

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING**

**ICFLEW 2025**

DHAKA, BANGLADESH | JUNE 26, 2025

**THEME**

**Empowering Individuals and Organizations through Financial Literacy,  
Competency, Inclusion, and Digitalization**

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDING**



# সবাই মিলে খুশির মিছিলে

৪০ বছর ধরে এমন অসংখ্য খুশির মিছিলে  
আমরাও ছিলাম, থাকবো আগামীতেও!

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Edited by the ICFLEW 2025 Editorial Team

BRAC Business School

BRAC University

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# Preface

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Welcome to the International Conference on Financial Literacy and Economic Wellbeing (ICFLEW) 2025. This conference, being held on 26 June 2025 at BRAC University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is aimed to serve as a pivotal platform for leading academics, industry professionals, and policymakers to explore the vital connections between financial literacy, sound financial decision-making, and economic success across individual, organizational, and national levels.

In an increasingly complex financial landscape, acquiring financial knowledge and understanding the nuances of decision-making is more critical than ever. The purpose of ICFLEW 2025 is to empower individuals and organizations by fostering discussions on how financial literacy can enhance access, inclusion, and overall economic performance. The diverse range of topics presented during the conference reflects the multifaceted nature of financial literacy and its implications for various stakeholders, from individuals to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and large corporations.

At ICFLEW 2025, we received a total of 122 submissions, comprising full papers and extended abstracts from local and international scholars and practitioners. Authors of 59 accepted extended abstracts and full paper presented their work in different parallel sessions, conducted in both in-person and online modes. This proceeding compiles the ideas, perspectives, and findings shared by scholars and practitioners on effective initiatives and policies that can enhance financial literacy, financial inclusion, and wellbeing in a global economy. We hope these contributions will inspire ongoing dialogue among various stakeholders and encourage further research in the field. We extend our sincere appreciation to all the presenters and participants for sharing their expertise and knowledge.

The plenary session of the conference, titled “Empowering Individuals and Organizations through Financial Literacy, Competency, Inclusion, and Digitalization,” began with opening remarks by Dr. Mohammad Mujibul Haque, Professor and Dean, BRAC Business School, BRAC University. Professor Dr. Mohamad Fazli Bin Sabri, Dean of the Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia delivered the keynote speech. A panel discussion followed, where Dr. Mohammed Helal Uddin, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Vice Chairman, Microcredit Regulatory Authority, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh; Mr. Md Mushfiqur Rahman, Chairperson, Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation; and Mr. Arinjoy Dhar, Senior Director, BRAC Microfinance shared their learned perspectives and recommendations on relevant aspects. The discussion was moderated by Professor Dr. Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, Director General, Bangladesh Academy for Securities Markets. Ms. Nazma Mobarek, Secretary, Financial Institutions Division (FID), Ministry of Finance, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, shared her valuable insights, including public policy issues, as the Chief Guest of the event. The Guest of Honor, Mr. Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury, Chairman, Sonali Bank PLC, shared his multi-faceted experiences and constructive recommendations for a better future in Bangladesh through enhancing financial literacy, inclusion and digitalization.

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The committee extends its sincere appreciation to Dr. Farhat Anwar, Professor and Vice Chancellor, BRAC University and Mr. Arinjoy Dhar, Senior Director, BRAC Microfinance, for their invaluable guidance and support throughout the organization of this event. Also, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our sponsors: Infrastructure Development Company Limited, IDLC Finance PLC, bKash Ltd. and Dhaka Stock Exchange PLC, for their generous support. Their commitment to promoting financial literacy and economic wellbeing played a pivotal role in making this conference possible. We are also thankful to the dedicated faculty and staff members, and students of BRAC Business School, along with many other staff members of BRAC University, for their tireless efforts and support, which ensured the success of this conference.

For more information about the conference, please visit our <https://icflew.bracu.ac.bd/>

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## **Investigating Digital Financial Literacy Readiness Among SME Owners in Bangladesh**

Md. Mizanur Rahman, Mohammad Mujibul Haque, Najmul Hasan, Saif Hossain, Ekramul Islam

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**Background:** Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are essential for any nation's economic growth and development. Though the contributions of SMEs in Bangladesh are remarkable, the overall performance of Bangladeshi SMEs needs to catch up to the global average introducing digital financial literacy. Digital financial literacy significantly affects and shapes business owners' daily operational activities, positively improving a nation's economic development. Though digital financial literacy is a burning research issue, less attention has been given to this issue considering SEM owners in Bangladesh. Even to the best of our knowledge (19-08-2024), no research has been conducted on digital financial literacy and the financial decision-making of SME owners in Bangladesh. Thus, the fundamental aim of this study is to investigate the readiness of DFL and the financial decision-making of SME owners in Bangladesh.

**Methodology:** Based on the objectives of this study, we adopted descriptive cross-sectional research design that is helpful for the researchers to describe, analyze, and report their current situation. We applied simple random sampling to collect the necessary data in this study. We considered eight divisions as clusters and took 280 responses from eight divisions. From each division, we collected data from 35 respondents. However, due to missing values and outliers, we deleted the responses of 8 respondents. Finally, we took 272 respondents as our final sample size.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that respondents were highly confident in making financial decisions, specifically regarding their understanding of Digital Financial Literacy (DFL). A substantial majority (71.3%) agree or strongly agree that they can promptly adjust their financial decisions in response to changes in circumstances due to their DFL understanding. Merely a minute fraction (10.7%) has a contrary opinion. 73.5% of the participants agree and strongly agree that digital financial awareness instills confidence to assess personal financial risks and make informed decisions—only 11.4% disagree with this notion. Most respondents (64.6%) agree and strongly agree that they exercise prudent financial judgment by comparing outcomes online. Nevertheless, a significant 19.6% have a different opinion. Moreover, a substantial majority (63.5%) express confidence in using Internet banking to explore economic alternatives when making financial decisions, whereas a smaller proportion (21.4%) do not show this confidence. The argument that previously used technology-based decision techniques have resulted in improved financial decision-making has received the most significant agreement, with 72.3% of respondents supporting it. Only 11.5% of respondents disagreed with this statement.

**Contribution:** Theoretically, this study helps in establishing a subtle understanding of how owners of SMEs in a developing economy like Bangladesh negotiate an increasingly complex digital financial landscape. Besides, the applications of Social Role Theory (SRT) to digital financial literacy incorporate the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and enhance its focus on social and cultural factors affecting financial decision

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making. Practically, the findings would be beneficial if applied in interventionist strategies by financial institution managers to create better, more appropriate, and focused interventions to improve the digital financial literacy of SME owners.

**Keywords:** Financial literacy, financial awareness, knowledge, experiences, SME owners, and financial decision making.

## **Financial Literacy As Human Rights: A Communication Design Perspective**

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**Background:** Financial literacy should be seen as the communicative right to know, question, be valued, and belong rather than as knowledge transfer, particularly in developing countries, where Bangladesh can be an example. Framed in this way, it becomes a pedagogical concern and a question of human rights, where every individual has the right to access, understand, and control the financial institutions shaping their lives.

**Purpose/Objective:** This commentary, in general, urges reconsiderations of how financial literacy is viewed, particularly for the disadvantaged, such as rural women—from an act of buying or selling to one of co-creation and emotional attachment. This change in pedagogical approach highlights community participation, which is crucial and empowering. Community participation is emphasized to evoke a feeling of engagement with and at the centerline of this cause.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The conceptual-philosophical approach underpins this commentary that, with empirical observations and fairly adapted anecdotes from Bangladesh's socio-financial setting, builds up the commentary's argument using Mark Aakhus's (2007) framework of communication as design, which considers communication as a process of designing shared understanding. Reconsidering analyses of financial literacy stresses cultural relevance, participatory pedagogy, and design ethics. Communication as design is designing shared understanding through communication, which is essentially important to financial literacy schooling.

**Findings:** In this commentary, it is argued that present initiatives of financial literacy, if they were devoted in their approach, are yet devoid of emotional grounding and communication inclusiveness. Such programs are surcharged to making persons perform or refrain from behavior rather than making them literate or giving them power; this being the classic approach-top-down. With a land full of such women who have accounts only in the name, they cannot control or confidently use them. The commentary reveals that promoting agency and resilience must somehow attend to the aspects of financial behavior that are emotional and cultural, for example, the feeling of security or anxiety associated with financial literacy, and the cultural norms and values that influence financial decisions.

**Practical and policy implications:** This commentary has yielded three implications for policy and practice. Firstly, it identifies the need for participatory design in financial literacy programs whereby programs would be designed with communities targeted for their intervention. Secondly, policy reforms would be needed that set financial literacy equity of states and formal and informal organizations: this would be the redefinition of financial literacy away from a technical skill to a civil right essential to individual autonomy and societal inclusion. Thirdly, the research would be refocused to argue that exhaustive research concerning financial behavior will address the emotional, communicative, and gendered dimensions. This call for shifting the research focus points to the urgent need for a deeper understanding of these issues to foster financial literacy and effectively empower underprivileged populations.

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**Originality/value:** This scholarly commentary recommends a paradigm shift on financial literacy: as a communicative human right and emotional resource, it should not be seen as just another transmission of technical knowledge. The application of communication as design theory lends theoretical richness and design sensibility to the matter of financial literacy. This different viewpoint would be of interest to scholars, educators, practitioners, and policymakers, among others, seeking inclusive and sympathetic means for financial inclusion in low- and middle-income nations.

**Keywords:** Scholarly Commentary, Participatory Design, Dignity-Based Financial Literacy, Communication-as-Design, Human Rights, Gender Empowerment.

## **Digital Financial Literacy, Financial Behaviour, and Financial Confidence as the Predictors of Financial Well-being Through the Lenses of TPB and TAM**

Dhruba Sarker<sup>1</sup>, Md. Mizanur Rahman<sup>1</sup>, Md. Nafizur Rahman<sup>2</sup>, Saif Hossain<sup>1</sup>

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**Background and Objective:** In the 21st century, digital financial literacy is one of the most crucial skill sets; therefore, today's young generation must understand digital financial literacy to ensure financial well-being. Despite the increasing importance of these financial dimensions, global studies on digital financial literacy among private university students remain scarce. In Bangladesh, research on this subject is nearly non-existent. This study addresses this gap by investigating how digital financial literacy, financial confidence, and financial behavior can empower private university students to handle their substantial financial commitments and ensure their financial well-being.

**Methodology:** In this study, the researchers used a cross-sectional research design and a deductive approach. They also used a snowball sampling technique to collect data from 319 private university students in Bangladesh. Students in public universities were excluded from the research because their relatively lower tuition fees and living costs lead to significantly different patterns of digital financial involvement and access to resources that could undermine relationships between digital financial literacy, behavior, confidence, and well-being. By focusing on private-university students, the research guarantees a relatively homogeneous sample with regards to the exposure to finance and investment, thus allowing for easier views on the operations of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) constructs in environments with comparable cost regimes. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that digital financial literacy has no significant impact on the financial well-being of private university students in Bangladesh. However, financial confidence and financial behavior have a significant positive impact on students' financial well-being. Besides, financial behavior partially mediates the relationship between financial confidence and students' financial well-being.

**Implications:** The findings of this research motivate educators to integrate digital financial modules into existing courses to enhance students' capabilities. Universities and colleges can introduce programs that teach students basic budgeting and how to use digital platforms or financial services effectively. Policymakers can devise youth-focused inclusion policies that increase digital financial accessibility. Governments of emerging markets can accelerate digital adoption by funding campus-based financial programs.

**Keywords:** Digital financial literacy; financial behavior; financial confidence; and financial well-being.

## **Advancing Financial Literacy in Bangladesh: A Policy-Centric Model for Inclusive Development and Digital Empowerment**

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**Background:** Financial literacy (FL) is crucial for economic empowerment in emerging economies like Bangladesh, where over 65% of adults lack fundamental financial knowledge. Despite efforts, Bangladesh's FL landscape is fragmented, with initiatives struggling to achieve widespread reach, particularly among rural, digitally marginalized, and underserved communities. This fragmentation, combined with an increasing digital financial landscape, highlights an urgent need to evaluate existing FL programs' effectiveness and inclusivity.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the existing FL programs in Bangladesh. It assesses their inclusivity, prevalent delivery mechanisms, and alignment with critical national policies such as the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS 2021) and the Digital Bangladesh Vision 2025. The ultimate objective is to propose a strategic roadmap for creating a more inclusive and digitally empowered FL ecosystem.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research constructed an empirical dataset of 58 financial literacy programs and 21 professional certification initiatives in Bangladesh, identified through structured digital searches of public documentation. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining descriptive quantitative analysis to map program distribution and key trends with thematic analysis of program documentation. The study is conceptually anchored by institutional theory, behavioral economics, and educational technology and adult learning theories, informing a policy-oriented roadmap.

