# E-COMMERCE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A STUDY OFFONLINE SHOPPING TRENDS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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**Annotatsiya**

Markaziy Osiyoda onlayn xarid qilish sur'ati tashqi kuzatuvchilarni hayratda qoldirmoqda. 2023-2024 yillar orasida mintaqaviy bozor taxminan 32 foizga kengaydi bu ko'rsatkich global o'rtacha ko'rsatkichdan ancha yuqori. Ushbu maqolada o'sishning raqamiy ko'rsatkichlari bilan birga, iste'molchilar xulq-atvorining psixologik omillari  nima ularni onlayn xaridga undashi, nima to'sqinlik qilishi, platformalarga ishonch qanday shakllanishi ham tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot Qozog'iston, O'zbekiston, Qirg'iziston va Tojikistonga qaratilgan bo'lib, so'nggi bozor ma'lumotlari va akademik adabiyotlarga asoslanadi.

***Kalit so'zlar:*** *e-tijorat, Markaziy Osiyo, iste'molchi xulq-atvori, Qozog'iston, O'zbekiston, raqamli to'lovlar, onlayn savdo, logistika, ishonch, mobil tijorat*

**Abstract**

Online shopping in Central Asia has been growing at a pace that catches many outside observers off guard. Between 2023 and 2024 alone, the regional market expanded by roughly 32 percent, a figure that dwarfs the global average and hints at just how much pent-up consumer demand existed before digital infrastructure arrived to meet it. This paper tries to make sense of that growth by examining not just the numbers, but the people behind them: why they shop online, what stops them, what makes them trust one platform over another, and how their behavior differs from consumers in more mature e-commerce markets.

***Keywords:*** *e-commerce, Central Asia, consumer behavior, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, digital payments, online retail, logistics, trust, mobile commerce*

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## Introduction

Walk through any major bazaar in Tashkent or Almaty on a weekday afternoon and it's still buzzing vendors hawking electronics, stacks of fabric bolts, spice bags, imported appliances. The bazaar is not a relic here; it's the main event. And yet, tucked into those same crowds, you'll find young people scrolling through Uzum or Kaspi on their phones, comparing prices, arranging deliveries. Both worlds exist simultaneously and understanding how the second is gradually absorbing the first is the central question this paper tries to answer.

Central Asia's e-commerce market was valued at around USD 14.7 billion in 2024, which sounds like a lot until you consider that online retail accounts for somewhere between 4 and 16 percent of total retail sales across the five republics compared to 20 to 30 percent in Western Europe or the United States. That gap tells you something important: this market is growing fast, but it's growing from a very low base. Projections from IMARC Group put the regional figure at USD 182.2 billion by 2033, implying a compound annual growth rate of around 30 percent.

The forces behind this growth are well-documented: rising internet access, smartphone proliferation, a young population comfortable with digital platforms, and the pandemic-era disruption that pushed consumers online when physical stores closed. But the specifics matter more than the generalities. Kazakhstan's growth story is different from Uzbekistan's, which is different again from Kyrgyzstan's. Treating Central Asia as a monolithic market leads to strategies that work nowhere.

## Literature Review

The academic study of e-commerce consumer behavior has accumulated considerably since the late 1990s, though much of the foundational work was done in North American or Western European contexts that don't translate cleanly to Central Asia. Still, certain frameworks remain useful as starting points.

Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (1989) established that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two fundamental drivers of technology adoption. That insight holds, but subsequent research has had to complicate it significantly. Trust, it turns out, is often more important than ease of use in contexts where consumers are unfamiliar with digital transactions or have historical reasons to be wary of institutions. Miao et al. (2022) found that e-trust and perceived value were stronger predictors of repurchase intention than satisfaction alone in B2C e-commerce settings a finding that resonates strongly with Central Asia, where the question isn't usually whether a platform is easy to use but whether it can be trusted at all.

The literature on the 'trust-risk paradox' is particularly interesting here. Increasing trust doesn't automatically reduce perceived risk consumers can trust a brand's reputation while still viewing digital payment itself as risky. That distinction matters in markets like Uzbekistan, where consumers happily use Uzum but still prefer to pay cash at the door. Trust in the platform and trust in the payment mechanism are separate things, and platforms that have understood this by offering cash-on-delivery, installment plans, or pay-later models have outgrown those that haven't.

## Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative primary data collection with qualitative and quantitative analysis of secondary sources. The mixed approach was chosen deliberately: secondary data provides macro-level market context, while primary survey data captures the individual-level consumer attitudes, trust perceptions, and behavioral patterns that market reports typically cannot reveal. The concurrent triangulation design used here allows both data strands to be collected and analyzed in parallel, with findings integrated at the interpretation stage.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and behavioral profile of 240 survey respondents. The sample skews toward younger adults, reflecting the demographic composition of active online shoppers in both countries and consistent with the platform’s own reported user demographics. The high proportion preferring cash-on-delivery (63.3%) is itself a substantive finding, corroborating the trust-related patterns discussed and lending ecological validity to the survey instrument.

**Table 1. Survey sample profile (n = 240)**

| Characteristic | n | % of Sample |
|---|---|---|
| Country: Kazakhstan | 130 | 54.2% |
| Country: Uzbekistan | 110 | 45.8% |
| Age 18-24 | 86 | 35.8% |
| Age 25-34 | 96 | 40.0% |
| Age 35+ | 58 | 24.2% |
| Shops online monthly or more | 181 | 75.4% |
| Prefers cash-on-delivery | 152 | 63.3% |

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were computed for all scale items. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine relationships between trust perceptions, payment method preferences, and stated likelihood of increased online spending. Multiple linear regression was applied to identify which attitudinal variables were the strongest predictors of repurchase intention, controlling for country, age group, and shopping frequency. Cross-tabulation with chi-square tests was used to compare platform preferences and payment method choices across demographic subgroups.

Secondary statistical data were analyzed using comparative trend analysis in Microsoft Excel, plotting market size, growth rates, and e-commerce penetration across countries and years. Thematic synthesis was applied to the qualitative literature review strand, with themes coded inductively using NVivo 14 and then mapped deductively onto the theoretical frameworks identified in Section 2. Integration of the two data strands followed a convergent parallel strategy: quantitative findings from the survey were compared with patterns identified in secondary data and literature, with agreements reinforcing conclusions and divergences prompting deeper investigation.

## Discussion

Kazakhstan is the clear frontrunner in Central Asian e-commerce, and the gap between it and the next country is larger than most outsiders appreciate. The market reached roughly USD 4.6 billion in 2023 and recorded 61 percent growth in the first half of 2024 alone, according to PwC. Online sales now account for about 13 percent of total retail, still well below mature market levels, but genuinely significant by regional standards. And 89 percent of all transactions flow through marketplaces, which means a small number of platforms are shaping almost all the consumer experience.

The dominant player is Kaspi.kz, and it deserves extended attention because it's genuinely one of the more innovative fintech-commerce integrations anywhere in the world. Kaspi started as financial infrastructure and then added a marketplace rather than the more common reverse path of a retailer adding financial services. That sequence matters. Kazakhstani consumers trust Kaspi with their money before they trust it with their shopping, and that trust transfers. The platform's 30 million monthly active users and NASDAQ listing at a market cap exceeding USD 20 billion reflect how seriously international investors take this model.

If Kazakhstan is the established market leader, Uzbekistan is the country that's making observers revise their growth models on an almost quarterly basis. The market went from USD 201 million in 2021 to USD 543 million in 2023 to USD 1.2 billion in 2024. That's not gradual growth, it’s acceleration. KPMG projects that e-commerce will account for 9 to 11 percent of Uzbek retail by 2027, which would represent a fundamental shift in how the country's 38 million people conduct their everyday commerce.

The platform story here is Uzum, which achieved unicorn status in 2024 and has grown by figuring out something that many international platforms miss: in a majority-Muslim country with significant portions of the population concerned about riba (interest), a conventional installment product won't cut it. Uzum's shariah-compliant buy-now-pay-later model has become the single biggest driver of platform adoption, with more than half of purchases using BNPL. That's not a feature it’s the whole product market fit.

Kyrgyzstan's e-commerce market reached USD 360 million in 2024, and while that's smaller in absolute terms, the growth rate over the previous two years was roughly 50 percent, which is notable. The country has a particularly strong cross-border export story in apparel: Kyrgyz clothing sales on Wildberries grew 8.2 times year-on-year, and sportswear exports rose sixfold. The mountains are a real obstacle for last-mile delivery, but pickup point networks are expanding in ways that partially compensate.

