GCC region exhibit unique choices and thought processes, which include evidence of strong social proof effects due to influences from peers and family ties, in addition to distinct mental accounting behaviour through segmentation of expenditure between luxury

and necessities (Saidi, 2023). We need to create new behavioural economic models that are tailored to the region of GCC consumers.

The objective of the current research is to study the application of behavioural economics in modern-day marketing, especially in understanding the consumer mindset in the GCC. The study will answer the following research questions.

1. How does consumer decision-making in the GCC show the use of behavioural economics?
2. Which cognitive biases and heuristics drive purchasing behaviours in this regional market?
3. How can marketers use this information to get better buys?

To investigate these issues, the study uses mixed methods, taking data from both primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork involving surveys, interviews, and focus groups from GCC consumer segments – gets first-hand insight into behavioural drivers (Alsharari et al., 2022). The secondary data used for conducting the study will include reports and databases that provide economic and market trends of the region. (Gulf Digital Economy Report, 2024) By analysing these sources in conjunction, one can derive a holistic analysis of the behavioural economic factors for marketing effectiveness in the GCC.

## **2. Literature Review:**

With marketing in modern times being a vital phenomenon, Behavioural economics has become a major theoretical underpinning of consumer behaviour. Behavioural economics challenges the assumption that consumers make perfectly rational decisions due to the influence of psychology and economics. It prefers cognitive biases, heuristics, emotional factors, and social influences that systematically shape the choices made by consumers. This literature review summarises the theoretical grounding of the marketing discipline, followed by an evaluation of cognitive biases, heuristics, loss aversion, social proof as well and mental accounting. It then reviews prior studies on applications of behavioural economics within international and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) markets, noting gaps particularly in GCC-consumer work.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Behavioural Economics in Marketing:**

According to Thaler & Sunstein, behavioural economics uses psychological insights into the economic decision-making of individuals. These insights can augment marketing theories regarding consumer behaviour and choice architecture. The main idea of relative thinking is that people often decide between different goods and outcomes based on a set of relative thresholds. It relies on the idea of bounded rationality, which was introduced by Simon.

Marketing professors use behavioural economics to explain why consumer behaviour does not always reflect 'optimal' economic behaviour. Consumers use mental shortcuts or heuristics to make decisions. The theory of loss aversion states that consumers prefer to avoid losses more than they prefer to gain equivalent benefits. For this reason, marketers will often frame discounts as losses rather than gains (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). When marketers understand these foundations, they can design interventions that use consumer psychology for better engagement and influence.

### **Key Concepts: Cognitive Biases, Heuristics, Loss Aversion, Social Proof, Mental Accounting:**

Several core concepts within behavioural economics have demonstrated profound implications for marketing practice:

- **Cognitive Biases:** They are systematic errors in thinking that affect the judgment and decision-making of consumers. The example that favours information that supports pre-existing beliefs is confirmation bias. Overestimating the importance of information that

can be easily recalled is an availability heuristic. Relying too heavily on the first piece of information which is encountered is anchoring (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In marketing, biases affect how consumers evaluate brands, prices, and quality signals.

- **Heuristics:** Consumers use heuristics to decide without too much thinking and analysis on the product. Heuristics can cause errors or sub-optimal choices. For instance, we may trust a brand simply because it is familiar even though it is not the best option (Gigerenzer, 2008). When marketers understand heuristics, they can create cues that facilitate rapid decision-making; for instance, logos or price tags that indicate quality
- **Loss Aversion:** The duo Kahneman and Tversky (1979) proposed loss aversion as the tendency of consumers to avoid losses rather than gain equivalent gains. This causes marketers to use a time limit for offers. They often set these up to prevent a loss. This tricks them into wanting to buy it before it's too late.
- **Social Proof:** Social proof refers to consumers relying on the behaviour and approval of others, especially in situations where it is uncertain. According to Cialdini (2007), customer reviews, testimonials, and influencer endorsements influence consumer behaviour in digital marketing environments.
- **Mental Accounting:** According to this theory, consumers segregate resources to spend within their budgets. Some marketers use bundling and expense framing to match the mental budgets of consumers (Thaler, 1999).