**Findings:** Analysis reveals substantial coverage gaps, with programs reaching an estimated 20-30% of the population. NGOs and microfinance institutions deliver most programs, focusing on basic skills, but engagement with marginalized groups—including ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and informal workers—is largely limited. Digital financial literacy remains nascent; only 8% of programs are mobile-optimized and 5% offer vernacular content. Reliance on traditional offline methods impedes scalability, and curricula often underrepresent advanced financial topics and behavioral economics principles.

**Practical and policy implications:** To address these challenges, the study proposes a Strategic Roadmap across six key areas. These include establishing a National Financial Literacy Authority (NFLA) for Institutional Coordination & Governance, expanding program reach to underserved populations through co-design for Inclusive Targeting & Outreach, and broadening curricula for Curriculum Enhancement. The roadmap also advocates for Digital Transformation via mobile-optimized, vernacular, voice-enabled platforms with cybersecurity education, promotes Sustainable Financing through diversified models like public-private partnerships, and emphasizes Impact Measurement using standardized behavioral outcome metrics and longitudinal evaluations. This actionable blueprint aims to improve FL program coverage and effectiveness.

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**Originality/value:** As the first holistic mapping of FL efforts in Bangladesh, this research offers novel insights into the broader discourse on digital learning and financial inclusion. It uniquely integrates institutional theory, behavioral economics, and educational technology to critically evaluate the FL landscape, and proposes a distinct Strategic Roadmap Policy Framework aligned with national development visions. This provides a scalable, policy-centric model for Bangladesh and offers a replicable framework for other developing economies facing similar challenges.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy; Financial Inclusion; Digital Inclusion; Inclusive Development; Bangladesh.

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### Understanding the Role of Financial Capability in Small Business Performance

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**Background:** Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are considered the heart of the financial ecosystem in Bangladesh. They not only create jobs but also support local growth and innovation, and a large number of families are directly and indirectly involved with this. While digital banking, finance management tools, and mobile financial services are available at the doorsteps, many SMEs struggle with financial management and long-term decision-making. Despite the opportunities and advantages, a large number of business owners still operate in informal methods and rely on intuition rather than structured financial planning. In the rapidly growing economy of Bangladesh, this limits their chances of potential growth and survival in the long run. Knowledge, skills, and attitude are the key factors of financial capability. Understanding how this capability affects business performance can lead the SMEs to new ways to run the business more effectively, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh.

**Purpose/Objective:** While previous studies explored how education and profitability influence financial literacy, there is still a limited understanding of how broader financial capability (practical skills and proactive attitudes) shapes actual business behaviour and performance. This study aims to bridge this gap by assessing the multidimensional influence of financial capability on strategic decision-making and financial outcomes among SME owners in Bangladesh.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study is based on primary survey data collected from 268 SME owners across different regions of Bangladesh. A structured questionnaire was used to capture responses related to their financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and key business decisions. Composite variables were created to summarize the core financial capabilities of the SME owners. The relationship between financial capability and business performance was analyzed using multinomial logistic regression, where financial decision-making was used as the dependent variable. Quantile method was applied to group the respondents into low, medium, and high performance levels.

**Findings:** The results primarily indicate that SME owners with higher levels of financial capability tend to make more strategic financial decisions. Among the three metrics of financial capability, the attitude showed the pivotal relation with proactive decision making. Additionally, fluctuations in performance were also observed across gender, employee size, and location, suggesting that contextual factors are also important predictors of financial outcomes.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study emphasizes how important financial capability is in determining the performance of SMEs in Bangladesh. This study offers a deeper understanding of what stimulates smart financial decisions by demonstrating that skills and knowledge are not enough in the absence of a proactive attitude. Policymakers, NGOs, and financial institutions that are striving to increase SME resilience, especially in areas with limited resources, should benefit from the findings. Furthermore, this study contributes to the discussion of how financial capability and literacy might improve economic well-being in underdeveloped nations.

**Originality/value:** This study presents empirical evidence of how the financial capability of SME owners, specifically their financial knowledge, skills, and attitude, influences the financial performance of their businesses. It also explores whether these capabilities affect the strategic financial decision making in planning, investment, and credit usage. This research enhances the literature by shifting focus from static financial knowledge to a behavioral understanding of financial capability.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Financial Capability, SME, Skills, Knowledge, Attitude.

## **Exploring The Impact of Community-Level Interventions on The Empowerment of Women In Marginalized Communities**

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**Background:** In Bangladesh, women in marginalized rural communities face systemic constraints and structural obstacles in accessing economic and financial opportunities due to deeply embedded patriarchal norms, limited financial literacy, and institutional exclusion. Although literature on the impact of microfinance and NGO-led initiatives in nurturing sustainable women empowerment is widely available, there remains a substantial gap in comprehending the role of community-level interventions that are focused on financial literacy and entrepreneurial development. Community-driven initiatives are significant in situations where the government-led mechanisms are insufficient or ineffective for the target users, especially for women who face multidimensional barriers from society, family, institutions, etc. (Lwamba et al., 2022). Utilizing the concepts of feminist (Carr, 2003; Abramovitz, 2012) and empowerment theories (Turner & Maschi, 2014), which are centered on the fair allocation of resources, this study considers empowerment not merely as a medium to financial liberation but as a process of enhancing women's decision-making skills.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of community-level financial literacy and entrepreneurial development programs in enhancing the economic empowerment of women in Bangladesh. Specifically, it explores: (1) how community-based interventions impact financial decision-making skills of women, (2) their role in broadening women's entrepreneurial mindset, and (3) whether these interventions contribute to sustained empowerment outcomes, in terms of growth mentality and self-confidence.

**Design/methodology/approach:** For this study, we have considered a single case study method based on the intervention- Academy of Women Entrepreneurs (AWE), which was conducted to fosteran entrepreneurial mindset and enhance financial competency (InvestarBD, n.d.) among 150 women-owned businesses from marginal communities, i.e., those coming from low-income backgrounds and different minority groups lacking familial and financial support. This program gave them access to skills like leadership, savings, basic accounting, budgeting, and business planning (Centre for Entrepreneurship Development [CED], 2022). The study is guided by an empowerment evaluation framework that measures both access to resources and the option to exercise control (Fetterman, 2021). It is exploratory in nature, where we conducted a structured survey, with a closed-ended questionnaire, among 65 participants of this program to assess its impact on women empowerment and entrepreneurial sustainability. The survey captured participants' opinions on financial decision-making, income-generating activities, and perceived advantages of attending the program. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies) to synthesize participants' responses and extract insights from them.

**Findings:** Our survey revealed that 74% of respondents found the intervention to be very supportive and that it helped them to boost their confidence, maintain work-life balance, and improve networking capabilities within their communities. 97% of them now prepare business plans that help them organize their business activities ahead of schedule. Instilling entrepreneurial skills among these women, despite having any sort of

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previous business management experience, significantly enhanced their decision-making ability and financial knowledge, helping them secure financial support from banks. The findings indicate positive perceived outcomes among the participants in relation to acquiring knowledge, proactively taking initiatives, and gaining self-reliance.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study presents the case for investing in community-driven entrepreneurial and financial education programs that operate at the marginalized level (Okech et al., 2020). Instead of solely depending on formal structures of power, locally organized interventions can create avenues of safe and accessible learning opportunities for women. Policymakers can consider combining with NGOs to offer unified programs under their rural development initiatives and prioritize partnerships with women-led community groups to enhance outreach and retention. They can also introduce a national registry of formal and informal women-led businesses to ensure their better access to opportunities and resources.

**Originality/value:** This research contributes to the literature by revealing how financially accessible, community-level interventions can enhance women's financial awareness and entrepreneurial readiness. By focusing on localized, community-run programs, this research offers a bottom-up perspective on empowerment that complements the existing top-down policy frameworks. The study offers country-specific insights on women's entrepreneurial challenges and impact of interventions. Future research can expand it to other countries and groups like young entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship, Marginalized Community

## **Money, Mobile, and Mindset: Digital Financial Literacy as a Catalyst for Women Empowerment in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** In today’s rapidly digitized economy, digital financial literacy (DFL) is no more a peripheral skill or technical competency, rather a key element of entrepreneurial success. In a nation with a 25 percent gender gap in deposit account ownership, 61 percent in loan accounts and 17 percent in mobile financial services as of 2024, DFL provides a pathway for economic inclusion and autonomy (WFID Summary, n.d.). The study postulates DFL as an influential strategic tool that triggers inclusive business growth and impactful financial performance (FP) by women-led enterprises in emerging markets like Bangladesh. This study draws on context-rich qualitative data from fourteen women entrepreneurs, to unload how financial knowledge when paired with digital tools, catalyzes empowerment through financial performance.

**Purpose/Objective:** DFL unfolds across several interconnected dimensions that directly influence how women run and grow their businesses. Digital literacy begins with the basic ability to use a smartphone or navigate an app—a significant barrier for many women from underserved backgrounds (Hassan & Ahsan, 2025). Next is transactional literacy: sending money, accepting payments, or using mobile wallets—skills essential for daily operations, yet often hindered by limited training and low confidence (Sari et al., 2024). Financial management involves tracking income, expenses, savings, and loans via digital tools. Most women learn this informally, as tailored upskilling programs remain scarce (Kumari et al., 2024). Security awareness—protecting digital assets and detecting fraud—is also crucial, though many women hesitate to report incidents due to stigma or lack of support (Naufalin et al., 2023). Finally, strategic financial decision-making requires using digital tools for planing and scaling. This demands not just access, but also confidence, mentorship, and mindset shifts—elements many women are still striving to gain (Obeng et al., 2024; Culebro-Martínez et al., 2024). These layers of digital financial literacy are shaped by women’s roles, responsibilities, and restricted agency. Thus, any intervention must address both skills and the socio-cultural barriers that shape their entrepreneurial pathways.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Two focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 28 women entrepreneurs. The first session included 14 participants—seven current members and seven graduates of the Uddomi Ami training program, which supports women whose businesses are either in the planning phase or at an early stage. The second session also involved 14 participants—seven current members and seven graduates of the Uddokta101 program, designed for women who have established businesses and are seeking to accelerate their growth. Both training initiatives are offered by the Women Empowerment Cell at BRAC Business School, BRAC University.

**Findings:** Three main themes emerged from the discussions: the role of financial literacy (FL) in business growth, barriers to upskilling, and inconsistencies in evaluating FP through DFL.

**1. Financial Literacy in Business Growth:** Participants highlighted how financial knowledge improved

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pricing, cash flow management, and access to growth capital. Understanding loan processes enhanced decision-making and financial scalability, emphasizing the synergy between DFL and FP in daily operations.

- 2. Barriers to DFL Adoption:** Women faced gender-specific barriers, such as a lack of gender-focused upskilling and socio-cultural resistance to change, which hindered the adoption of new financial practices.
- 3. Inconsistencies in Evaluating FP:** Most participants used informal metrics like profitability, while a few relied on indicators like revenue growth. This reveals the need for structured evaluation methods to assess DFL's impact on FP.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study emphasizes that enhancing DFL in women entrepreneurs bolsters inclusive growth and FP in women-led businesses. Practitioners such as NGOs and financial institutions should strategically integrate targeted digital literacy training, specifically catered to the unique needs of such businesses. In addition, policymakers should prioritize the development of digital financial education policies and infrastructure that bridges the gendered gap in access to finance and technology. In doing so, an emerging market like Bangladesh will move in the direction of inclusive finance and equitable participation of women-led businesses.

**Originality/value:** This study makes two contributions. First, it offers a gender-sensitive and localized perspective of the prospects and challenges of DFL among the new and aspiring women entrepreneurs. Second, it provides explanations into how DFL directly influences FP and business scaling, which is often underexplored in developing economies. Since the present research, the idea is in its nascent phase, it is subject to further research to address existing literature gaps and to excavate the understanding of DFL's long-term implications on women empowerment.