Tajikistan is the most nascent of the markets examined here, with a market size around USD 22 million. But the legal foundation is in place: a 2022 E-Commerce Law established the framework for digital transactions, World Bank support has contributed to payment infrastructure development, and digital wallet penetration reached 10.4 million users in 2024, up 16 percent year-on-year.

**Table 1. Comparative e-commerce metrics, Central Asia (2024)**

| Country | Market Size (2024) | E-Commerce Share | Key Platform | Growth Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kazakhstan | ~USD 6B | ~13% | Kaspi.kz | 61% (H1 2024) |
| Uzbekistan | USD 1.2B | ~3.8% | Uzum | ~40% YoY |
| Kyrgyzstan | USD 360M | ~5% | Wildberries | ~50% (2-yr) |
| Tajikistan | USD 22M | <2% | Digital wallets | 13% CAGR |

*Sources: IMARC Group, PwC Kazakhstan, KPMG, News Central Asia, Trade.gov*

## Challenges

All five Central Asian republics are landlocked a geographic fact that translates into a 20 to 30 percent logistics cost premium compared to coastal markets. Getting goods from China, Europe, or the Persian Gulf into the region means multimodal transport across multiple international borders, each with its own customs regime, documentary requirements, and delay risks. The China-Kazakhstan-Europe rail corridors have improved things considerably, and the Cainiao-Kazakhstan Railway logistics platform has reduced China-to-Kazakhstan delivery times to around 7 to 10 days. But for last-mile delivery into secondary cities and rural areas, the infrastructure remains genuinely inadequate.

The regulatory environment for e-commerce across Central Asia is actively flux. Kazakhstan raised import taxes on cross-border e-commerce packages in 2024, increasing certain rates from 15 to 20 percent a meaningful margin compression for international platforms. Its Personal Data Protection Law requires local data storage, which imposes compliance costs on foreign operators. Uzbekistan introduced new requirements in late 2024 for e-commerce operators to establish legal entities, though subsequent clarifications softened the impact. Regulatory risk is a real consideration that international players are often underweight.

Cash-on-delivery solves a consumer trust problem, but it creates operational costs that platforms bear directly. COD requires physical cash handling at every delivery, increases the risk of failed or refused deliveries when consumers change their minds, and prevents the accumulation of the transaction data that powers personalization and loyalty programs. Building out payment infrastructure is a precondition for solving this problem, and it's work that neither the private sector nor governments can do alone.

Central Asian governments have been more active in supporting e-commerce development than is sometimes recognized. Kazakhstan's Digital Kazakhstan program, Uzbekistan's E-Commerce Strategy 2023-2027, and Kyrgyzstan's E-Commerce Development Programme represent genuine commitments of resources and political will. Businesses that engage constructively with these programs often find faster regulatory clearance, access to subsidized logistics zones, and public co-promotion of their platforms.

## Conclusion

Central Asia's e-commerce story is fundamentally a story about trusting its absence, its reconstruction, and its translation into commercial relationships. The bazaar culture that still animates these economies is not a barrier to be overcome but a baseline to be understood. Consumers who have shopped face-to-face their whole lives bring certain expectations to online platforms: that they can verify before paying, that someone is accountable if something goes wrong, that the people they're dealing with are known quantities in some meaningful sense.

The platforms that have succeeded in this region Kaspi, Uzum, even Wildberries in its regional adaptation are those that have found ways to approximate those expectations in digital form. The market's growth numbers are real and impressive. A compound annual growth rate of 30 percent over a decade, if sustained even partially, would represent one of the more significant retail transformations in the world. But that growth will not distribute itself evenly or automatically. It will concentrate on markets where logistics infrastructure can support reliable delivery, in product categories where online purchasing offers genuine advantages, and in platforms that have done the hard work of adapting to local financial and cultural realities.

For researchers, the region offers a genuinely interesting laboratory for studying how e-commerce adoption unfolds in societies where the usual Western assumptions stable institutions, widespread credit access, high baseline digital trust don’t hold. For businesses, it offers a market with real growth potential and real barriers that require genuine local expertise to navigate. The bazaar isn't going anywhere. But the smartphone in the bazaar shopper's pocket is changing what the bazaar is and what it can become.

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