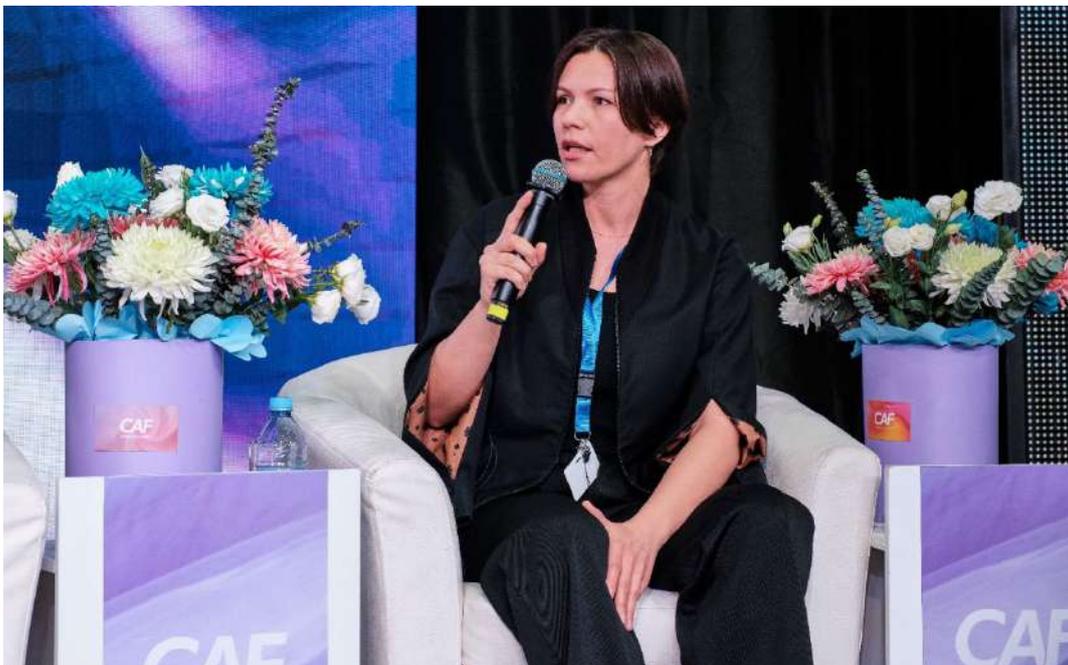


LUXURY AND PREMIUM SEGMENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN: POSITIONING, SALES CHANNELS, AND MARKET DYNAMICS

The current state of the luxury segment in Kazakhstan was discussed during one of the most relevant sessions at the business conference of the 37th International Fashion Exhibition *Central Asia Fashion Spring 2026*. Invited experts addressed key questions of interest to exhibition visitors: who the consumers of the luxury and premium segments are today, how demand is evolving, and which brands and formats are experiencing growth. They also discussed the specifics of positioning premium brands, approaches to customer experience management, key sales channels, and future development prospects.

The session moderator, an expert in the development and implementation of design concepts and merchandising, founder of VMC Retail, and an international consultant at the EBRD, Marina Polkovnikova, opened the session by raising the question of what currently has a greater impact on premium brand sales — the brand itself, the purchasing format (online or offline), or the availability of omnichannel interaction.

Ludmila Polyanina, CEO of the Salta brand, believes that virtually all factors are currently influencing the premium segment. At the same time, the segment itself is going through a rather challenging period: *«Customer behavior is changing significantly: both consumers are shifting to high-quality mass market, which is accessible and fast, or moving into the luxury segment, perceiving such purchases as investments and assets. In this situation, the premium segment has to fight particularly hard for its place in the market. Therefore, online channels, in my opinion, will continue to grow. By the end of 2025, e-commerce demonstrated significant growth, with around 92% of online sales coming from marketplaces, which are actively attracting audiences. Omnichannel will undoubtedly continue to gain momentum as well. In Kazakhstan, it is not yet as developed as, for example, in Russia. However, the Kazakh market is closely observing more mature players and gradually adopting this experience. Offline channels will not disappear. Despite the growth of online sales, in the premium segment it remains important for*



Ludmila Polyanina, CEO of the Salta brand

customers to «experience» the purchase: to try on, touch, and evaluate the quality and tactile feel. Therefore, all channels will retain their importance. However, the key challenge is to find new

approaches. The premium segment will continue to face pressure and undergo a period of transformation. Under these conditions, brands will have to develop hybrid sales channel and positioning models, as maintaining their niche is becoming increasingly difficult».

