

# Will technology reinvent 'the new normal' in 2021?

By [Mohammed Amin](#)

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2020 can only be described as an unpredictable year, and one that brought with it some of the most dramatic shifts we've seen in the way we live and work. In a year of uncertainty, it's safe to say that technology was the one constant - the platform that transformed the fundamentals of commerce, healthcare, education and financial services across the world.



Mohammed Amin, senior vice-president – MERAT, Dell Technologies

I've also always believed that disruption is a process that plays out over time; sometimes slowly, but completely and the pandemic proved this to be true. It showed that it's imperative for organisations to invest in a holistic and strategic approach to respond to the pace of disruption. This investment calls for the convergence of technologies, to connect, collaborate and create new services that will ultimately help weather disruption.

As we head into 2021, my conversations with our customers and partners across the MERAT region are centred around one common theme – how to transform for the long term.

2020 brought with it an accelerated pace of digital transformation, so the question we must ask is what are some of the major opportunities and shifts that will dominate the business landscape? And more importantly, can organisations rise to take advantage of these market dynamics? Here are the broad segments within technology that we expect will play out in the year ahead.

## 1. Hybrid cloud for the hybrid workforce:

A recent [IDC survey](#) showed that

across the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa region, at least one third of CIOs are planning to increase their spending on cloud. Investments in cloud operating models that span public, private and edge environments will continue to grow, enabling rapid scale and management of IT everywhere, with the security and visibility organisations need to keep their data protected.



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**2. Edge opportunity comes into focus:** The increase in remote work and learning combined with data-powered smart applications has meant that data workloads need to be managed and analysed in real-time at the edge. Across every industry, organisations are now looking to edge technology to improve agility and customer experiences. According to [IDC](#), the worldwide edge computing market will reach \$250.6bn in 2024 with a compound annual growth rate of 12.5% over the 2019–2024 forecast period. This means we'll see even more investments into simpler and faster-to-deploy distributed technology infrastructure, particularly within the education and healthcare sectors.

**3. The promise of 5G:** The pandemic may have slowed the deployment of 5G networks in non-GCC markets, however 5G leaders in the GCC have continued to invest in the technology, and 5G activities in non-GCC countries are expected to gather pace again from 2021, according to the GSMA. Effective management of spectrum is key to maximising this opportunity, and mobile network operators will invest in modern IT that “cloudifies” their network architecture – bringing us closer to widespread connectivity and edge processing made possible by 5G.



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**4. Intelligent PCs will make work and play more seamless, intelligent and enjoyable:** A [Dell-commissioned Forrester Consulting survey](#) revealed that remote work is likely to become the norm, with 67% of decision-makers extending remote working arrangements for some employees even after the pandemic, and 57% introducing more flexible work-from-home policies. As people adapt to hybrid remote working models, technology will continue to evolve as well. We'll see a combination of AI, cloud and improved connectivity merge to improve user experiences with devices. AI will make PCs more seamless, customised and hassle free. Intelligent software will help your device understand when you do not want to be seen in a video conference and new apps and services will continue to make collaboration easier and more organic, and the systems we're using will also start to see upgrades in functionality.

**5. AI disruption will unlock human potential:** Technology will enable a greater sense of connectivity in a time where we're working and learning further apart from our homes. AI and automation will reimagine the division of labour between humans and machines. In this region, AI, IOT and other new interfaces are already changing how organisations and governments operate, with the annual growth in the contribution of AI expected to range between 20-34% per year across the region, according to [PWC](#), with the fastest growth in the UAE followed by KSA. AI is also expected to contribute over \$135.2bn in 2030 to the KSA economy alone. We'll offload more thinking tasks to AI instead of just mechanical ones, leading to faster, deeper and more meaningful insights than enables us to shift our focus to greater innovation, purposeful work and human connections.



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## Conclusion

While 2020 has brought significant and unexpected change, 2021 will begin to shape a society that is more trustworthy, empathetic, patient and flexible. I am optimistic and excited about what the new year holds, especially as we see technology play a fundamental role in strengthening the regional economy. Digitalisation will accelerate the transformation of key sectors and help boost recovery over the coming year, as well as allow for innovation to once again be central to the regional growth agenda. In short, this is the year we will see technology have a stronger impact on the world with the changes driven by a stronger sense of purpose. It is this change in society that I am most excited about and which gives me a sense of hope and optimism for what's to come in 2021.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohammed Amin, senior vice-president - MERAT, Dell Technologies

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