

WONDERFUL WORK

# POWERFUL INSIGHTS

APRIL 2025

This is the third in a market intelligence series from Tonic, designed to help businesses navigate the evolving world of work.

At Tonic, we believe in creating Wonderful Work That Works. Work that inspires, engages, and delivers real impact. Through this series, we bring you sharp, data-driven insights into talent trends, employer branding, and workplace culture, with a special focus on KSA & the UAE.

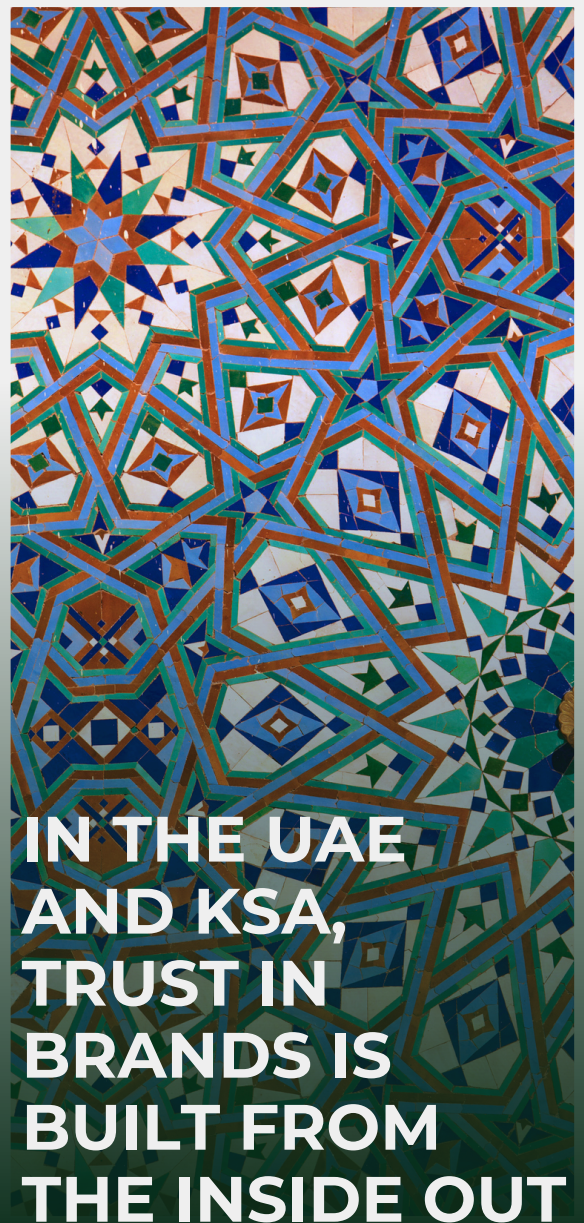
## NAVIGATING THE TALENT TRENDS THAT IMPACT EMPLOYERS IN THE GCC

Brand trust is no longer exclusively built through top-down messages or advertising. It's created through real interactions, human experiences and personal recommendations. As a result, employees have become amongst the most credible voices a brand can offer.

Across the GCC, businesses are alive to this shift. In a region where personal networks and cultural connections matter, the employee voice is a critical source of brand trust. Not just because they are close to the customer experience, but because their stories carry the weight of authenticity.

In this issue, we explore how this adjustment is reshaping brand reputation across the Gulf. We explore how this shift is influencing performance, reputation and recruitment, and how employers can align brand strength with workforce connection and engagement.

**BOTTOM LINE:**  
**THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUR PEOPLE INFLUENCES CUSTOMERS, CANDIDATES AND COMMUNITIES.**





## YOUR PEOPLE ARE YOUR BRAND: TRUST, ADVOCACY AND REPUTATION IN THE GCC

What do people trust today? In a world flooded with content and campaigns, the answer is increasingly simple: other people. Studies show that **76% of people trust content shared by individuals more than by companies**, and **92% trust recommendations from friends and peers above advertising**. In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where word-of-mouth is a cultural constant, this shift is especially pronounced.

Employees are now at the heart of brand trust. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, in an age of institutional doubt, the most trusted source of information for many is “my employer.” **People trust employees more than CEOs, media or government officials to speak credibly on company values and behaviour**. That means employee voices are not just important – they’re critical to brand credibility.