Ludmila Polyanina noted that by the end of 2025, online sales had grown significantly — by approximately 15%, specifically within the brand’s own channels such as Instagram and WhatsApp, including order processing and customer service. The company also experimented with marketplaces; however, the experience was not entirely satisfactory: *«Our brand is positioned as premium in the Kazakh market, and the audience of these platforms does not always perceive it the way we would like. At the same time, we are present on the Lamoda platform — the situation there is different. It has not been as successful as we expected, but the performance is still better than on other marketplaces, and overall, we feel comfortable there. Offline channels showed slight growth in 2025 compared to 2024. However, the increase was not as significant as in online. Online, on the other hand, delivered noticeable growth. I believe this is due to people becoming more tolerant of online shopping — they feel more confident and secure. Interestingly, starting from 2026, we are beginning to split our assortment between online and offline segments and are building a new strategy. »*

Nagima Kaidarova, founder of the Kaidarova brand, spoke about how the brand emphasizes its premium positioning through thoughtful customer engagement: *«When it comes to ethnic fashion, we see that over the past 10 years it has truly become relevant — interest in ethnic motifs has grown significantly. More and more brands are turning to national visual codes, and in my opinion, this is a natural process for an emerging cultural industry. Ethnic aesthetics can become a strong trend. However, there is also a risk: it may quickly saturate the market and lose its depth, or, on the contrary, it can become the foundation of a brand’s philosophy and support its long-term identity. In the case of my brand, I believe the second scenario has worked. We have been on the market since 2015. When I created the brand as a student, I did not set out to build a premium brand. Rather, it was about working with history and depth. A consistent focus on cultural codes and a refusal to follow short-term trends allowed us to build our own value system — and it is this system that defines the brand’s position in the market today. We are well*



Nagima Kaidarova, founder of the Kaidarova brand

known for our online sales, and four years ago we opened an offline store. By nature, I am more of an introvert and an artist, so I resisted the idea of a physical retail space for a long time — online worked

perfectly well for me. But once we started actively interacting with customers in a physical environment, it became clear how important it is. Offline helps highlight our weaknesses, allows us to better hear the customer, and gain a deeper understanding of their expectations and desires. This is extremely valuable experience that helps us move toward a truly premium segment. »

Nagima Kaidarova noted that online and offline sales are distributed approximately 50/50: *«Over the years, we have built a loyal audience that supports us online. Many clients order items from different countries despite the distance, even without any prior offline familiarity with the brand. And then, once they receive the product and experience its quality and level of service, they come back. That is probably the most valuable part. Today, our customers are very sophisticated. They live in a global world, travel, shop online, and compare us not with neighboring showrooms, but with global brands — both in the premium and luxury segments. Accordingly, the bar is getting higher. At the same time, our key task is not to try to copy anyone, but to work more deeply with our own culture. We may not have two-hundred-year-old fashion houses, but we do have a rich history and traditions that have existed for much longer. This is our foundation. It is precisely the content, meanings, and the depth of our prints and collections that create the brand's value. »*