**Keywords:** Digital Financial Literacy, Women-owned businesses, Women empowerment, Financial performance, Digital Finance

## **Empowering Communities Through Financial Literacy and Digital Inclusion: A Pathway to Sustainable Development in Habiganj District, Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Access to financial services through technology is crucial for equitable economic growth. Financial literacy and digital inclusion, fair access to infrastructure and skills, are key to poverty alleviation and financial empowerment. Programs enhancing these skills can have a significant impact, particularly in rural areas where women, youth, and small business owners face challenges. Habiganj, in northeastern Bangladesh, highlights the barriers to financial inclusion. While mobile financial services (MFS) like bKash, Nagad, and Rocket have expanded access, their full potential is limited in rural areas due to poor infrastructure, limited smartphone access, and cultural barriers, especially for women and youth. These issues can be addressed through community-based financial education and digital literacy. Research shows that financial and digital literacy improve financial behavior and economic participation. Digital banking skills enable saving, informed decisions, and income-generating activities. To overcome these barriers, inclusive digital ecosystems should be fostered through policy initiatives involving fintech companies, microfinance institutions, NGOs, and local governments.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study assesses financial literacy and digital inclusion in Habiganj, focusing on vulnerable groups like women, youth, and small entrepreneurs, who are often excluded from formal financial systems due to gender, education, infrastructure, and socio-economic barriers. The study explores how financial knowledge is acquired and applied, how digital technologies are used, and the challenges these communities face in accessing financial and digital services. Financial literacy supports informed decisions on money management, savings, and investment, while digital inclusion drives socio-economic development in underserved areas. The study aims to identify gaps, barriers, and opportunities to promote inclusive access to financial and digital tools, contributing to the sustainable development of Habiganj by empowering its vulnerable populations to engage in the digital economy.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study used a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires from 50 residents of Habiganj, focusing on demographics, financial literacy, digital inclusion, and mobile banking. Secondary data was gathered from reliable sources such as articles, reports, and journals. A purposive sampling method targeted students, job holders, and farmers.

**Findings:** 41 individuals participated in the survey, with 73% aged 18–25, 15% aged 26–40, and 7% under 18. 61% were female, and 37% male. 56% held graduate degrees, and 29% had completed higher secondary education. 80% were students, with small business owners and farmers making up the remainder. In terms of financial knowledge, 68% reported knowing how to prepare a household budget, and 71% saved regularly. However, only 51% fully understood interest mechanisms. The majority preferred saving at home (51%) rather than using digital or formal financial services. Gender disparities were evident, with 44% of respondents indicating that women made independent financial decisions. Mobile financial services like bKash and

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Nagad were widely used, but barriers such as high transaction costs and lack of trust remained. The demand for free training was high, with 71% expressing interest in learning more about financial and digital literacy.

**Practical and policy implications:** To bridge the digital and financial divide, the following policy actions are suggested:

1. Conduct localized training sessions in community centers, schools, and union offices using culturally relevant materials.
2. Improve internet connectivity and mobile network coverage in rural areas to enhance digital access.
3. Integrate digital literacy and financial education into secondary school curricula.
4. Increase access to affordable gadgets and internet connectivity through policy measures.
5. Foster partnerships between governments, NGOs, and fintech companies to promote financial inclusion.

**Originality/value:** This study's mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative surveys with qualitative assessments, provides a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral trends and barriers in adopting mobile financial services. The study highlights the importance of gender-inclusive financial literacy programs and community-driven development strategies to address digital and financial exclusion in rural contexts.

**Keywords:** Digital Inclusion, Sustainable Development, Financial Services, Habiganj District.

## **Unlocking Sustainable Growth for Female-Entrepreneurs Through Financial Inclusion and Literacy**

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**Background:** Financial inclusion is pivotal to the development of emerging economies, as it fosters economic growth while combating poverty. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), nearly 91 percent of women in total employment mostly work in informal sectors in Southern Asia. The concept of inclusive financial growth holds paramount significance for Bangladesh, given that female micro-entrepreneurs make substantial contributions to the informal economic sector. Female micro-entrepreneurs contribute to the financial well-being of their families. The lack of capital drives their operations through informal business sectors. The significant business impact of these women continues to be limited due to various barriers that hinder their access to financial resources, thereby undermining their capacity for business expansion and jeopardising their long-term viability. The government has taken remarkable steps by working on expanding financial resources while teaching women basic financial literacy, particularly in rural locations. Many social institutions, including government programs and NGOs, as well as microfinance institutions, support the growth of women entrepreneurs.

**Purpose/Objective:** Socio-cultural restrictions, coupled with limited educational opportunities and mobility barriers, hinder women from accessing both financial assistance and knowledge resources. This qualitative study investigates the intersection of inclusive finance and financial literacy among rural female micro-entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants for the study. Five female micro-entrepreneurs engaged in their businesses in rural areas were interviewed utilising open-ended and semi-structured interview techniques. Research data went through transcription and analysis with NVivo-14 software for thematic analysis to prepare them for further assessment. An extensive case study methodology was also utilised in this research for contextual analysis.

**Findings:** Three critical factors – affordability, eligibility, and proximity – proved to be decisive in determining access to financial services for these women. Moreover, service terms, accessibility, reliability, security, cost, and convenience were also found to be other important factors in the effective use of financial services. The respondents lack exposure to formal financial education. Their financial decision-making is largely influenced by personal experience, peer guidance, and instinct to a considerable extent. This study provides findings indicating that agent banking and Mobile Financial Services (MFS) played an important role in expanding financial access in convenience and cutting down transaction costs. The respondents acknowledged that improving financial literacy helps them to make knowledgeable business decisions, utilise resources efficiently, and plan for sustainable progression. It also helps improve their access to formal credit and, among other things, promotes savings and reinvestment, strengthens their confidence and participation in economic and household decision-making.

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**Practical and policy implications:** The study further emphasises that enhancing the financial literacy of rural female microentrepreneurs and facilitating access to financial resources significantly influence individuals' financial health, which, in turn, directly affects their business resilience. This research tried to explore the benefits of women's economic empowerment through financial inclusion initiatives. Moreover, the research sets the future research directions of how rural female microentrepreneurs can achieve gender equality and bring sustainable business growth. Hence, policymakers and business enthusiasts can find this study useful for further exploration of inclusive financial growth, especially in emerging economies.

**Originality/value:** This study serves the original purpose of the study to add value in the existing literature and practical policy implications.

**Keywords:** Emerging Markets and Developing Economies (EMDEs), Financial Inclusion, Financial Literacy, Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment, Micro-entrepreneurship.

## **The Intersection of Financial Inclusion and Water Security: How Microfinance is Enhancing Water Access in South Asia**

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**Background:** Millions in South Asia lack consistent access to safe drinking water and sanitation, posing significant developmental challenges. Water insecurity impacts public health, education, gender equality, and socioeconomic growth. While large-scale infrastructure projects have traditionally been the focus, their high costs and logistical barriers often fail to reach marginalized rural and peri-urban areas. In parallel, microfinance, which provides small-scale financial services to underprivileged populations, has gained prominence as a tool for poverty reduction. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) in South Asia have recently started offering water and sanitation loans to address financial barriers to water access. Although the intersection of microfinance and water security shows great potential, there is limited research on this convergence. This study aims to explore how microfinance systems improve water access, infrastructure, and hygiene outcomes in South Asia, with a focus on the socio-economic impacts for women, who are disproportionately affected by water shortages and typically manage household water needs.

**Purpose/Objective:** Water security remains a significant challenge in South Asia, as millions lack access to safe water and sanitation. This shortage hampers public health, education, and economic growth. Large-scale water projects often fail to benefit marginalized communities due to financial and logistical constraints. Microfinance has become crucial for economic empowerment in marginalized groups, and in recent years, MFIs have offered loans for water and sanitation, enabling low-income households to invest in water access solutions. This study examines how microfinance can improve water accessibility, affordability, and hygiene, particularly for women, and evaluates the spatial and institutional dynamics at play. The goal is to provide actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and financial institutions to promote sustainable water security, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

**Design/methodology/approach:** A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study focused on rural and peri-urban areas in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, where MFIs offered water and sanitation (WATSAN) loans. A multistage stratified sampling method was used to select districts with varying microfinance penetration, including both MFI clients and non-clients. The quantitative component involved structured household surveys to assess loan utilization, water access, sanitation practices, hygiene, health, income, and time use. Institutional records from MFIs were also analyzed. The qualitative component included focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with MFI clients, officials, and community leaders to explore perceptions and challenges related to microfinance and water access.

**Findings:** The study found that microfinance significantly improved water security and supported inclusive development. Households with WATSAN loans saw an increase in monthly income from \$500 to \$800 from 2018 to 2023, indicating that improved water access boosted economic productivity. School attendance rose

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from 70% to 89%, with girls benefiting from reduced water collection duties. Loan repayment rates increased from 85% to 95%, demonstrating the financial viability of these initiatives. Community satisfaction with water services improved, and the average time to access water dropped from 45 minutes to 15 minutes. Female participation in WATSAN programs rose from 30% to 68%, highlighting improved gender inclusion. Public health outcomes also improved, with waterborne disease incidents decreasing from 150 to 45 per 1,000 people.

**Practical and policy implications:** The study suggests that integrating microfinance with water infrastructure projects can drive equitable development. Microfinance for water access can enhance household incomes, reduce disease burden, increase school attendance, and improve community satisfaction. Policy-makers should foster collaboration between financial institutions, local governments, and development agencies to scale WATSAN-oriented microfinance schemes. Including water access finance in national policies will help close service gaps in water-insecure areas while ensuring financial sustainability and improved public health.

**Originality/value:** This study offers a novel analysis of how microfinance, specifically WATSAN loans, can improve water security, public health, education, and gender equity. It provides evidence-based insights into the intersection of microfinance and water security, with a focus on long-term, quantifiable outcomes. The study tracks the impact of microfinance on income, education, health, and gender participation, providing fresh perspectives on how financial inclusion can contribute to sustainable water access.

**Keywords:** Microfinance, Water Security, Financial Inclusion, WATSAN, South Asia.

## **Mind the Money Gap: Twisting the Threads Between Financial Literacy and Women's Entrepreneurial Mojo – What's Next?**

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**Background:** Over the past decades, there has been a surge of women participating in entrepreneurship, which is increasingly becoming vital in a society's economic development and social transformation, especially that of developing and emerging economies. Despite this upward ambit, female entrepreneurs often face financial challenges that deter their venture's financial growth and sustainability. Among several factors influencing their growth and success, financial literacy is one critical component that is usually ignored. While financial literacy (FL) cannot be emphasized enough in the case of women entrepreneurs, it becomes even more crucial. Women entrepreneurs often operate in a resource-constrained environment with limited access to capital, training and essential tools and resources.

**Purpose/Objective:** The objectives of this study are to identify gaps in the current literature concerning independent and dependent variables, geographical focus, and methodological approaches.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study uses a qualitative meta-analysis research approach on the basis of secondary data collection. Relevant academic literature, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks were reviewed to gain insights into the research topic.

**Findings:** The findings of this study reveal that financial literacy significantly contributes to empowering women entrepreneurs. It enhances their economic resilience and business performance, most importantly in a resource-constrained environment. Many past papers focused on the need for training on technical issues. Behavioral competencies such as confidence, risk-taking attitude and mindset are underexplored. The study further confirms the significant gap in the accessibility of financial tools and training that exists in different geographic regions. Furthermore, methodological gap calls for more inclusive longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to capture the true impact of financial literacy on women's business outcomes.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings of this study emphasize the need for robust policy frameworks integrating financial literacy into the dialogue about women's empowerment and SME development strategies. Government and associated partners must mandate contextual training on financial literacy, especially for loan recipients and entrepreneurship grants. By increasing investment, digital infrastructure should be strengthened, and more economic inclusion programs should be developed to reduce the urban-rural gap. These initiatives will gradually provide equitable access to all. Training should focus on developing technical skills and increasing behavioural competencies of these entrepreneurs, such as a positive attitude towards risk and entrepreneurship and boosting their confidence and mindset. A continuous monitoring and feedback system will further enhance the effectiveness of these interventions.

**Originality/value:** This study originally integrates qualitative meta-analysis with emerging themes from recent literature, offering a multi-dimensional view of financial literacy as both a technical and psychological

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enabler for women entrepreneurs. This study highlights the traditional business performance metrics and sheds light on the importance of changing behavioural drivers such as confidence and mindset. There is no doubt that digital financial literacy is imperative in the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Additionally, it addresses contextual and methodological gaps. The study offers some suggestions on including some underrepresented regions. It also suggests that mixed and longitudinal research designs should be conducted. Doing so provides a novel, inclusive, and practical framework for researchers and policymakers aiming to create scalable, impactful solutions for women's financial empowerment.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Women entrepreneurs, Empowerment and Behavioural Competencies.

