

Voices of 500 Women

What Women's Experiences Reveal About
the Future of E-commerce in West Africa



Over the past few months, DODO's research team engaged 500 women across 8 West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Findings revealed digital adoption patterns, behaviours and drivers, providing actionable insights to inform strategic decisions and business growth.

Insights emerged for the e-commerce industry that highlight untapped consumer behaviours, market opportunities, and innovation pathways, that will inform business strategy and investment decisions across these sectors.

E-commerce in West Africa is experiencing significant growth. The market size reached USD 216.85 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 1,711.12 billion by 2033, exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 25.80% during 2025–2033*. This expansion is driven by factors such as improved digital connectivity, increased smartphone penetration, and government investment in digital infrastructure.

However, this growth coexists with significant challenges as trust remains fragile, with concerns around online scams, product quality, and delivery reliability shaping how people engage with online platforms. The goal would be to balance scale with trust, by creating reliable, transparent, and localized experiences that build long-term confidence in online shopping.

*Imarcgroup



CONVERSATIONS THAT CONVERT

84

% of respondents in Nigeria rely heavily on social channels

72.7% of respondents in Ghana highlighted reliance on radio/TV to learn about new digital platforms.

One of the key findings our survey uncovered was the principle of Social proof, highlighting family and friends and social media to be the strongest drivers of digital platforms for women, with 85.7% in Senegal and 83.3% in Benin, also relying heavily on these channels. Similar trends exist in smaller sample sizes with about 98% of respondents in Togo, Sierra Leone and Liberia relying on family and friends. This demonstrates that e-commerce adoption may grow faster when platforms position discovery around trusted word-of-mouth networks and users' positive experiences and that e-commerce platforms can benefit from leveraging multi-channel approaches, combining social networks with traditional media to maximize reach.

Source: DODO's survey of women in West Africa

Sample size: n=295 (Nigeria), n=33 (Ghana), n=51 (Senegal), n=50 (Benin)

Base: Women in West Africa aged 18+, who mostly reside in urban areas and have access to mobile phones. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected "Social media or online sources", "family and friends" and "radio/tv" in answer to how they mostly learn about new apps and websites.

Studies have revealed that trust mediates the relationship between social influence and e-commerce adoption. Women are far more likely to try a platform when they hear about it from someone they know or trust, and this reinforces our survey finding that family, friends, and social media are critical channels for adoption.¹

Radio and television have also remained crucial sources of information for women, especially in rural areas.² Our work with the Gates Foundation in 2024 with women also highlighted this important data point, that women in peri-urban and rural areas of Northern Nigeria turn to radio as a major source of information, showing that e-commerce platforms can benefit from leveraging multi-channel approaches, combining social networks with traditional media to maximize reach.



Women in rural areas, often rely on members of their communities and informal support systems to access information and resources, including knowledge of new digital services. This demonstrates that socially validated channels are essential for reaching women who may otherwise be excluded from formal digital marketing or online services.³

¹Research Gate, "Sustaining Consumer E-Commerce Adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa: Do Trust and Payment Method Matter?" July 2022

²Afrobarometer, "Citizen engagement, citizen power: Africans claim the promise of democracy" 2025

³UNDP, "Community-Based Social Protection in Africa" 2025

1

How can we build trust in low access contexts where peer-to-peer recommendations, testimonials, or local community ambassadors can enhance credibility and drive adoption?

2

How might we leverage family conversations and social sharing as the primary engine of discovery, instead of standard referral programs or ads, while using mass media to widen the circle of those conversations to amplify reach?

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark skin and purple braided hair. She is wearing a green corduroy jacket over a black top and a black headset with a microphone. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is blurred.

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SECURITY BY
SUPPORT

52%

of respondents in Ghana identified internet scams and harassment as the top barriers to their adoption of digital platforms.

50.8% of respondents in Nigeria also reported same. Alongside these risks, respondents also cited poor customer support as a major reason for abandoning platforms. These experiences give the perception that online shopping is not safe, therefore pushing women back to offline markets they consider more trustworthy. This finding goes on to show that there is an opportunity to strengthen women's trust on digital platforms.

Source: DODO's survey of women in West Africa

Sample size: n=295 (Nigeria), n=33 (Ghana)

Base: Women in West Africa aged 18+, who mostly reside in urban areas and have access to mobile phones. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected "fear of online scam or harassment", and "customer support is not helpful" as the challenge they face when using apps or websites.

Online safety concerns have been found to be a major barrier to the sustained digital participation of women across Sub-Saharan Africa. For Nigerian women, research highlights that more than half of the women surveyed encounter some form of online abuse or scam, ranging from cyberbullying to fraudulent transactions. These experiences don't just create discomfort, they directly shape how women interact with e-commerce platforms, often making them more cautious or entirely disengaged from online buying and selling.¹

In Ghana, findings reveal a similar pattern where cybercrime and identity fraud are eroding consumer trust. Women, are more likely to disengage when platforms fail to clearly communicate safety, transparency, or recourse mechanisms. In Sub-saharan Africa, perceived security is what determines whether users continue engaging in online commerce, even more than platform functionality.²



Together, these insights reinforce that trust, security, and customer protection are not just technical requirements, they are core to user retention and market growth. For e-commerce platforms targeting women, building confidence through visible safety cues, responsive support, and fraud prevention systems is fundamental to long-term adoption.

¹ Gatefield report reveals, 58% of Nigerian women experience online abuse, Technext, 2025

² Advances in Consumer Research Journal, Culture and Cybersecurity's Role in the Continual Usage of E-Commerce Platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: Perspectives from Ghana, Jan. 14, 2025

1

How can you leverage key points in the customer's journey to further cement their trust and remove biases?