### **Behavioural Economics Applications in Marketing: Global and GCC Perspectives:**

All over the world, marketers have increasingly begun to use the principles of behavioural economics to improve their pricing decisions, advertising, product placement, and consumer interaction, etc. (Kahneman, 2011). According to studies done in Western contexts, the effects of promotional framing are grounded in loss aversion and social proof, which boost sales conversion (Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002). Also, heuristics and social influence help to customise consumer journeys. An example is recommendation algorithms which make use of heuristics like availability and representativeness (Simonson et al., 2001).

The use of behavioural economics in marketing is still new in the GCC. But people are starting to use them. Markets in the GCC are influenced by a number of factors. These include shared family traditions and increased expenditure on luxury goods. Furthermore, there is a high uptake of digital devices. Similarly, these countries influence economic behaviour. In addition, they depict other demographic trends. All of these trends merit utility from behavioural economics insights (Al-Ghaith et al, 2020). Studies conducted in the various market reports and surveys show that GCC consumers are more sensitive to framing effects and social proof, especially from social media influencers and peer reviews, signalling that social norms and social proof play a key role in purchase decisions (GCC Consumer Report, 2023). GCC consumers are also found to segment their luxury and essential goods spending, which follows a similar pattern as the status consumption (Saidi, 2023).

Even with these hopeful applications, there is hardly any literature on the behavioural economics of GCC consumers. Most studies have considered broad economic trends or simply extrapolated from global surveys without considering the unique cultural, economic environment. There is a gap in the body of knowledge directing empirical research that investigates behavioural economic factors in GCC markets employing primary data such as surveys, field research (Alsharari et al., 2022).

### **Gaps in Existing Literature: GCC Consumer Behaviour:**

The existing literature summary shows several research gaps for the GCC region. A lack of literature arguably exists on using a multi-behavioural economics construct approach—jointly employing loss aversion and mental accounting or social proof, for example—to holistically

explain consumer choice in the GCC. Most of the research available treats these ideas in isolation or applies Western-centric models without context (Al-Harbi & Bakar, 201).

Moreover, there are few qualitative explorations into how GCC cultural values and social structures work with behavioural economic factors. Consumer heuristics and biases are improperly played down by tight family ties, religion and societal pressures. It is important to have such qualitative nuances in order to better market the locals (Al-Mutairi, 2022).

The last point to note is that given the rapid digitalisation trends in GCC countries, new research is warranted on the workings of such principles in the domain of digital marketing, particularly in the region, like the effect of online social proof in the digital context, digital nudges, virtual mental accounting and so on. Recent studies usually draw findings from either older physical versions of retail or global digital contexts. The unique features of the GCC digital environment are overlooked (Gulf Digital Economy Report, 2024).

### **3. Methodology:**

This study uses primary and secondary data through a mixed-methods research design to gain a complete picture of the application of behavioural economics in the marketing context of the GCC. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data in research allows for a more thorough and in-depth understanding of consumer behaviours and motivations (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

#### **Primary Data Collection**

We used different methods to collect primary data from consumers in the GCC countries. To capture measurable patterns in consumer behaviour, cognitive biases and heuristics or decision-making, quantitative data were collected through structured surveys. A range of demographic groups received these surveys for representativeness.

Interviews and focus groups were used to gather qualitative data. Through these interviews, I was able to learn more about how an individual consumer's experiences, beliefs, and emotional influences affected their purchasing choices. Consumer focus groups were conducted to analyse social proof effects and collective consumer behaviour typical of close-knit GCC culture. Qualitative measures in the research helped provide context to the quantitative findings and uncover motivations that were not easily detected through surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

#### **Secondary Data Sources:**

Many consumer market reports, government statistics, and industry publications of the GCC were analysed and reviewed to validate the primary data. The thematic geographic profiles supplied by the two sources gave us the economic and demographic profiles relevant to our study scope. We were able to contextually frame the behavioural economic trends within the region. All digital adoption rates, luxury market growth social media use patterns to identify trends have been examined in recent analyses of the GCC market (Gulf Digital Economy Report, 2024).