## **Does Financial Literacy Influence Household Economic Well-being? Evidence from Dhaka, Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Over the years, Bangladesh has witnessed outstanding socio-economic transformations, including strong GDP growth, rising incomes, and a gradual transition from an economy dependent on agriculture to a robust industrial and service-based one. While this shift has resulted in upward mobility for millions, rising incomes have also introduced new financial complexities, which demand a higher level of financial literacy among households. However, access alone does not guarantee effective utilization. There is still a paucity in individuals' ability to make wise financial decisions, particularly when it comes to retirement planning, investments, insurance, and savings, even with increased financial access and product availability. Although the previous study in South Asia (e.g., Grohmann, 2017; Khallily, 2016) indicates that even a moderate level of financial literacy might improve financial outcomes, this area is underexplored in the Bangladeshi context, particularly in terms of advice-seeking behavior.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to evaluate how households' financial decision-making and overall well-being are influenced by financial literacy, which has been defined by financial knowledge, confidence, capability, attitudes, and intentions, alongside the willingness to seek professional financial guidance. It also explores the additional role played by advice-seeking behavior, whether or not individuals actively seek help from professionals in managing their finances.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We conducted a large-scale, structured survey on 472 Bangladeshi households, targeting diverse household profiles across age, income, education, and family structure. The questionnaire measured multiple dimensions of financial literacy and wellbeing, using validated Likert-scale items. We developed composite scores to quantify financial literacy and well-being, and applied multiple regression models to explore the relationship between the two.

**Findings:** The preliminary findings of this study indicate that higher financial literacy is associated with stronger financial behaviors. Households with higher financial literacy scores are more likely to practice better financial strategies, maintain emergency savings, invest in long-term goals, and report lower stress related to financial insecurity. Also, the tendency to seek financial advice, particularly from reliable, professional sources, enhances the benefits of literacy. This indicates that access and behavioral intentions are equally important as knowledge itself. By connecting financial literacy with behavioral outcomes in a developing country setting, this study addresses an empirical gap in the literature on household finance. Secondly, this research offers evidence-based policy recommendations, such as integrating financial advisory services at the community level and creating inclusive financial literacy programs tailored to diverse household profiles.

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**Practical and policy implications:** This study further contributes to the growing literature on household finance in developing economies and highlights the urgent need for specialized financial education initiatives and advisory services. These findings are significant because they suggest that governments, NGOs, policy-makers, educators, and financial institutions must prioritize enhancing financial literacy initiatives to support long-term financial stability and inclusion in Bangladesh. This type of effort would ensure households earn more and are capable of sustaining economic stability and prosperity in the long run, which will eventually help promote broader financial inclusion and national economic well-being.

**Originality/value:** This research presents original data-driven insights into Bangladeshi household finance. It contributes to the behavioral finance literature and offers practical value for designing more effective financial inclusion policies in developing economies. Furthermore, the findings highlight that while financial knowledge is crucial, behavioral engagement and access to reliable guidance can truly enhance the positive outcomes.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Household Finance, Financial Wellbeing, Advice-Seeking Behavior.

## **Reimagining Finance and Accounting Education: Understanding the AI Integration Dilemma**

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**Background:** Due to the groundbreaking effects of artificial intelligence (AI) the academic arena of finance and accounting is transforming. AI is being adopted by the industries for automation, auditing, analytics and many more, but educational curricula frequently fall behind. AI tools are becoming invaluable in the professional context but ironically multiple academic institutions have banned the use of AI in the classroom. This paper reviews existing research by exploring how accounting and finance education can be reimagined in the era of AI in order to protect the integrity of academics, improve its pedagogy and to meet transforming business expectations.

**Purpose/Objective:** The main goal of this paper is to analyze the ways for academic institutions to incorporate the use of AI into finance and accounting curricula by looking into four key dilemmas: (a) curricular lag in meeting industry-driven AI competencies, (b) balancing academic integrity with AI tool fluency, (c) faculty readiness versus student-driven adoption of AI, and (d) navigating between regulated integration and adaptive flexibility. These keys offer a thematic lens to be able to understand multiple institutional and pedagogical difficulties arising from technological innovation.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A thematic literature review was applied to identify common patterns, ethical concerns and practical solutions to organize key ideas from the literature. Initially the search was conducted on the Scopus database using terms like "artificial intelligence" or "AI" or "machine learning" or "generative AI" or "chatbots" or "ChatGPT" and "finance education" or "accounting education" or "finance curriculum" or "accounting curriculum" or "business curriculum" filtering the peer-reviewed articles that were published in English. By this 1,048 articles were generated. Screening according to the content relevancy and subject matter, 256 articles were shortlisted. Reviewing the abstract of these shortlisted papers in alignment with the four main keys, 112 papers were finalised for in depth research. Each article was coded and categorized under the corresponding tension, facilitating a structured synthesis of insights across the global academic landscape.

**Findings:** The findings demonstrate that the finance and accounting education and industry needs have a major disparity. Academic programs are struggling to meet the artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities expected by the modern workplace. FinTech modules, real-time case simulations, and AI labs show potential but are not widely implemented yet. The academic integrity and tool fluency show moral problems caused by generative AI tools, raising issues about plagiarism and over-reliance. This highlights the need of universities to promote AI literacy alongside academic honesty. Between faculty preparedness and student adoption of artificial intelligence, there is an obvious disparity. Although many faculty members lack the expertise or self-assurance to advise ethical use, students are eager to use AI tools. This asymmetry leads to inconsistent pedagogical outcomes. Finally, the middle ground possibility, i.e. regulated integration of AI, gives a viable

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way forward with programs like blended assessments, AI ethics declaration, and AI integrated learning outcomes.

**Practical and policy implications:** This paper contributes to the literature by offering a framework that categorizes current challenges and establishes sensible solutions for bridging the gap between technological innovation and educational practice. Policy implications are outlined in terms of creating AI education guidelines, investing in continuous faculty development, mandatory course incorporation of AI literacy modules, and increased cooperation between industry and academia. In conclusion, navigating the age of AI requires a holistic transformation of finance and accounting education, ethical values, and collaborative efforts of educators, policymakers and industry leaders.

**Originality/value:** The study consolidates key issues and solutions of the integration of AI in accounting and finance education. It highlights the necessity of a systematic approach of combining traditional teaching with technological advancement. Furthermore, it outlines a clear path for future research in this evolving field.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, finance and accounting education, industry needs, curriculum integration, faculty development.

## **Does Islamic Social Finance Matter for MSMEs Sustainability? The roles of Digital Literacy and Government Initiatives in an Emerging Economy**

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**Background:** Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) serve as the backbone of global economies, playing crucial roles in maintaining economic stability and sustainability through multiple channels particularly developing and emerging economies (Endris and Kassegn, 2022; ILO, 2023). They contribute over two-thirds of private sector jobs in Asian countries and account for 25% of GDP in Bangladesh (ADB, 2018; Ministry of Industry, 2019). Beyond providing employment opportunities, MSMEs play a multifaceted role in poverty alleviation and lifting millions out of economic vulnerability in rural and informal sectors (Ipinaiye and Olaniyan, 2023). However, they often face constraints in achieving sustainability (e.g. long-term resilience) due to limited access to conventional financing, technological gaps, current market competitiveness, and regulatory obstacles. In this context, Islamic social finance (ISF) can contribute to mitigate these unanticipated challenges by digitizing its instruments such as Zakah, Sadaqah, Waqf, Qard al-Hasanah, Takaful, Islamic microfinance, Sukuk, and crowdfunding (Hossain et al., 2025). While ISF has immense potential to empower MSMEs, its impact remains unexplored, especially in the context of government support and current digital ecosystem like digital literacy.

**Purpose/Objective:** The purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive model that enhances MSMEs sustainability in an emerging country like Bangladesh by leveraging the interactions between Islamic social finance (ISF), digital literacy (DL), and government initiatives (GI).

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study relies on a qualitative approach due to the complex interplay among Islamic Social Finance (ISF), government initiative (GI), and digital literacy (DL). Qualitative research design is suitable for unveiling underlying meanings, contextual factors, and stakeholder perspectives. Therefore, instead of quantifying the magnitude of impact, this study aims to build and refine a conceptual model based on deep insights into the phenomena. Moreover, the study highlights synthesizing existing literature on Islamic social finance, institutional frameworks, and digitalization, applying related theories like social finance theory, institutional theory, and the technological acceptance theory (TAM). This research design is consistent with qualitative methods that associate and foster theory development through rich, context-specific data (Al-Daihani et al., 2025; Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2013). However, incorporating the analysis of ISF instruments along with assessment of related literature and theoretical underpinnings. By associating these magnitudes, the proposed model articulates to signify policymakers, MSME stakeholders, and Islamic financial institutions with considerable strategies to foster long-run resilience.

**Findings:** This study finds that the proposed model offers a comprehensive, ethical, and interest-free financial ecosystem that significantly fosters MSMEs sustainability. By embracing the instruments of ISF like Zakah, Waqf, Islamic microfinance, sukuk, crowdfunding, it offers ethical, inclusive, and Makashid Al-Shariah based solutions that significantly contribute to MSMEs sustainability. However, the efficiency of ISF strongly depends on government initiatives, which act as a moderating variable by providing policy implica-

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tions, regulatory boundaries, and institutional support. In addition, digital literacy emerges as a key mediating dynamic, enabling MSMEs to access and utilize ISF instruments through digital platforms.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study provides several practical and policy implications. First, the findings suggest that the instruments of ISF may integrate into national financial inclusion strategies to enhance MSMEs sustainability in emerging economies. Second, policymakers are encouraged to develop regulatory frameworks that promote Shariah compliant instruments, ensuring transparency and accountability. Third, government agencies may collaborate with Shariah compliant institutions to facilitate digital platforms and improve financial literacy. Finally, the nexus between ISF, advanced digital literacy, and government support creates an interactive effect that strengthens MSME sustainability and contributes to sustainable development in emerging economies like Bangladesh.

**Originality/value:** The present study proposes a comprehensive model that integrates ISF, digital literacy (DL), and government initiatives (GI) to foster MSME sustainability in emerging economies. It presents the mediating role DL and moderating role of GI within a single framework associating ISF instruments, while prior studies have typically explored these components in isolation. Aligned with the principles of Maqasid-Al-Shariah, this study offers a faith-based inclusive approach to MSMEs suitability, contributing practical insights for policymakers, digital inclusion providers, and financial institutions.

**Keywords:** Islamic Social Finance; MSMEs Sustainability; Digital Literacy; Government Initiative; Emerging Economy.

## **The Impact of Financial Literacy on Bangladesh SMEs': Financial Behaviour and Financial Wellbeing**

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**Background:** Several studies have been conducted on the subject of financial well-being, financial concerns, and financial literacy. In this research, the impact of three variables on financial decisions, health and success in business and personal life of individuals was covered, and family factors, economic-social–social and demographic variables on the rates of economic welfare, financial concerns, and financial literacy are studied.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study investigates the relationships between financial literacy, financial well-being, and financial concerns. Utilizing a questionnaire distributed through random sampling, the data were analyzed using correlation tests, independent t-tests, and regression analysis. The findings indicate that age and education are positively associated with both financial literacy and financial well-being. Moreover, married individuals and men exhibit higher levels of financial literacy.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The survey for this study is placed in the area of applicable research depending on its aim, because it focuses on planning to solve a real-world problem, and the results can be applied in the real decision-making situations. and from the viewpoint of the method of data collection it can be placed in the field of survey and analysis research, because it studies the characteristics of a statistical population and seeks to analyze and process data. In this research, society is Small Medium Entrepreneur's (SME'S). This Area is located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and has around 200 SME'S.

**Findings:** The results revealed several important points. First, there is a positive relationship between the age and variables of financial wellbeing and financial literacy, marital status and sex and the financial literacy variable, and education level and financial well-being variable and financial literacy. Second, a higher level of financial wellbeing is followed by financial literacy. Third, higher financial literacy leads to less financial concerns. Finally, higher financial well-being reduces financial concerns.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings highlight key practical and policy implications for Bangladeshi SMEs, emphasizing the need for structured financial literacy training to enhance entrepreneurs' skills in budgeting, credit management, and financial planning. Targeted support should be directed toward female and unmarried entrepreneurs, who may have lower financial literacy, to promote inclusivity and equal opportunity in business. Additionally, government bodies and financial institutions should collaborate with NGOs and business chambers to design education-based programs tailored for SME operators with limited formal education. Finally, since financial literacy tends to increase with age, young SME owners would benefit from age-specific financial guidance through mentorship and coaching from more experienced business professionals to strengthen financial decision-making early in their entrepreneurial journey.