**This trust translates into influence.** A consumer is more likely to believe a company’s sustainability claim if it comes from an engineer, not a spokesperson. A candidate will weigh employee reviews more heavily than employer branding campaigns. And **when employees speak positively, the benefits are real**.

**Businesses with highly engaged workforces report 147% higher earnings per share than their competitors**, according to Gallup. All of this makes internal trust a branding issue. How organisations engage, support and empower their people shapes the story that’s told externally. **When employees feel connected, their advocacy becomes a powerful force. One that builds trust, boosts visibility and drives performance.**



## INSIDE-OUT BRAND BUILDING IN THE UAE AND SAUDI ARABIA

The link between employee experience and brand strength is especially visible in the Gulf. **In the UAE, engagement rates have risen steadily, from just 19% in 2019 to over 30% in 2022, the highest in the region.** This rise isn't just good for morale. It has measurable impact. **Disengaged employees are estimated to cost the UAE economy over \$10 billion** in lost productivity, but the upside is that engaged people generate value. **They advocate, they innovate, and they deliver.**

Trust is currency. A 2023 UAE survey found that **62% of employees would “highly recommend” their company’s products and services, but only if they feel valued.**

In KSA, 60% of large employers are investing in formal ambassador programmes, encouraging their teams to share stories and successes. And when they do, the effects are tangible. Whether it's a surge in applications following a “Great Place to Work” award or positive sentiment linked to staff-led campaigns, the relationship between internal culture and external reputation is becoming clearer.

Regional employers are responding. Companies like Emirates, Emaar and Etisalat are weaving employee voices into their marketing. Saudi organisations are using platforms like LinkedIn to showcase their people as the face of their brand. And both markets are seeing stronger alignment between what employees say and what customers believe. The result? **Brands that feel more human. More relatable. More trusted.**

### ADVOCACY IN PRACTICE:

#### WHY EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PAYS OFF

Employee engagement and the resulting brand ambassador behaviours are reshaping how brands grow and connect. **In the Gulf, where personal networks are powerful and trust is built person-to-person, stories from employees have a unique value.** When people talk about their work, their culture, and their purpose, others listen.

This strategy is delivering clear results. **Content shared by employees receives over five times more reach and eight times more engagement than company posts.** Audiences trust it more. 76% say they believe content from individuals over brands. It's more engaging, more authentic, and it resonates.

### HOW EMPLOYERS CAN BUILD ADVOCACY:

- **Empower people to share:** Give employees support and confidence to tell their stories.
- **Connect advocacy to culture:** Link it to purpose, recognition and pride.
- **Make it strategic:** Integrate advocacy into brand and recruitment plans.



## SECTOR SPOTLIGHT: HOSPITALITY IN SAUDI ARABIA

In Saudi Arabia's booming hospitality sector, people really are the product. As Vision 2030 drives rapid expansion in tourism, hotels and resorts are realising that service quality, and therefore brand experience, is determined by employee engagement.

The numbers are striking. **Hospitality in KSA grew by 107% in 2024 alone.** Thousands of young Saudis are entering the industry through new training schemes, with many high-end resorts reporting over 90% local staffing. **That investment in people is having a visible impact.** From the Red Sea to Riyadh, guests are noting the friendliness, professionalism and cultural authenticity of their interactions.

The best brands are elevating their people. Some, like **Hilton and Four Seasons, have topped workplace satisfaction rankings in KSA.** Others, like boutique resorts in Al-Ula, are using social media to **showcase the stories and personalities of their staff.** These moments, a guest helped by a concierge, a surprise arranged by housekeeping, are becoming part of the brand narrative.

Hospitality has long understood the Service-Profit Chain: employee satisfaction drives customer satisfaction, which drives loyalty and performance. What's new is how clearly that chain is being communicated. Empowered, visible employees are not just delivering the brand. **They are the brand.**

### APRIL'S FINAL THOUGHT

Brand trust starts with people. And in a region where relationships matter, it's employee experience that sets the tone. Companies that invest in their people, and give them the voice, tools and culture to succeed, aren't just building better workplaces. **They're building better brands.**

As trust becomes the defining currency of competitive advantage, **the message is clear: your people are your brand.** The most successful employers in the GCC will be the ones who recognise that, act on it, and let their people lead.