2

How can e-commerce platforms leverage social media and community networks like peer recommendations, or educational campaigns to reinforce credibility rather than risk?

3

How can you enhance customer support to counter fears of fraud as women use digital products and platforms, building the trust women need to stay and shop confidently, thereby improving retention on e-commerce platforms?

A woman with short dark hair is smiling at the camera. She is wearing a black and gold striped top and holding several large, wrapped packages in her arms. The background shows a residential street with houses and greenery.

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TRADE
HER WAY

54%

of respondents in Liberia
reported unemployed or self
employed

More than half of respondents in Benin (56%), 54.5% in Côte d'Ivoire, and 38% in Nigeria also reported to be unemployed or self employed. With more than half of respondents in Benin (56%), 54.5% in Côte d'Ivoire, and 38% in Nigeria being unemployed or self-employed, e-commerce emerges not just as a marketplace for buyers but as an economic platform for sellers. E-commerce platforms are uniquely positioned to bridge this gap, transforming these women from passive consumers into active economic participants.

Source: DODO's survey of women in West Africa

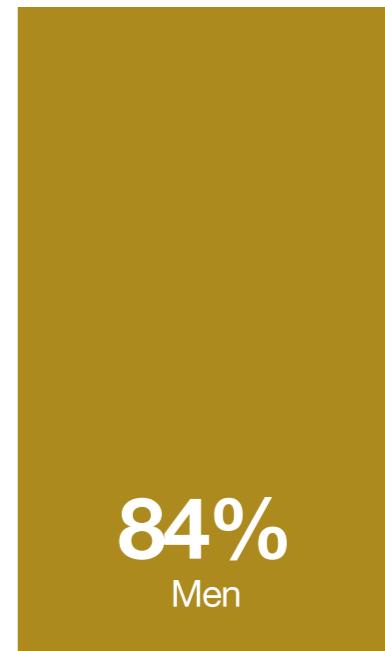
Sample size: n=50 (Benin), n=11 (Côte d'Ivoire), n=13 (Liberia) and n=295 (Nigeria).

Base: Women in West Africa aged 18+, who mostly reside in urban areas and have access to mobile phones. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected "unemployed or self employed" as their current employment status.

87% of all jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa are informal, with 90% of working women and 84% of working men.¹ These illustrate the prevalence of women working informally or running micro-businesses without official protection or registration.²

A strong reason behind this exclusion leading to concentration on informal economy is reinforced by barriers entrenched in cultural norms¹ such as limited property rights, lack of identification, limitations on their ability to grow their businesses and access to wider markets. These have led to a focus on the informal economy. Since limited asset ownership and mobility make it more difficult to secure financing and fully engage in the digital economy, legal and institutional frameworks make these challenges worse.

Gender Gap in Informal Employment (Sub-Saharan Africa) ILO, 2022



Collectively, these constraints strengthen reliance on informal networks and restrict women's capacity to effectively use e-commerce as a tool for economic empowerment.

¹Centre for International Governance Innovation, "Financing Development in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward. Zakaria, F." 2024

²International Finance Corporation (IFC). "Women and E-commerce in Africa" 2021

1

How might e-commerce platforms integrate solutions like credit and savings mechanisms into business transactions to expand financial opportunities for underserved women?"

2

How might marketplaces empower women economically in ways other than just product sales?



ACCESS BEYOND LIMITS



70% of respondents in Benin reported

that high data costs is a major barrier to their engagement with digital services

Our survey shows that high data cost is a major barrier to e-commerce adoption for women across West Africa, as 64% in Nigeria, and all respondents in Senegal also reported that high mobile data costs limit their ability to engage with digital services. These findings suggest that for many women, affordability determines whether they can meaningfully participate in the digital marketplace.

Source: DODO's survey of women in West Africa

Sample size: n=50 (Benin), n=295 (Nigeria), n=51 (Senegal)

Base: Women in West Africa aged 18+, who mostly reside in urban areas and have access to mobile phones. Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who selected "it uses too much data", as one of the top 3 challenges they face when using apps and websites.

Affordability remains a cornerstone for bridging the gender digital divide and enabling inclusive online participation. With women in Sub-Saharan Africa face a 37% gender gap in mobile internet use, driven in large part by the high cost of data.¹ For women with lower income levels and limited financial autonomy, the expense of mobile internet restricts engagement in digital services, including buying and selling.



Nearly half of women entrepreneurs lack regular internet access
Source: Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, via The Guardian

In developing countries, 45% of women entrepreneurs do not have regular internet access, mostly due to high prices and connectivity challenges.² This limits their ability to digitally manage payments, manage online stores, and advertise their products. Thus, directly influence the extent to which women can establish and expand their businesses in the digital economy.

Designing for low-data scenarios will facilitate women's shift from hesitant browsers to active participants in the buyers and sellers in West Africa's growing digital marketplace.

¹GSMA "The mobile gender gap report" 2024

²The Guardian, "Women in business held back by mobile data's cost in developing world" 2025

How might e-commerce platforms reduce the data burden on women users, through lightweight design, offline browsing features, or partnerships that subsidize data use?

LOOKING FOR DEEPER INSIGHTS?

We welcome the opportunity to partner with your strategy and product team to uncover the needs of new markets, validate existing assumptions or refine opportunity areas for your current customers.

Data reflects survey responses with unequal sample sizes by country. Results from Nigeria, Bénin, and Ghana represent more robust samples, while findings from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire should be viewed as exploratory signals.

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