**Originality/value:** This study offers original value by empirically establishing the interconnectedness

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between financial literacy, financial well-being, and financial concerns within the context of growing economic complexity, which is especially relevant for Bangladeshi SMEs. It highlights the significance of targeted financial education as a strategic tool to improve the financial decision-making capacity of SME owners and entrepreneurs. By identifying key demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and education that influence financial literacy, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers and financial institutions. The findings underscore the importance of inclusive and customized financial literacy programs to foster a financially resilient SME sector in Bangladesh, thereby contributing to sustainable economic growth and stability.

**Keywords:** Financial literacy, Financial behavior, Financial-well-being, Financial Knowledge.

## **Digital Microfinance in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** This research seeks to understand the function and impact of digital microfinance in Bangladesh. Microfinance, first initiated in Bangladesh by Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus through Grameen Bank, and further advanced through BRAC led by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, is now a worldwide recognized financial transaction system that targets the poorer section of people, especially women, who do not fall under the traditional banking requirements to receive a loan. Microfinance is a proven banking system for the poor that has received acceptance by many states, especially poor women groups, to engage themselves in financial dealings and thereby causing social and economic development. The microfinance transactions at present are being held through the manual system in Bangladesh. Introducing digitalization is the urge of the time that can really accelerate the performance of the sector, and the economy of the country.

**Purpose/Objective:** The objective of this study is to see the on-the-ground situation of digital microfinance and its impact on both the sector and the economy of Bangladesh by broadly discussing the benefits and challenges of digitalization and the way forward.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study follows a qualitative methodology. For the primary source of data, snowball sampling was adopted. Individual interviews of various designated persons of some MFIs were conducted. 10 FGDs were conducted with microfinance group members from three different geographical areas. Various books, journals, scholarly opinions, and news articles have been considered as secondary sources.

**Findings:** The initial finding states that the institutions are now willing to create a common digital platform and infrastructure to run digitally though previously many were doubtful and unwilling. Some large MFIs like BRAC, BURO Bangladesh, ASA, etc. are implementing digital methods which have shown positive results. The main challenges MFIs face are designing the appropriate program in a digital method, identifying authenticity of the borrower's personal information, particularly in case of larger loan amounts, and the transfer of loan money using digital methods. MFIs prefer a common digital platform, which will be less problematic to implement, and overcoming the hurdles will be easier. MFIs are also focusing on digital literacy training, both for staff and borrowers. During the FGDs, the borrowers who are comparatively aged show less interest in accepting digitization and are shaky about using the technology. Lack of digital literacy is another biggest cause behind their preference for a manual transaction system. However, there were a good number of borrowers who are comparatively educated and young in age showed interest in adopting digital transaction systems. No individual was found who is completely dependent on digital tools or willing to use a completely digitized system.

**Practical and policy implications:** Organizing digital microfinance facilities in the country need fund allocation and governmental policy provisions so that a form of binding and promotional arrangements can be made available to shoulder a huge task like digitization. Our country still lags far behind in a digital

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environment. Proper guidelines are important so that both large and small MFIs get equal distribution of funds and services for transforming their institutions with digital facilities.

**Originality/value:** The apogee and push factor of this research is to understand the reality of implementing digitalization in the MF sector, even though it is not a novel issue, but surely a less studied one. In our country, MFIs have shown success through manual transactions, but face a lot of limitations concerning increasing outreach, staff time and efficiency, quick information generation and decision making, accurate and timely accounting, resulting in a kind of saturation of the promotion of microfinance. Digitalization can play a positive role on limitations created from manual transactions.

**Keywords:** Microfinance, Digitalization, Digital Literacy, Infrastructure, Transaction.

## **Determinants of Labor Force Participation of Females with Tertiary Education: A Cross-Country Analysis**

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**Background:** Despite significant global improvements in female tertiary education driven by initiatives like the SDGs, labor force participation (LFP) among tertiary-educated women varies substantially across countries. Previous studies (Chapman, 2015; Patimo et al., 2015; Marjanović et al., 2023) have not examined the determinants of LFP specifically for tertiary-educated women on a global scale, creating a critical knowledge gap. Understanding this variation is essential given the economic benefits of integrating highly educated women into the workforce, including enhanced economic growth (Gemmell, 2009), increased government revenue (OECD, 2017), and improved productivity (Moretti, 2004).

**Purpose/Objective:** This study fills the research gap by analyzing multidimensional factors influencing labor force participation of tertiary-educated females (FLFPT) across countries, examining how economic, demographic, and sociocultural factors affect FLFPT rates among working-age women with tertiary education.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study analyzes data from 109 countries from 2006-2018 using a two-way fixed effect panel regression model. Key explanatory variables include GDP per capita, expected to demonstrate a U-shaped relationship with FLFPT according to the feminization-U hypothesis, and the child-to-woman ratio, hypothesized to negatively impact participation due to childcare responsibilities. The percentage of working-age women with tertiary education should positively influence FLFPT, while the service sector's contribution as percentage of GDP is expected to enhance participation by providing female-friendly employment opportunities. The unemployment rate is expected to have an ambiguous relationship, and the Adjusted Gender Gap Index should positively affect FLFPT, with interaction effects capturing synergies between female education and gender equality.

**Findings:** Results confirm a U-shaped relationship between economic development and FLFPT. At average GDP per capita of \$12,805, each one-percent GDP increase corresponds to a 0.19 percentage point rise in FLFPT. Surprisingly, the child-woman ratio exhibits an inverse-U relationship, with each unit increase yielding a 2.6 percentage point FLFPT increase on the average (2.8). A one-percent rise in unemployment and service sector GDP contribution associate with 0.14 and 0.1 percentage point increases in FLFPT, respectively. The interaction between female tertiary education and gender equality demonstrates significant synergistic effects, with each point increase in gender equality corresponding to a 0.17 percentage point FLFPT increase. Income-group disaggregated analysis reveals distinct patterns: in low-income countries, the child-woman ratio negatively impacts FLFPT but becomes positive beyond 4.6, while service sector expansion adds 0.23 percentage points per one-percent increase. Lower-middle-income countries show 0.08 percentage point FLFPT increases per five-percent GDP rise and 2.2 percentage point increases per unit rise in child-woman ratio. Upper-middle-income countries demonstrate GDP's U-shaped relationship with 0.09 percentage point increases per five-percent GDP rise. High-income countries exhibit 0.17 percentage point

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FLFPT increases per one-percent unemployment rise. The education-gender equality interaction remains significant across all income groups.

**Practical and policy implications:** Policy recommendations include subsidized childcare and flexible work arrangements to reduce caregiving burdens across income levels. Low-income countries should expand female-friendly service sectors through targeted investment in education, healthcare, and financial services. Middle-income nations should focus on economic development while integrating tertiary-educated women into the workforce. High-income countries should strengthen gender equality through workplace equity measures. Universal strategies include investing in female tertiary education and improving gender equality policies across all development levels.

**Originality/value:** This study contributes by being the first to comprehensively examine FLFPT determinants across income groups globally, revealing income-specific patterns while demonstrating the importance of coordinated education-gender equality policies.

**Keywords:** female labor force participation, tertiary education, panel data regression, economic empowerment of women.

## **Exploring Consumer Behavior in Cosmopolitan Areas of Bangladesh: A Study on Mobile Financial Service-Based Microcredit Loans**

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**Background:** As mobile financial services (MFS) become more embedded in daily life in Bangladesh, urban residents are turning to these platforms not just for payments but also for credit. In cities like Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, and Khulna, where access to traditional banking can be limited or inconvenient, mobile-based microloans have gained popularity. These digital loans offer quick, collateral-free access to credit and are often seen as a flexible financial tool by working professionals, students, and informal sector workers.

**Purpose/Objective:** The aim of this study is to better understand what drives urban consumers to use mobile microloans. It explores what motivates adoption, how people use these loans, and what concerns or barriers they face. The study also looks at how MFS-based credit fits into the broader picture of urban financial behavior and decision-making.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. A survey was conducted among 400 respondents across four major cities. Participants included actual and potential users of mobile microcredit—ranging from students to freelancers and early-career professionals. The survey gathered information on digital habits, trust in platforms, perceived need for credit, income consistency, and repayment behavior. To support and deepen the findings, 12 qualitative interviews were carried out with financial service users, MFS agents, and fintech experts. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to identify key influencing factors.

**Findings:** The results show that ease of access, lack of paperwork, and fast loan disbursement are primary reasons people use mobile microloans. Many users described these loans as a convenient backup for covering sudden costs like education fees, transport, or health expenses. For those without access to credit cards or formal banking, these microloans act as an alternative financial safety net. However, the research also found challenges. A significant portion of users lacked clear understanding of repayment terms or interest rates. Concerns about data privacy and debt risk were also common. Trust in the platform and clear communication of loan conditions were found to play a big role in shaping user behavior.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study adds insight into how digital microcredit is shaping financial behavior in urban Bangladesh. It shows that while mobile loans can improve access to credit, especially for underserved groups, there are risks if consumers are not well-informed. Policymakers and service providers should consider investing in financial education, improving transparency around loan terms, and enforcing strong data protection. Building trust and financial awareness will be key to making digital credit systems more inclusive and sustainable in the long run..

**Keywords:** Mobile Financial Services, Microcredit, Urban Consumer Behavior, Digital Loans, Financial Inclusion.

## **MFIs and Livelihood: Assessing Impacts of Microcredit Programs Through PRA in Talaimari Slum, Rajshahi, Bangladesh**

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**Background:** With regard to low-income people living in an area like a slum in Talaimari, they are often in need of financial resources to improve their lives. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) provide small loans to low-income people for the purpose of initiating some small businesses or upgrading their homes. This study is centered on the changes in the lives of the people of the slum due to these loans, especially women who are using this support for empowerment and becoming independent.

**Purpose/Objective:** The main purpose of this study is to explore the impact of microcredit programs on the economy, social relationships, and living conditions of people living in the Talaimari slum. The research has been focused on community participation to understand their real experiences.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study was conducted under a participatory research approach in which members of the community actively participated in the study. Tools used included social mapping, process mapping, trend analysis, force field analysis, Venn diagrams, and livelihood analysis. Data was collected by means of group discussions and surveys with community people.

**Findings:** The saying goes that microcredit has enabled the villagers to gain credit and finance small businesses for earning some income and financial sustenance. Women, in particular, have gained courage and independence. With these small loans, families are able to repair houses, pay for school fees for their children, medical needs of family members, and the like. Some hitches, however, are still evident: late repayments, misuse of loans, and social or cultural restrictions barring some people from joining these programs.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study proposes that training in money management for borrowers be instituted, better techniques ought to be employed to ascertain those who actually need loans, the society should be encouraged to report all malpractices, and housing loan policy and women policies should also be designed in line with the real needs of the borrowers. It further suggests the implementation of strict government laws and fair practices in the collection of loan repayments so that the programs remain sustainable and just.

**Originality/value:** The originality of this research lies in the involvement of the community in the process, which paints a picture of the influence of microfinance on poorer urban areas like Talaimari. It puts the good and the bad of microcredit programs on the table, thus contributing vital money that other surveys neglect.

**Keywords:** Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Livelihood, Urban Slum, Socioeconomics Impact.

## **Qualitative Dimensions of Financial Behaviour Among Low-Income Consumers: A Conceptual Inquiry**

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**Background:** Traditionally, the financial sector has used quantitative techniques based on observable indicators like income level, creditworthiness, and loan expertise. As much as they give users much insight into economic systems, measures like these might have nothing to say explicitly about potentially influencing challenging, intangible factors (e.g., cultural norms, emotion, and trust) on financial behavior (Mhlanga & Dunga, 2024). When formal financial services networks are weak, disused, or nonexistent, social dynamics, propensity, cultural norms, and trust factor into financial decision-making. For low-income communities, these qualitative dimensions revolve around the opportunities for borrowing, spending decisions, and financial management.

**Purpose/Objective:** This research is of significant importance as it aims to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework that reinterprets the financial behavior of low-income consumer groups. It focuses on cultural norms, emotional sensitivities, and trust in informal financial systems, questioning the claimed generality of quantitative standpoints in finance studies. By shedding light on the socio-cultural and emotional dimensions of decision making, particularly in the confines of informal economies, this research brings to the forefront a crucial aspect of consumer behavior.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research adopts a conceptual research method to develop a framework through the synthesis of current literature that logically links constructs/variables from understandings, contributing to a new, cohesive framework of how financial behaviors, qualitatively defined, are communicated by low-income consumers. This research is built on an interdisciplinary foundation of knowledge comprising several fields such as behavioral finance, cultural economics, social exchange theory, and institutional theory. These fields provide the theoretical underpinnings for our investigation into the influences that cultural norms, emotional resilience, trust in informal systems, financial preferences, and adaptive strategies exert on the behavior of choices within such a market by low-income consumers.