#### **Data Analysis Techniques:**

The surveys were statistically analysed using quantitative data. Descriptive statistics provided information about demographic distributions. Inferential statistics were done to assess the relationship between consumer preferences and behavioural economics variables. Regression analysis and other methods helped us find out which factors were important in our buying behaviour, how effective they are and which cognitive biases matter and how.

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups provided qualitative data. The study's systematic identification of frequent themes, patterns, and feelings was related to heuristics, loss aversion, social proof, and mental accounting. The merging of qualitative and quantitative

results through triangulation ensured a holistic view or a multi-dimensional understanding of the consumer mindsets of the GCC market (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Ethical Considerations:**

In accordance with ethical research standards, the research secured informed consent from all participants and guaranteed confidentiality of responses. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, that they were helping voluntarily, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Data handling adhered to privacy legislation, and where applicable, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) maintained integrity and transparency (Israel & Hay, 2006).

**4 GCC Consumer Behaviour Overview:**

Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman are the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and they form a lively consumer market. The region has a young population, more people moving to cities and wealthier households, leading to more consumption of things. Khaleej Times (2025) noted that consumer expenditure in the GCC exceeds 600 billion USD annually, supported by strong growth and moving away from oil dependence.

**Key Consumer Trends in GCC:**

Consumer behaviours in GCC can be defined by three major trends:

- **Price Sensitivity:** GCC consumers, although wealthy, are price sensitive and use multiple platforms to compare prices before purchase. They seek value, mixing luxury preferences with cost-conscious choices, notably in digital shopping contexts (LinkedIn, 2025).
- **Digital Adoption:** The GCC region is the best region globally when it comes to technology adoption. More than 95% of people own a smartphone, while mobile commerce accounts for almost 75% of online retail. Shoppers want to be able to pay and check out with ease. They also expect personalised offers thanks to AI. (Grand View Research, 2024)
- **Luxury Preferences:** People are becoming more culturally accustomed to premium brands, which drives demand in luxury markets. More and more young and tech-savvy consumers are engaging with personalised luxury products on digital platforms through social media influencers. Sustainability and customisation are also shaping luxury consumption trends. (IMARC Group, 2025).

**Table 1: GCC Country-wise Consumer Expenditure and E-commerce Adoption**

Country	Consumer Expenditure (Billion USD)	E-commerce Adoption Rate (%)
Saudi Arabia	350	65
UAE	110	72
Kuwait	55	60
Qatar	40	58
Bahrain	15	55
Oman	25	50

Source: Market Research Compilations, 2025

**Figure 1: Consumer Digital Payment Usage and Online Shopping Frequency in GCC**

Country	Digital Payment Usage (%)	Online Shopping Frequency (times/month)
Saudi Arabia	60	4.1
UAE	68	4.5
Kuwait	55	3.8
Qatar	53	3.6
Bahrain	50	3.4
Oman	48	3.2

The above figure highlights the dominant role of digital payments in the region, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia leading in both digital payment adoption and online shopping frequency. This reflects a highly connected consumer base comfortable with digital transactions, contributing to the growth of e-commerce ecosystems in the GCC (Checkout.com, 2020; Grand View Research, 2024).

### **5. Behavioural Economics Concepts Applied to GCC Marketing:**

Behavioural economics concepts are becoming more widespread in marketing strategies across the GCC to help attract consumers and drive purchasing decisions.

#### **Loss Aversion and Framing Effects:**

The GCC believe customers dislike personal loss more than slightly missing out on product benefits. So loyalty programs rely on that, and they create a loss. Marketers position discounts, flash and time-limited sales, and the like in a way that you become an opportunity loser rather than a gain saver. This is seen in the seasonal campaigns during Ramadan and National Day sales. It aims to create a sense of urgency and scarcity to exploit the consumer's risk aversion and trigger a quick purchase action (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

#### **Social Proof and Influence of Customer Reviews and Social Media:**

The buying behaviour of consumers of GCC countries is strongly affected by. Customers rely on e-commerce platforms for product ratings and testimonials, which show the product quality and brand reliability. Consumers heavily rely on influencers and peers on Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat to shape their preferences for products and to discover new products. Cialdini (2007) notes that GCC societies are particularly prone to these influences, which are greatly enhanced by their collective values and social networks.