Sevil Amangeldiyeva, owner of the Seven Lifestore chain of concept stores featuring selective brands, emphasized that in the premium segment it is the combination of all key factors that drives results — such as unique brand selection, atmosphere, and a high level of service: *«One does not work without the other. Our key strength is, of course, curation. Around 90% of the brands we work with are presented on an exclusive basis. The second important factor is a high level of service. Today, it is impossible to operate without professional stylists. When a customer enters the store, they often feel overwhelmed: the product range is extensive and there are many brands. This is where it is essential for a specialist to assist — to identify the client's needs, create a look, and offer solutions that truly suit the individual. Naturally, the factors of exclusivity and brand status also play a role. We collaborate with brands that have already established themselves in Europe in terms of quality, fit, and style. This also influences perception. From the very beginning, our mission has been to act as a bridge between Europe, global*



Sevil Amangeldiyeva, owner of the Seven Lifestore chain of concept stores featuring selective brands

brands, and Kazakhstan — providing customers with access to selective international fashion. There are also practical constraints — space. Our stores average 140–150 square meters, with around 100 square meters dedicated to retail space, which means we have to carefully curate our assortment. »

Sevil Amangeldiyeva shared an interesting insight — so-called «perfect fitting rooms» do not exist in their stores, as they can be a form of manipulation: *«The customer will still go home, see themselves in a different light, and may feel disappointed. We use standard mirrors, and this is reflected in our performance: we have a very low return rate — around 3% per year, mostly from online orders when the size or color does not fit. More often, it is not even a return but an exchange. If we talk about the key factor behind a purchase, it is ultimately our selection and the quality of fit. It is quite rare in the market to find garments that truly fit well. I personally focus on this as someone with curves, and I always test items either on myself or on models who are closer to our customers. Early in my career, I had the experience of buying collections based on models with ideal proportions and tall height. Of course, everything looked perfect on them, but on our customers of average height, it looked completely different. As a result, the collection did not perform. It was an important lesson. »*

The speaker also spoke about another interesting service designed to retain the attention of premium customers — a mobile, at-home retail experience: *«We launched it about five years ago and were among the first on the market. It's not just delivery. A stylist visits the client, helps with fittings and selection, and sometimes even integrates new pieces into the client's existing wardrobe. At first, clients were cautious, especially new ones. The service is actively used by our VIP clients; some of them don't even visit the store anymore. They can comfortably try everything on at home. Sometimes the process can take several days. We aim to be as flexible as possible because this is our loyal audience — essentially friends of the brand. The service is free of charge. A stylist usually spends about one to two hours with a client, although there are exceptional cases. For example, once our employee worked with a client late into the evening, almost until midnight. That reflects a high level of trust and a special relationship. We also have clients in other cities, for example in Kostanay. We send them curated selections; they try items on, return or exchange them. The entire process can take up to a week. Delivery is covered by us, and across Kazakhstan, including Almaty, delivery is free for purchases starting from 200,000 tenge. »*

The issue of high-level customer service was also addressed by Ainura Rakhimzhanova, Head of the Marketplace Department at Lamoda Kazakhstan: *«The premium segment has traditionally been built on quality, individuality, and style. However, according to forecasts up to 2030, emotional factors and customer experience will become increasingly important. Today, it is no longer enough to simply say that a brand is «great» — it is essential to build an emotional connection with the customer. Looking at the dynamics between 2024 and 2025, we observe interesting changes in the structure of demand. In the premium segment, customers are more likely to purchase accessories — footwear, bags, and watches — while basic items can easily be bought in the mass market. At the same time, the premium segment continues to grow at an average rate of 8–10% per year. This is a stable trend which, according to our forecasts, will continue until 2030. The mass market is growing faster — at approximately 20% annually. This is understandable: the audience is broader and volumes are higher, so despite lower margins, this segment generates significant revenue. For us as a marketplace, it is important to work across different segments. New customers often come with a degree of skepticism: they 'test' the platform by purchasing more affordable items, such as T-shirts. Only after gaining confidence in the quality of service do they move on to premium purchases. That is why it is important for our strategy to include both mass-market and premium brands. »*

A separate focus of Lamoda Kazakhstan's marketplace is the support of local manufacturers. The platform features dedicated promotional sections — Made in Kazakhstan and Made in Kazakhstan Kids — where domestic brands are showcased. Currently, around eight local brands are represented on the platform. Active development of this direction began in 2025. Ainura Rakhimzhanova explained that a new seller account interface has been introduced and integration has been simplified: «*This is an*