**Findings:** The research reveals that financial behavior in community-based financial ecosystems is determined by cultural norms, emotional resilience, informal trust, and adaptive financial strategies through decision-making. These adaptive financial strategies, which include specific strategies, enhance emotional resilience, promote preference for informal mechanisms, and stimulate themselves through adaptive financial strategies. These strategies, deeply embedded in a socio-cultural culture, directly influence the financial choices of low-income consumers, a direction barely theorized within traditional quantitative models.

**Practical and policy implications:** The research advances the area of quantitative finance by investigating the social and emotional facets of financial behavior. It implies an encouragement for financial institutions' stakeholders, policymakers, and marketers to interface with the low-income consumers in building financial products of relevance to them. These aspects translate into the design of financial services, literacy programs,

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and marketing strategies that are all inclusive, culturally sensitive, and emotionally oriented, respectively, providing practical implications for this study.

**Originality/value:** This inquiry highlights the human and cultural aspects and provides a fresh and original look at finance. It sees financial behavior, especially among low-income groups, not as errors or deviations but as meaningful action brought about by emotional and cultural stimuli. This approach represents a fresh contribution to finance, studying economic behavior among low-income consumers.

**Keywords:** Qualitative Finance, Cultural Norms, Low-Income Consumer Behavior, Financial Decision-Making, Inclusive Finance

## **Financial Inclusion and Economic Resilience in Iraq: Analysis using IMF Data (2016-2023)**

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**Background:** Enhancing financial inclusivity is not just an economic objective in a country that is trying to recover from years of conflict, but rather a pillar for achieving long-term security and sustainable development. This research analyzes the financial inclusion indicators of Iraq from 2016 to 2023 and seeks to understand its contribution towards economic resilience. The work explores the latest released International Monetary Fund's Financial Access Survey (IMF FAS) data on the physical banking infrastructure as well as digital financial services, and their relationship to financial health. In countries emerging from conflict, financial inclusion serves not only as a tool for economic revitalization but as a cornerstone for fostering long-term resilience, equity, and social conversions. Iraq is undergoing through transition in its financial landscape marked as shifts from traditional banking structure to a hybrid model encompassing digital technologies.

**Purpose/Objective:** This research seeks to evaluate the transformation of financial inclusion in Iraq from 2016 to 2023 by assessing how developments in both physical and digital financial infrastructure correlate with key indicators of economic resilience, especially within the households and SME sectors.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This paper employs a case study methodology and uses publicly available secondary data from the International Monetary Fund's Financial Access Survey (FAS). Data processing, visualizations, and econometric modelling were conducted using Python libraries including Pandas, Seaborn, stats models, and Matplotlib.

**Findings:** Results demonstrate a distinct transition towards digital -first financial inclusion in Iraq. Debit card ownership increased over 100-fold. ATM installation grew by more than 7.5 times, while bank branches declined or stagnated. ATM availability was the most reliable predictor of SME deposit growth. Moreover, household and SME credit behaviors were shown to be interrelated, reflecting diffusion of financial habits across economic strata. Mobile money agents, while showing early promises, plateaued in later years. pointing to gaps in consumer adoption or operational Sustainability. Regression findings aligned with observed trends in line plots and bar charts strengthening empirical reliability.

**Practical and policy implications:** To translate the observed gains in financial inclusion into long term economic resilience, policymakers must prioritize investments in ATM infrastructure, which our findings identify as the strongest predictor of SME deposit growth. Strengthening this physical access point will anchor broader digital banking adoption. Public private partnership should be mobilized to scale up ATM and digital service networks while addressing the stagnation in mobile money uptake through targeted subsidies and capacity building for agents. Importantly, the policy framework must be context sensitive, balancing the push for digital transformation with infrastructural realities and user readiness to avoid widening the inclusion gap.

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**Originality/value:** This work is one of its kind of study where there is a combination of longitudinal IMF FAS data with multivariate regression. VIF diagnostics and detailed visual analytics using Python-based tools to understand Iraq's evolving financial inclusion landscape. It offers evidence-based recommendations for infrastructure investments and financial inclusion strategies in post conflict and fragile settings like Iraq.

**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Iraq, Digital Infrastructure. Economic Resilience, IMF, Financial Access.

## **Impact of E-Payment Systems on the Economic Growth of Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Prior studies on electronic payment systems were mostly concerned with mobile financial services (MFS). The goal of the studies was to determine how the e-payment system impacts sustainable economic growth in Bangladesh. The existing literature does not address the entire growth of all payment service categories in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the literature shows minimal correlation between the development of e-payment systems and Bangladesh's GDP growth.

**Purpose/Objective:** The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of E-Payment Systems on the economic growth of Bangladesh, while the specific objectives are:

1. To analyze the growth and current status of electronic payment systems in Bangladesh.
2. To correlate between the development of electronic payment systems and GDP growth in Bangladesh.
3. To identify the key drivers and barriers affecting the adoption of electronic payment systems.
4. To recommend policy and infrastructure improvements for sustainable digital financial development.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development of electronic payment systems and its impact on the economy in Bangladesh. The secondary data has been collected from Bangladesh Bank's reports on payment transactions through inter-bank operations and database of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The study period covers 2015 through 2024. The variables such as GDP growth, volume and value of electronic payment transactions including BACH, BEFTN, NPSB, RTGS and MFS, number of active customers and internet users have been selected to collect the data from secondary sources.

**Findings:** GDP growth from the year 2015 to 2020 was continuously positive in Bangladesh. E-Payment Systems in Bangladesh has been continuously developing since 2015 to 2024. In the year of 2024 the total amount of transacted value became one trillion taka. Adjusted R2 of 96% suggests the independent variables explained about 96% variation in the dependent variable. The result further suggested that all the electronic payment systems variables had a positive impact on economic growth in Bangladesh. This study employed volume and value of transactions through Bangladesh Automated Clearing House (BACH), Bangladesh Electronic Fund Transfer Network (BEFTN), National Payment Switch-Bangladesh (NPSB), Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), number of active registered MFS accounts and internet users of Bangladesh, while the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was employed as a measure of economic growth. Electronic payment systems impacted positively on economic growth of Bangladesh.

### **Policy implications:**

1. Since electronic payment systems impacted positively on economic growth in Bangladesh, central bank may come up with the formulation of more policy that would enhance electronic payment systems in the

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economy.

2. E-payment platforms, individuals, retailers, and payment service providers are most worried about interoperability issues. Bangladesh should implement an API based Unified Payment Interface (UPI) to guarantee a reliable and smooth payment system and increase the availability of digital finance throughout the nation.

**Originality:** This study provides novel insights into the connection between e-payment systems and GDP growth in Bangladesh. The study's findings are helpful to the central bank, policy makers and scholars who want to know how the e-payment system supports equitable and long-term economic development in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** gross domestic product, electronic payment services, automated clearing house, electronic fund transfer, mobile financial services.

## **Factors Affecting Digital Financial Literacy and Their Impact on Customers' Financial Behaviour: A Bangladesh Perspective**

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**Background:** In the rapidly evolving digital economy, digital financial literacy (DFL) has emerged as a critical competency that influences individuals' ability to effectively use digital financial services (DFS). This competency has become increasingly important as financial technologies permeate everyday life, yet access and ability to utilize these services remain uneven across populations, particularly in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study investigates the key factors that affect digital financial literacy among Bangladeshi consumers and examines how varying levels of DFL shape customers' financial behaviour, particularly in terms of financial decision-making, risk management, and the adoption of digital financial services.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework that integrates insights from behavioural economics, financial literacy theory, and technology acceptance models, the study identifies and evaluates several socio-demographic, psychological, and technological factors that influence DFL. These include age, education, income, gender, digital access, trust in digital systems, perceived ease of use, and prior exposure to financial education. Primary data were collected through a structured survey of 600 adult participants from urban and semi-urban regions of Bangladesh, supplemented by in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including mobile financial service providers, bank officials, and fintech entrepreneurs. Using a combination of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM), the study empirically tests the relationships between the identified factors and levels of DFL, as well as the downstream effects on customers' financial behaviour.

**Findings:** The findings of this study indicate that higher digital financial literacy is significantly associated with increased usage of mobile banking, improved budgeting and saving practices, and a greater propensity to compare financial products. Trust and ease of use emerged as critical mediators between DFL and financial behaviour, suggesting that technological familiarity alone is insufficient without corresponding user confidence in digital platforms. Moreover, the study highlights notable disparities in DFL across different population segments. Women, older adults, and those in lower-income brackets show lower levels of digital financial literacy and, correspondingly, a more cautious or limited engagement with digital financial tools. These gaps point to systemic barriers, including limited access to smartphones, inadequate digital infrastructure in rural areas, and insufficient targeted educational initiatives.

**Practical and policy implications:** From a policy perspective, the research underscores the urgent need for tailored financial education programs, improved digital access, and user-centric design in financial technology platforms to enhance financial inclusion. It calls for collaborative efforts between government agencies, financial institutions, and educational bodies to develop interventions that address both digital and financial skill deficits.

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**Originality/value:** This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital financial literacy in developing economies and offers actionable insights for policymakers, financial service providers, and development practitioners seeking to foster inclusive financial ecosystems in Bangladesh. Future research is encouraged to explore longitudinal impacts of DFL on financial resilience and to examine how emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain could further reshape consumer financial behaviour in low-income contexts.

**Keywords:** Digital financial literacy, digital financial service, risk management, financial behaviour, decision making.

## **Investigating the Barriers to Accessing Formal Financial Services Among Rural Women in Bangladesh: A Quantitative Approach**

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**Background:** Rural women in Bangladesh encounter significant obstacles in accessing formal financial services such as banking, microfinance, insurance, and mobile financial services (MFS). Despite the potential benefits these services offer, including poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, numerous barriers impede their participation.

**Purpose/Objective:** This research aims to comprehensively investigate these barriers using survey data exclusively, applying statistical analysis to derive meaningful insights. By uncovering these barriers and proposing interventions to address them, this study seeks to empower rural women in Bangladesh and promote financial inclusion. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing survey data to provide quantitative insights into the challenges faced by rural women in accessing financial services.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing survey data collected from 350 rural women in Bangladesh. A structured questionnaire was developed to gather information on demographics, financial behavior, awareness of financial services, perceived barriers, and attitudes towards formal financial institutions. Before finalizing the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders, including representatives from government agencies, financial institutions, NGOs, and community leaders, to gain insights and refine the research hypotheses. Statistical analysis techniques, including multiple regression analysis to identify significant barriers of financial service access and chi-square tests to assess associations between categorical variables, were applied to analyze the survey data rigorously.

**Findings:** Among all the participants, 64% of the participants were married and 14% of the participants were unmarried. However, 14 women among 50 participants were divorced. 133 respondents were in the age between 36-45. However, 199 women have individual income  $\geq 20000$ . The study finds a negative coefficient (-0.187) suggesting that women who perceive traditional gender roles as hindering financial access tend to have lower access to financial services. Higher comfort levels with digital technology lead to increased access to financial services, as digital platforms provide convenient access to banking services. The positive coefficient (0.264) supports this relationship. Besides, women who receive support from relatives, neighbours, or friends for financial services have better access to information and resources, enhancing their financial inclusion. The positive coefficient (0.153) indicates that social support positively influences financial access. Additionally, women who perceive existing financial products as suitable for their needs, such as lower fees or flexible repayment schedules, are more likely to access financial services. Positive coefficients (0.201) and (0.176) for these variables suggest that product suitability contributes to financial inclusion. Women living closer to banks or microfinance institutions have easier access to financial services. The negative (-0.142) coefficient indicates that shorter distances are associated with higher financial access.

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**Practical and policy implications:** By identifying significant predictors and associations, this study aims to inform the development of targeted interventions such as financial education programs, gender-sensitive policy reforms, targeted outreach and awareness campaigns to address these barriers effectively. The findings of this research have the potential to enhance financial inclusion and economic empowerment among rural women in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** formal financial services, rural women, barriers, financial inclusion, Bangladesh Bank, gender roles.