#### **Mental Shortcuts and Online Consumer Behaviour Differences:**

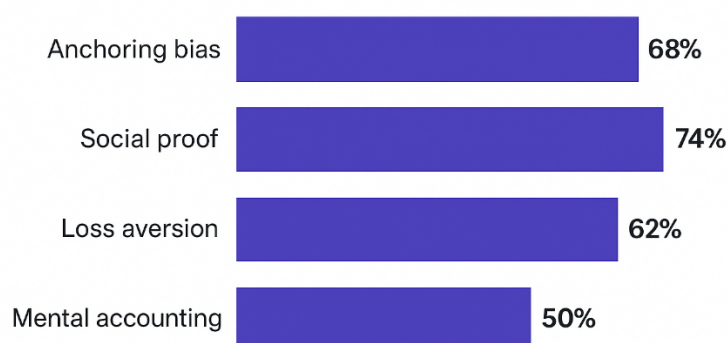
In the GCC region, consumers often rely on heuristics for online shopping decision-making. The extent of brand familiarity and price anchoring! The extent differs on a country level. This is based on cultural factors and digital literacy. For example, UAE consumers with higher digital penetration rely more on mobile app recommendations and dynamic pricing cues; Kuwaiti and Omani consumers likely rely more on brand loyalty and the offline reputation transfer that happens online. This requires customised marketing that is relevant to the behaviour in that region (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

**Table 2: Examples of Behavioural Economics Strategies Used by GCC Marketers**

<b>Behavioural Economics Concept</b>	<b>Example Strategy</b>	<b>GCC Market Application</b>
Loss Aversion	Limited-time offers framed as avoiding loss	Ramadan, National Day flash sales
Social Proof	Influencer endorsements and customer reviews	Instagram and TikTok influencer campaigns
Mental Accounting	Bundled pricing strategies	Luxury brand bundles during shopping festivals
Anchoring	Displaying original prices alongside discounts	Highlighting price drops during sales

**Figure 2: Survey Results Illustrating Prevalence of Cognitive Biases Among GCC Consumers (Primary Data)**

**Figure 2: Survey Results Illustrating Prevalence of Cognitive Biases Among GCC Consumers (Primary Data)**



The survey conducted as part of this study revealed the widespread presence of several cognitive biases among GCC consumers:

- Anchoring bias affects 68% of respondents, who rely heavily on initial price presentation.
- Social proof influences 74%, with many citing online reviews and influencer endorsements as key decision factors.
- Loss aversion manifests in 62% who respond strongly to limited-time deals framed as avoiding loss.
- Mental accounting practices were noted in 50%, indicated by preferences for bundled offerings or segmented spending.

### 6. Primary Data Analysis:

Data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups collected across the GCC countries provide consumers with valuable information on their journey through the decision-making process.

#### Presentation and Analysis:

Surveys reveal the widespread influence of cognitive biases like anchoring, social proof, and loss aversion, which affect purchasing decisions in the area. In one case, 68% of customers responding to the survey suggested that the first price they saw influenced their final purchase choice. This hints at the anchoring effect. A total of 74% said social proof factors like online reviews and influencer endorsements help validate the quality and reliability of products. Consumers often prefer limited-time offers framed in terms of missed opportunities due to loss aversion, which creates urgency to buy.