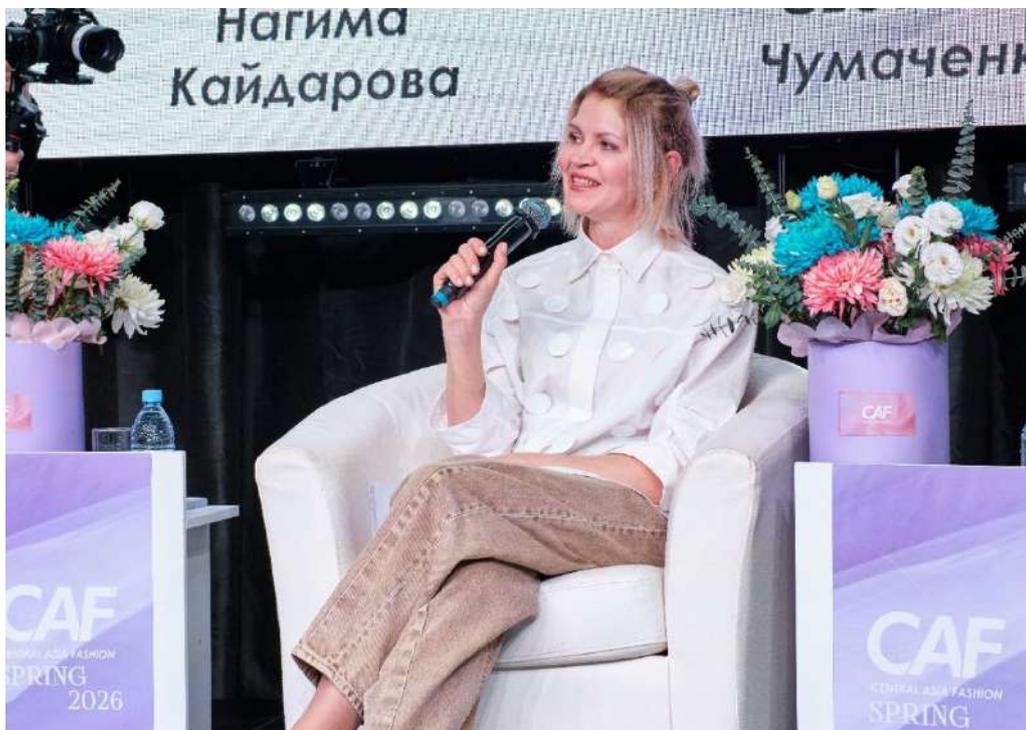


Ainura Rakhimzhanova, Head of the Marketplace Department at Lamoda Kazakhstan

important step that will, in the future, allow Kazakhstani brands to enter the Russian market through our platform. We offer special conditions and work individually with each partner we provide marketing support, allocate dedicated promotional zones where local brands do not get lost among international ones, offer participation in campaigns, and send partners weekly proposals with discounts and promo codes. It is important to understand that sales on a marketplace are a joint effort between the brand and the platform. In 2026, we plan to strengthen the emotional component — to focus more on storytelling and to share brand narratives. We had a successful case with one of our partners in Kazakhstan — a perfume brand that built its communication through emotions and associations. For example, they offered fragrances linked to specific imagery — such as the 'scent of the mountains or even more unexpected interpretations. This approach truly engages customers. After such stories, people want to buy the product. This is exactly the approach we plan to scale — one built on emotions and meaning. »