## **Entrepreneurial Orientation, Digital Financial Literacy, and Economic Empowerment: A Study on Bangladeshi Female Entrepreneurs**

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**Background:** Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth in Bangladesh, enabling poverty reduction and employment creation. Although most entrepreneurs are confronted with challenges of limited access to financial services, the evolution of digital financial services has opened up new avenues for expansion. World Bank–affiliated surveys report that digital finance innovations largely drove a 56% increase in financial inclusion from 2011–2018 in Bangladesh (IPA Consumer Protection Research Initiative, 2022). Women entrepreneurs, who have been even more disadvantaged than their counterparts regarding access to conventional financial services, have benefited from these sites. As digital literacy grows, entrepreneurs gain improved control over financial planning, risk management, and business resilience. It is leading to improved financial independence and allowing individuals to participate in the economy in an improved manner.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to investigate the role of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and digital financial literacy (DFL) in influencing the adoption of digital financial services (DFA) to promote economic empowerment (EE) among female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. It also examines how entrepreneurial orientation (EO) affects entrepreneurial risk preference (ERP). Finally, it analyzes how entrepreneurial risk preference (ERP) moderates the relationships between both digital financial literacy (DFL) and digital financial adaptation (DFA) in shaping the level of economic empowerment (EE).

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design and applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS. Data were collected from 200 female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh through a structured questionnaire with items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. PLS-SEM was selected for its strength in handling moderate sample sizes, non-normally distributed data, and models involving multiple reflective latent constructs.

**Findings:** Postulations obtained through technical analysis emphasized a significant linear relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, digital financial literacy, and digital financial adoption to promote economic empowerment in Bangladesh. The findings have also illustrated the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on entrepreneurial risk preference. It further confirmed that entrepreneurial risk preference acted as a mediating variable, demonstrating economic empowerment augmented through digital financial literacy and digital finance adoption among the women.

**Contribution:** This research enhances the knowledge on the intersection of entrepreneurship, inclusion in digital finances, and equity through the lens of socio-economics by assessing their impact on financial well-being. It identifies relevant gaps within these fields and underscores digital financial skills that are essential for economic empowerment. The study addresses a profound gap in the literature by targeting a traditionally marginalized population and builds a new paradigm to understand the impact of digital finance

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on the sustainable empowerment of women-led businesses. The findings could further assist BIDA and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) in shaping practical, woman-focused digital money skills courses for women-led businesses in Bangladesh, opening the door to more inclusive entrepreneurship and steadier economic self-reliance.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings strongly suggest that advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing economic empowerment should be directed towards low-income groups that have access to technology, as digital financial literacy programs designed for them are beneficial. Adequate mobilization on the part of government, financial establishments, and charitable organizations is essential to ensure relevant materials are offered through online services. Financial empowerment not only supports the success of individual businesses but also drives broader economic growth. The adoption of such policies is important for assisting in building an economy with broader participation as well as addressing societal imbalances.

**Keywords:** digital financial literacy, entrepreneurial risk preference, entrepreneurial orientation, female entrepreneurs, economic empowerment.

## **Financial Crime, Governance Quality, and the Dynamics of Nonperforming Loans: A Panel Analysis Across Income-Stratified Economies**

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**Background:** Non-performing loans (NPLs) are a persistent concern for financial system stability, especially in the face of global financial crimes and governance inefficiencies. This paper investigates how institutional quality—specifically anti-money laundering (AML) effectiveness and governance metrics—interacts with macroeconomic indicators to influence NPL dynamics across 92 countries from 2012 to 2023. The countries are stratified into four income groups based on World Bank classification: high, upper-middle, lower-middle, and low income. The paper highlights that in addition to macroeconomic performance, institutional resilience plays a vital role in credit risk management, particularly under conditions of systemic stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Purpose/Objective:** The primary objective is to evaluate whether AML policies—when moderated by governance dimensions such as Voice & Accountability and Control of Corruption—significantly impact NPL ratios. By introducing novel interaction terms (Voice & Accountability  $\times$  AML, and Control of Corruption  $\times$  AML), the study examines how institutional integrity shapes financial risk outcomes. Additionally, the study tests the "Skimming Hypothesis," which suggests that reduced corruption may lead to more accurate, albeit higher, NPL reporting..

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employs a balanced panel dataset covering 92 countries across 12 years (2012–2023), using internationally recognized sources: IMF's Financial Soundness Indicators, the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI) and Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), and the Basel AML Index. The dependent variable is the NPL ratio, while the key explanatory variables include:

- Macroeconomic indicators: GDP per capita (PPP), unemployment, liquidity
- Institutional variables: Voice & Accountability, Control of Corruption, AML Index
- Interaction terms: Voice  $\times$  AML, Control of Corruption  $\times$  AML

Two econometric approaches are utilized:

1. Dynamic Fixed Effects (AR(1)) model: Controls for country-level heterogeneity.
2. Two-step System GMM: Addresses endogeneity and dynamic persistence, validated through robust Sargan and Arellano-Bond tests..

**Findings:** Empirical findings reveal that NPLs are significantly and positively driven by their own past values and by higher unemployment. Liquidity buffers are negatively associated with NPLs, indicating their protective role. Notably, AML policies alone are not significantly associated with reduced NPLs; however, their interaction with strong governance indicators yields a significant negative impact on NPL ratios. The year 2020 dummy—capturing COVID-19-related repayment moratoriums—shows a temporary decline in

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reported NPLs. The Skimping Hypothesis is validated: better corruption control correlates with higher reported NPLs, likely due to stricter and more transparent reporting. The interaction effects imply that AML regulations are most effective in countries with higher institutional accountability and corruption oversight.

**Originality/value:** The study underscores that AML frameworks are most impactful when supported by robust governance institutions. For low- and lower-middle-income countries, where institutional fragility persists, standalone AML policies may not suffice. The results advocate for integrated reforms—combining regulatory quality, public accountability, and anti-corruption measures—to enhance credit discipline and safeguard financial stability. These findings carry significant implications for policymakers and international financial bodies aiming to design resilient banking systems and prevent future credit crises.

**Keywords:** anti-money-laundering, non-performing-loan, governance, high-income, low-income.

## **Financial Inclusion as a Catalyst for Inclusive Growth: Empirical Evidence from Bangladesh**

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**Background and Objective:** In recent years, financial inclusion has gained global recognition as a strategic tool for accelerating inclusive growth, promoting financial stability, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It enables individuals and small businesses to access useful and affordable financial products and services, contributing to improved living standards and economic participation. Bangladesh, as a lower-middle-income country with a rapidly expanding digital financial ecosystem, provides a compelling case for evaluating the macroeconomic impacts of financial inclusion. This study aims to examine whether financial inclusion contributes to long-term economic growth in Bangladesh. The findings would help concerned authorities devise public policy on financial inclusion and undertake future research focused on inclusive and resilient economic development.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research will employ a time-series econometric approach, autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model to analyse the long-run and short-run relationships between financial inclusion and economic growth in Bangladesh during 2004-2024. The number of bank branches, depositors and ATMs are considered as proxies for financial inclusion. The dependent variable is expected to be a change in GDP at market prices. Data are collected over the period of 2004 to 2024 from World Development Indicators (WDI) of World Bank, Scheduled Bank Statistics (SBS) of Bangladesh Bank and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). The ARDL model is chosen for its robustness in handling small samples and variables with mixed stationarity.

**Findings:** Empirical results reveal that the number of bank depositors' accounts of commercial banks has a positive and significant impact on GDP, indicating that the regressor is the key indicator of financial inclusion that genuinely affects the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Bangladesh in the long run. On average, a 1% increase in bank deposits accounts accelerates the GDP in Bangladesh by almost 42% (current market prices). Additionally, gross capital formation is another regressor that enhances the GDP, with a coefficient of nearly 46%. The number of commercial bank branches, another proxy of financial inclusion, also boosts Bangladesh's GDP in the long term. However, the regressor is found insignificant in our estimation process. Moreover, an inverse relationship is found between the credit-to-GDP ratio, the Number of ATM branches, and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Bangladesh.

**Practical and policy implications:** Based on findings, Bangladesh needs to further accelerate the pace of financial inclusion to boost GDP. To this end, increased use of fintech and enhancing financial literacy may be effective panacea. More attention may be given on expansion of Islamic finance to promote inclusive growth as it has already emerged as a powerful tool of financial inclusion in Bangladesh and other countries for bringing many unbanked people under financial networks.

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**Originality/value:** The current study confirms the positive relationships between the financial inclusion and economic growth in Bangladesh. The future research needs to include some other variables in the model such as micro, CMSME and Women entrepreneurs financing for examining the impact of financial inclusion on inclusive economic growth.

**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Economic Growth, Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL), Bangladesh.

## **Components and Assessments of Bangladesh's Shift to Fintech-Based Financial Inclusion**

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**Background:** Fintech is a novel yet impactful idea in Bangladesh, increasingly serving as a catalyst for financial stability and sustainable economic progress. Despite the fact that there are several financial inclusion indices, Bangladesh does not yet have a fintech-based financial inclusion (FTFI) index, which is required to track the state of fintech innovation in comparison to other comparable nations.

**Purpose/Objective:** The purpose of this research is to explore the key indicators and dimensions to create the fintech-based financial inclusion index (FTFI) for Bangladesh.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study used secondary data from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) financial access survey and the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) world telecommunication/ICT indicators database for the years 2004–2020. Because, the data related to fintech-based financial inclusion indicators for Bangladesh are available from the year 2004. By combining up to 16 variables from three dimensions—the availability, penetration, and usage of formal financial services—this study has used the equal weighting approach to estimate the FTFI. This method is applied due to its simplicity, transparency, and broad acceptance.

**Findings:** Key observations from the descriptive statistics of the indicators specifies that the adoption of mobile technology, alternative banking services, and availability of mobile money services are somewhat prevalent but vary widely across different regions. Bangladesh also experienced a moderate level of adoption of digital banking services, and relatively lower penetration of credit cards compared to debit cards. Transactions conducted through internet and mobile banking, as a percentage of GDP, show less variability compared to mobile money transactions. Again, a more consistent and moderate presence in the level of access to landline telecommunication services, widespread mobile network infrastructure, high adoption levels of fixed-broadband internet services, and moderate level of internet usage are ensuring connectivity for a significant portion of the population which likely influences the usage of fintech-based financial services. Analytical results indicate that every dimension has increased significantly in Bangladesh. Over the years, it moved through several FTFI classifications. After beginning in the "Low" category from 2004 to 2015, Bangladesh advanced to the "Medium" category from 2016 to 2018 and then eventually to the "High" category in 2019 to 2020, demonstrating significant growth in every dimension. From 2004 to 2020, fintech-based financial inclusion in Bangladesh had a notable transformation, rising from a low FTFI of 0.03 to a high of 0.82. This endeavor represents a major advancement in the use of fintech technologies to improve financial inclusion. The index value is steadily rising from 2019 to 2020, reaching 0.82 in 2020 which is close to the maximum index value of 1.00, indicating that Bangladesh is extremely close to achieving complete fintech-based or digital financial inclusion.

**Practical and policy implications:** In addition to providing researchers and decision-makers with an

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insightful analytical tool, the findings of this study will assist the body of knowledge on gauging financial inclusion based on fintech. Furthermore, it will foster the ability to use technology to nurture better communities and promote sustainability while building a brighter future. Likewise, construction of this index can assist the government and regulatory bodies in achieving the aspiration of green growth in Bangladesh. In this way, this study can help to formulate policies to create the low-carbon economy in Bangladesh.

**Originality/value:** This study provides a comprehensive overview of Bangladesh's progress in financial inclusion through the lens of fintech. This is the primary effort to determine Bangladesh's FTFI index. Moreover, addition of technological indicators in creating this index also demands the novelty of this study.

**Keywords:** Fintech, Financial inclusion, Digital financial inclusion, Bangladesh.

## **Antecedents of Financial Well-being in Bangladesh: Mediating Role of Financial Behaviour**

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**Background:** Financial well-being refers to the ability to sustain one's current situation while proactively planning for a future that ensures both economic independence and a fulfilling quality of life (Brüggen et al., 2017). A wide range of academic disciplines have expressed interest in the idea of financial or economic wellbeing, according to (Mahendru et al., 2020). In most cases, individuals who are financially secure report lower levels of stress associated with their financial circumstances, which typically has a positive impact on their mental and physical well-being. In addition, the attainment of several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—including the elimination of poverty (SDG-1), the promotion of health and wellness (SDG-3), and the reduction of inequality (SDG-10)—is contingent upon financial well-being (Fu, 2020).