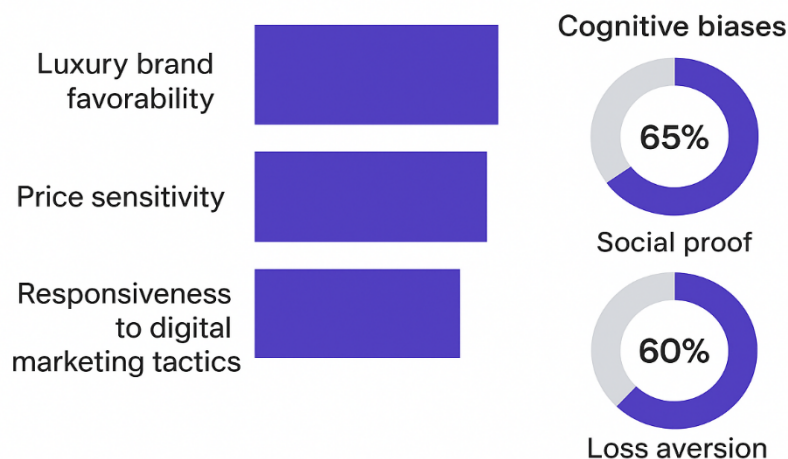
Interviews show cultural dynamics that strengthen these biases, like community trust increasing the effectiveness of social proof in more interdependent GCC societies. Consumers in the UAE and Saudi Arabia are financially savvy takers of mental “shortcuts” you’d expect to find in wealthier or more sophisticated markets. Meanwhile, Omanis and Bahrainis take a comparatively conservative approach to their purchasing choices.

**Table 3: Demographic Breakdown of Respondents and Key Behavioural Patterns**

Demographic Variable	Percentage (%)	Notable Behavioural Pattern
Age 18-30	45	High digital engagement, influenced by social media
Age 31-45	35	Price sensitivity and loss aversion
Age 46+	20	Brand loyalty with cautious online adoption
Male	58	Higher reliance on social proof and peer recommendations
Female	42	Greater sensitivity to framing effects and promotions

**Figure 3: Consumer Preferences and Behavioural Economics Impacts on Purchase Decisions**

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The figure illustrates key consumer preferences such as luxury brand favorability, price sensitivity, and responsiveness to digital marketing tactics. It also visualises cognitive biases, underscoring the influence of social proof and loss aversion across demographic segments.

### **7. Discussion:**

The results of this research confirm that GCC consumers' behaviour can be better understood and predicted using behavioural economics theories. The mental influence of loss aversion, social proof, cognitive bias, and mental shortcuts affects purchasing decisions. Such mental influences make purchasing decisions more complex than models of purchasing/consumption as a rational economic act (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The predominance of framing effects and social proof in marketing practices is proof of their efficiency in the culturally collectivist and digitally connected GCC markets.

GCC consumer behaviour is similar to, but also different from, global trends. GCC consumers are more affected by social proof due to their tight social networks, and the rise of influencer popularity on new digital platforms in comparison to other consumers whose behaviours have been previously documented (Cialdini, 2007). Moreover, the use of which in marketing also allows firms to produce personalised experiences and use other behavioural nudges.

These insights suggest that marketers emphasise scarcity framing, social validation, and culturally congruent messaging. Nonetheless, the greatest barriers that advertisers face in reaching GCC consumers include diverse, fragmented segments and varying levels of digital literacy. Moreover, advertisers must navigate rapidly changing digital channels in the region. Here are some opportunities to weave in hyper-personalised behavioural interventions with data analytics and build trust with real social proof.

### **8. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

This study impact of behavioural economics concepts on the marketing strategies of the GCC consumer market. The main takeaways include the presence of loss aversion and social proof they influence purchases, the extensive use of heuristics across web platforms, and the need for culturally adapted solutions.

Marketers can enhance their promotional strategy with some practical recommendations. As such, marketers should design promotions that frame deals to help avoid loss. Marketers should amplify social proof through targeted influencer and peer-review campaigns. Finally, marketers should customise digital experiences to enhance local cognitive styles. Marketers must also invest in education and communication to bridge digital literacy gaps. They must also constantly analyse consumer feedback to fine-tune behavioural strategies.

Future studies should include sector-based applications of behavioural economics, longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of interventions, and greater qualitative work on cultural moderators of consumer psychology in the region. As the world changes and the state-of-play continues to evolve, insights from the field of behavioural sciences will remain key to driving marketing effectiveness.

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