

# Retail Competitiveness Hinges on Service Quality: BCCI

Rapid e-commerce growth is reshaping consumer behaviour in Bahrain

TDT | Manama

The Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) has stressed the importance of developing the retail sector to keep pace with rapidly evolving consumer behaviour and purchasing patterns, highlighting service quality and operational efficiency as critical factors in maintaining competitiveness.

Shaker Mirza Al Huli, a member of the BCCI Board of Directors, said retailers face significant changes in consumer expectations, requiring businesses to modernise management practices, improve operational performance and enhance service delivery to remain competitive in a changing marketplace.

Al Huli noted that competition in the retail sector is no longer determined solely by expansion and increasing the number of outlets. Instead, success is increasingly driven by service quality, responsiveness and a deeper understanding of consumer needs, as shoppers place greater emphasis on value



for money, product quality and speed of service.

He explained that the rapid growth of e-commerce and on-demand services has fundamentally transformed the market and intensified competition. Consequently, businesses must move beyond traditional operating models and focus on improving customer experience, increasing efficiency, reducing waste and leveraging modern technologies and data analytics to enhance decision-making and

service delivery.

He added that the retail and food sectors remain closely linked to daily economic activity, making adaptability essential for business continuity and stability. He noted that Bahrain's private sector has accumulated significant expertise, helping to maintain market stability and provide consumers with diverse options despite various economic challenges.

Al Huli highlighted digital transformation as one of the

Today's consumers are looking for value, quality and fast service more than traditional marketing appearances, this requires retailers to be more flexible and capable of adapting quickly to market changes

SHAKER MIRZA AL HULI

primary drivers of retail sector growth. He pointed out that the value of e-commerce in Bahrain reached approximately BD1.722 billion in 2025, up from BD1.501 billion in 2024, representing growth of 14.7 per cent. The figures reflect continued shifts in consumer purchasing behaviour and the growing role of technology in enhancing services and business efficiency.

He also noted that the wholesale and retail trade sector recorded growth of 2.8 per cent in 2024, underscoring the impor-

**E-commerce expansion: 14.7% growth in Bahrain online retail (2025).**

**Sector growth: Wholesale and retail trade up 2.8% in 2024.**

**Digital transformation: Data analytics and tech adoption are becoming essential.**

tance of continued investment in operational and technological capabilities across the industry.

Looking ahead, Al Huli said businesses should explore opportunities for mergers and strategic integration where appropriate, particularly among medium and large companies. Such initiatives could help reduce operating costs, strengthen competitiveness and improve long-term sustainability in the face of rising costs and rapidly changing market conditions.

He reaffirmed the Bahrain Chamber's commitment to supporting the development of commercial and service sectors and enhancing their ability to respond to economic changes. He noted that the restructuring of sectoral committees

during the current term aims to strengthen engagement with businesses, identify challenges and opportunities and submit recommendations that contribute to improving the business environment and boosting private sector competitiveness.

Al Huli concluded by warning that companies that fail to adapt to changing consumer behaviour and modernise their operations will face increasing challenges in maintaining market share. He stressed that future success will depend on innovation, customer experience, effective use of technology and stronger cooperation between the public and private sectors to create a more resilient and competitive economy capable of achieving sustainable growth.

## Anthropic cuts access to AI models over US 'national security' order

AFP | San Francisco

Anthropic said it will "abruptly disable" its most advanced AI models for all users after the U.S. government ordered it to suspend access to the models for foreign nationals, citing national security concerns.

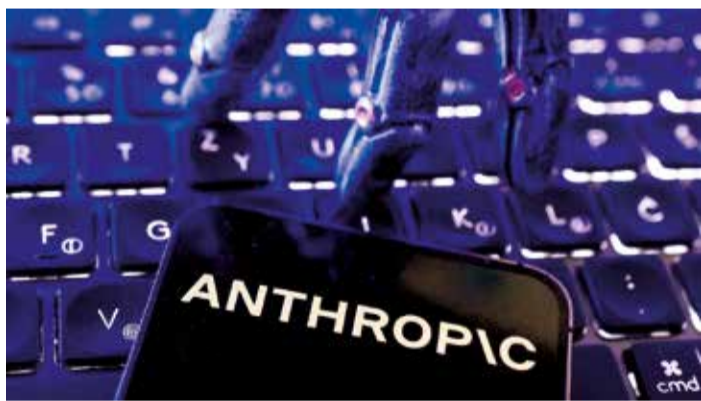
The company received the export control directive to suspend access to Fable 5 and Mythos 5 for all foreign nationals, without being given specific details of its national security concern, Anthropic said in a statement.