Svetlana Chumachenko, Head of Brand Direction at the Li-Lu showroom and Head of Wholesale Sales at Aeronautica Militare, noted that, according to open data, there has been a slight decline in the luxury segment, while the premium segment continues to demonstrate stable and confident growth: «*If we compare the situation to 20–25 years ago, the market has undoubtedly changed. However, today the premium segment often even exceeds performance expectations on our platform. We work with high-quality products and well-known global brands, and demand for them remains strong. One illustrative case is the Italian brand Aeronautica Militare, a brand with a strong heritage. It originally specialized in producing leather jackets and shearling coats for pilots. When we started working with the brand about 10 years ago, it was just entering the market. One of the first to believe in the brand was actually a client from an online platform. Today, we can see the results: purchase volumes have increased 15-fold. The brand is actively developing — nine mono-brand spaces have already been opened, and it is also widely*

represented in multi-brand stores. In Kazakhstan, we operate in a multi-brand format in Almaty, Astana, and Kostanay. Overall, development is steady and confident. Yes, offline retail is currently experiencing certain pressure — this is a global trend. However, the online segment compensates for this dynamic. At present, we can speak of an approximate 50/50 balance between online and offline. Moreover, we see cases where brands first grow online and then move on to open physical spaces. »



Svetlana Chumachenko, Head of Brand Direction at the Li-Lu showroom and Head of Wholesale Sales at Aeronautica Militare

Svetlana Chumachenko is confident that the luxury segment in Kazakhstan has strong development potential, as the country is considered one of the most stable markets in the region: «*There is a strong appreciation here for quality, aesthetics, and beautiful things. This creates potential for growth in both luxury and premium segments. I would also highlight the growth of the menswear segment — it is developing particularly actively right now. I agree that luxury will continue to grow, but it is important to understand that this primarily concerns brands that already exist. The emergence of a new luxury brand is not a quick process. Most likely, it will start as a premium brand — possibly a well-funded project that can make a strong initial impact. However, without a solid foundation, it can just as quickly disappear. Why? Because luxury is not just about the product. It is always about history, cultural code, values, craftsmanship, and time. We do not simply buy an item — we buy meaning and a sense of belonging. Behind a luxury product lies mastery: sometimes it is a piece handcrafted over several months. Or a brand that invests in sustainable production, material recycling, and environmental responsibility. There is also another important indicator — the secondary market. If a product retains its value or depreciates only slightly, this is a sign of luxury. In the premium segment, prices on the secondary market typically drop significantly, sometimes by up to 70%. This means that premium offers quality, but does not always provide value as an investment or as a symbol of belonging. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has strong potential. Local brands can grow from premium to luxury if they find their cultural code, build a strong identity, create a compelling story, withstand time and crises, and form a loyal community. And, of course, luxury implies an entirely different level of service — not just a transaction, but an individual experience, almost a personal universe for the customer.* »



Marina Polkovnikova, founder of VMC Retail and international consultant at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Summarizing the discussion, Marina Polkovnikova highlighted several key takeaways regarding the luxury and premium segments: *«Service is becoming the top priority. Today, it is the main factor in both attracting and retaining customers. The second point is alignment with the declared positioning. If a brand claims to operate in the premium segment, this must be reflected in everything — in the level of service, the visual presentation of the space, and the details. A premium store cannot be located in a «basement-like» space, cannot have a weak entrance area, low-quality fixtures, or overcrowded racks. Plastic hangers, poor lighting, and substandard merchandising instantly destroy the perception of premium quality. The third point is well-structured communication channels and a seamless customer experience. Customers should feel freedom — to buy online and return offline, and to receive the same*



Speakers of the CAF Business Conference (from left to right): Sevil Amangeldiyeva, Nagima Kaidarova, Marina Polkovnikova, Svetlana Chumachenko, Ainura Rakhimzhanova, Ludmila Polyamina

high level of service across all touchpoints with the brand. These details are what build trust and create a sense of status. I sincerely wish all market participants growth in both online and offline sales, expansion of their customer base, and — most importantly — high customer retention, as the key indicator of loyalty and brand strength. »

When using the information, it is mandatory to indicate the source — the International Fashion Exhibition Central Asia Fashion Spring 2026; when using photographs — the Central Asia Fashion press office. All exclusive rights to the materials belong to the organizers — CATEXPO. For more information about CAF, please visit the official website www.fashionexpo.kz and the project's social media channels.