It is Anthropic's understanding that the government believes there is a method of bypassing, or "jailbreaking," a safeguard that would prevent Fable 5 from being used in identifying software vulnerabilities, the company said.

The order comes just as a previous dispute between Trump administration officials and IPO-bound Anthropic showed signs of easing across parts of the U.S. government.

Anthropic's relationship with the government ruptured this year after it refused to allow the U.S. military to use its AI models for domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons systems. The government responded by putting Anthropic on a supply chain blacklist, set to take effect later in the year.

The action also marks a major escalation of U.S. efforts to halt foreign adversaries' AI capabilities. For years, U.S. export con-



trols have focused on the chips and tools that power AI rather than on restricting foreign access to AI itself.

Anthropic said the government has given it only "verbal evidence of a potential narrow, non-universal jailbreak".

"We disagree that the finding of a narrow potential jailbreak should be cause for recalling a commercial model deployed to hundreds of millions of people," the company said.

The government directive and Anthropic's response highlight growing tension between AI developers and regulators over how to assess risks from so-called "jailbreaks," or methods used to bypass model safeguards.

As recently as Wednesday, Anthropic had called for greater U.S. oversight of AI, including the ability to block models with unacceptable risks. It said, however, the government action on Friday did not follow principles of fair and fact-based regulation.

The Pentagon's chief information officer, Kirsten Davies, said

in a post on X that the Defense Department supported prioritizing national security.

"Some things are simply more important than revenue cycles, clickbait, and pre-IPO valuation. America First. Always," Davies said.

Anthropic confidentially filed for a U.S. IPO last month, edging ahead of rival OpenAI in the race to reach public markets.

### Sophisticated cyberattacks

Earlier this week, Anthropic rolled out an AI model named Claude Fable 5, representing a new tier of capability it calls "Mythos-class." The model is accompanied by guardrails barring its use in risky areas such as cybersecurity, which some users have complained are "overly broad," Anthropic said.

Experts have said that Mythos models, in the wrong hands, could dramatically accelerate sophisticated cyberattacks, particularly in sectors such as banking that rely on complex, interconnected, and often decades-old technology systems.

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Several prominent Anthropic figures, including co-founder Chris Olah and researcher Andrej Karpathy, were born outside the United States, raising questions about how broadly the restrictions could apply

Anthropic said it had worked with the U.S. government, among others, on safety ahead of the Fable launch and that models from rival AI providers showed a similar ability to unearth minor bugs in code.

"The net effect of this order is that we must abruptly disable Fable 5 and Mythos 5 for all our customers to ensure compliance. Access to all other Anthropic models will not be affected," Anthropic said.

Anthropic said that it believed there was a "misunderstanding" and that it is working to restore access to the models as soon as possible.

"If this standard was applied across the industry, we believe it would essentially halt all new model deployments for all frontier model providers," the company said.

## US clears Paramount's \$111 bn Warner Bros. takeover



AFP | Los Angeles

The US Justice Department cleared Paramount Skydance's \$111 billion takeover of Warner Bros. Discovery, handing a major win to a media empire financed by one of President Donald Trump's closest billionaire allies.

The Antitrust Division approved the blockbuster deal without demanding a single change, capping an eight-month review and clearing the way for one of the largest media mergers in years.

It said the tie-up was "not likely to result in harm to competition or American consumers" -- and could even increase competition.

The approval is a coup for Paramount chief executive David Ellison, whose father, Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, largely financed the takeover.

The elder Ellison, one of the world's richest men, is a close ally of Trump.

A group of Democratic senators led by Elizabeth Warren had warned that a Warner Bros. deal risked being "taint-

ed by political favoritism and corruption," urging the Justice Department to review it on the law and facts.

Larry Ellison's financial guarantee was what finally won over the Warner Bros. board, sealing Paramount's victory in a bruising bidding war with Netflix.

The combined company will control a sprawling roster of assets, including CNN, Warner Bros. Pictures and the HBO Max streaming service.

But the federal sign-off does not end the deal's legal peril.

A coalition of about 10 states led by California is preparing an antitrust lawsuit that could land this month, Bloomberg has reported.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta's office said this week the acquisition "remains an active investigation." The European Commission is reviewing the merger as well.

Hollywood is uneasy about the deal. Hundreds of actors and directors have signed a letter opposing the merger, warning it will choke production in an industry already battered by years of consolidation and cost-cutting.