**Purpose/Objective:** This study attempts to uncover the key antecedents that influence the financial well-being of individuals in Bangladesh. Furthermore, our study further investigates the mediating effect of financial behavior in shaping the financial decisions of individuals.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The target population of this study is working women in Bangladesh. A quantitative research design is employed. A structured questionnaire survey is conducted with 207 female respondents aged 25 to 55 who are currently employed. In order to validate the hypothesized associations among key variables, including financial literacy (Prakash et al., 2022), financial attitude (Potrich et al., 2016), financial socialization (Manfrè, 2017), financial stress (Fan & Henager, 2022), financial behavior (Dew & Xiao, 2011) and financial well-being (Zhao & Zhang, 2020), the analysis employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Partial Least Square (PLS).

**Findings:** Financial literacy has been shown to have a significant positive impact on financial well-being, whereas financial stress has been demonstrated to have a significant negative impact. Nevertheless, the direct effects of financial socialization and financial attitude are negligible. Moreover, financial behavior has served as a mediator in the relationships between financial attitude, financial socialization, and financial well-being.

**Practical and policy implications:** With increasing female labor force participation in Bangladesh, the study's findings are expected to contribute to ensuring the financial well-being of working women if proper measures are taken accordingly. To ensure financial well-being, policymakers and market practitioners can implement measures that enhance women's financial literacy and alleviate financial stress. Furthermore, financial well-being can be enhanced by cultivating a more positive financial attitude and socialization, which can subsequently lead to improved financial behavior.

**Originality/value:** The concept of financial well-being has been the subject of growing interest among

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academics and practitioners in recent decades, resulting in the development of a diverse array of studies from various theoretical perspectives. In the context of Bangladesh, numerous studies have been conducted on financial literacy. Nevertheless, financial well-being was not given sufficient attention in the context of Bangladesh, particularly when women were the primary respondents. This study strives to address the disconnect and offer a comprehensive understanding of the variables that are impacting the financial well-being of Bangladeshi working women. It investigated key variables and underscores the mediating role of financial behavior in guaranteeing financial well-being by integrating advanced quantitative designs such as PLS-SEM.

**Keywords:** Financial well-being, financial literacy, financial behaviour, working women, Bangladesh.

## **Fostering Financial Literacy Through Gamification: Navigating Reward Mechanisms and Overspending Risks in Bangladesh's Digital Payment Ecosystem**

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**Background:** Bangladesh's financial landscape has undergone a significant transformation with the rapid adoption of digital financial services. By the end of 2024, the total number of mobile financial service (MFS) accounts reached 238.6 million, reflecting a 28.42% increase from the previous year. Concurrently, the issuance of plastic cards (debit, credit, and prepaid) has risen by 142% over the past five years, with a corresponding 166% increase in transaction volumes. Despite these advancements, concerns have emerged regarding overspending behaviors. A 2022 study by the Bangladesh Bank revealed that 44% of debit/credit cardholders admitted to struggling with managing their expenses, often due to impulsive spending spurred by promotional rewards, discounts, and easy credit access. This surge in spending has raised alarms about the potential for financial distress among consumers. Understanding the dynamics of these spending behaviors is crucial for developing strategies to promote responsible financial management in the digital age.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study explores the impact of gamified reward systems integrated within digital payment platforms in Bangladesh (e.g., bKash, Nagad, debit/credit card points) on young adults' financial empowerment, discipline, and overspending behavior. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly focusing on Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), the study assesses how digital platforms influence financial literacy and promote responsible financial management. By investigating the relationships between gamification elements, financial empowerment, and overspending risk, this research aims to offer insights into the ways these systems shape financial behaviors among young adults in Bangladesh. Furthermore, machine learning techniques, such as K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), are employed to predict overspending risks based on behavioral and demographic data. This study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding digital financial literacy and the role of gamified engagement in shaping financial decision-making.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research used a quantitative cross-sectional design to study the impact of gamified reward systems on financial behaviors in Bangladesh. Data from 300 young adults (18-45) were collected through a structured survey. PLS-SEM and K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) classification were applied to analyze financial behaviors and predict overspending risk. For the measurement model, reliability was checked using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\geq 0.7$ ) and Composite Reliability ( $\geq 0.7$ ). Validity was assessed with AVE ( $\geq 0.5$ ) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT  $< 0.9$ ). The structural model's goodness of fit was evaluated using path coefficients,  $R^2$  values, and t-values via bootstrapping.

**Findings:** The findings of this study suggest that gamification elements positively influence financial empowerment, which, in turn, mediates the relationship with financial discipline. Financial literacy (FL) is moderating these relationships, enhancing the effectiveness of financial empowerment while mitigating impulsive spending tendencies driven by extrinsic rewards in gamified systems. In this context, financial lit

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eracy (FL) acts as a moderating variable, influencing the strength of the associations between financial empowerment (FE), financial discipline (FD), and overspending risk (OR). The KNN model identified overspending-prone users based on their interaction with gamified features and demographic profiles, underscoring the empowerment-overspending paradox. These findings are consistent with prior research in behavioral economics that examines how gamified features impact consumer decision-making.

**Practical and policy implications:** The study's cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data limit causal conclusions. However, integrating behavioral theories with machine learning offers a strong approach to understanding and predicting consumer financial behaviors. Future research could explore longitudinal or cross-cultural comparisons. This study contributes to financial inclusion and literacy in Bangladesh, addressing overspending behavior and promoting financial decision-making. It provides a framework for policymakers and fintech developers to create interventions that enhance financial literacy and mitigate overspending risks, supporting economic growth and well-being..

**Keywords:** Gamification, Financial Empowerment, Financial Literacy, Overspending Risk, Digital Payment Systems, Bangladesh.

## **Financial Literacy, Competency, Inclusion, and Digitalization: Initiatives at Dhaka Stock Exchange PLC. (DSE)**

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**Background:** In the context of a constantly evolving global economy, terms such as financial literacy, competency, inclusion, and digitalization have become increasingly prominent. These four interconnected concepts empower not only individuals but also organizations, ultimately fostering economic inclusion and development, financial stability, and collective welfare.

**Purpose/Objective:** This article examines these themes through the lens of the capital market, a vital component of any nation's economy, with a particular focus on initiatives by Dhaka Stock Exchange PLC. (DSE)..

**Design/methodology/approach:** As the country's principal stock exchange, DSE is committed to enhancing the financial literacy of retail investors, who represent 84.52% of the country's investor base (Asian and Oceanian Stock Exchanges Federation, 2024). Since its inception, DSE has recognized the importance of serving as a hub for promoting financial literacy by raising awareness and providing effective training. Guided by this mission, the DSE Training Academy (DTA) was established on September 10, 2007 (Dhaka Stock Exchange, n.d.). Through the academy, DSE organizes training programs and seminars aimed at equipping investors with essential knowledge and skills related to the capital market. The drive to promote financial literacy among investors gained significant traction on January 8, 2017, with the launch of the nationwide 'Financial Literacy Program' by the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC), the regulatory authority of the capital market in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, n.d.). In addition, like other exchanges around the world, DSE participates in World Investor Week—an initiative by IOSCO—in collaboration with BSEC and the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE), to further spread financial literacy among investors (Dhaka Stock Exchange, 2022). Beyond the DTA, DSE's Product and Market Development Department (PMDD) is actively engaged in introducing innovative financial products aimed at fostering financial inclusion across diverse population segments. Meanwhile, DSE's ICT Division has improved service delivery by developing mobile applications that allow investors of all types to trade seamlessly from anywhere in the world.

**Findings:** This article reviews DTA's training processes and the post-training surveys it conducts. These surveys primarily focus on evaluating resource persons and the training content, but these do not assess how effectively participants apply their knowledge in their professional or business contexts, or whether they become more financially literate or competent as a result. Therefore, this study identifies a gap in the current training and evaluation methods—the failure to measure actual learning outcomes among retail investors. Practical and policy implications: This article recommends a mixed-method research approach involving surveys and interviews conducted for six months to one year after training completion. Such follow-up studies would provide valuable insights for developing more inclusive and impactful training programs.

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**Practical and policy implications:** This article recommends a mixed-method research approach involving surveys and interviews conducted for six months to one year after training completion. Such follow-up studies would provide valuable insights for developing more inclusive and impactful training programs.

**Originality/value:** The recommended efforts can play a crucial role in fostering a capital market in Bangladesh that is resilient, transparent, and free from manipulation and baseless speculation.

**Keywords:** Financial literacy, competency, digitalization, capital market, DTA.

## **Empowering Communities Through Islamic Finance: Enhancing Financial Literacy and Economic Wellbeing**

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**Background:** In Bangladesh, where a large segment of the population—especially in rural areas—remains financially underserved, the need for inclusive and ethical financial solutions is pressing. Conventional banking systems often fail to reach the poor due to structural barriers such as collateral requirements, interest-based lending, and urban-centric service delivery. As a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh has seen the rise of Islamic finance as a culturally and religiously aligned alternative. Islamic microfinance, which operates on Shariah principles such as interest-free lending and risk-sharing, has emerged as a powerful tool for social and economic empowerment. Institutions like the Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) have implemented targeted schemes such as the Rural Development Scheme (RDS) to reach marginalized populations. These programs focus not only on poverty alleviation through access to finance but also on ethical wealth distribution, financial literacy, and community development. Given the alignment between Islamic finance and values such as social justice, cooperation, and financial inclusion, there is a growing need to empirically examine its impact on economic wellbeing and literacy among the poor. This study is situated within that context, aiming to assess the tangible socio-economic outcomes of Islamic microfinance initiatives in Bangladesh.

**Purpose/Objective:** This research aims to evaluate the impact of Islamic microfinance on financial literacy and economic wellbeing in Bangladesh, focusing on how Shariah-compliant financial models promote financial inclusion, empower marginalized communities, and support sustainable development.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study adopts a qualitative and empirical approach, drawing on data from institutional reports, field studies, and case analyses—particularly focusing on the Rural Development Scheme (RDS) of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited—to assess the socio-economic impacts of Islamic microfinance.

### **Findings:**

- **Income Growth:** Participants in Islamic microfinance programs, particularly the RDS, saw their average annual income double—from BDT 15,000 to over BDT 30,000.
- **Employment Generation:** Access to Shariah-compliant financing enabled the growth of rural micro-enterprises in agriculture, crafts, and trade.
- **Women's Engagement:** Women experienced increased financial autonomy, greater household decision-making power, and higher spending on children's education and health.
- **Financial Literacy:** Though informal, the microfinance process improved financial habits and understanding of Islamic financial principles among low-income borrowers.
- **Ethical Financial Behaviour:** Rooted in Islamic values, these institutions promote trust, social welfare, and responsible borrowing.
- **Reduced Informal Borrowing:** A decline of 2.39% in informal debt was recorded among recipients of

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Islamic microfinance in areas like Sunamganj.

- **Macro Impact:** Evidence suggests a positive contribution to national economic growth and financial inclusion.

### Practical and policy implications:

- **Enhancing Financial Inclusion:** Islamic microfinance should be scaled up nationally to bring more rural and underserved populations into the formal financial system.
- **Women's Engagement:** Shariah-compliant, collateral-free finance models offer a culturally acceptable and effective pathway to support female entrepreneurship and household stability.
- **Promoting Financial Literacy:** Policymakers and Islamic financial institutions should integrate structured financial education programs alongside microfinance initiatives to strengthen financial capability.
- **Regulatory Support:** A supportive legal and regulatory environment is needed to expand Islamic microfinance while ensuring compliance with both Shariah and national financial standards.
- **Leveraging Faith-Based Finance:** Policymakers can harness the strong ethical and religious alignment of Islamic finance to promote inclusive, trust-based economic development across Muslim communities.

**Originality/value:** This research provides empirical evidence on how Islamic microfinance—rooted in ethical and religious values—uniquely contributes to financial literacy, women's empowerment, and sustainable economic wellbeing in Bangladesh. It adds value by highlighting the culturally relevant, socially inclusive nature of Islamic finance as a viable model for poverty alleviation and financial inclusion in Muslim-majority contexts.

**Keywords:** Microfinance, Sustainable, Literacy.

## **Inclusive FinTech Systems for Empowering Digitally and Financially Excluded Communities**

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**Background:** Despite transformative innovations in financial technology (FinTech), digital and financial exclusion persist among marginalised populations worldwide. Key systemic barriers—including the lack of formal identification, limited device accessibility, low digital literacy, and institutional mistrust—continue to inhibit engagement with FinTech services. Prevailing FinTech models typically presume uninterrupted connectivity and stable digital identities, inadvertently deepening exclusion. This challenge demands a reorientation from technology-centric innovation towards inclusive, process-driven system design.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study advances a holistic, interdisciplinary framework for inclusive FinTech systems grounded in Business Process Management (BPM) principles. It reconceptualises FinTech as a dynamic service ecosystem that foregrounds participatory process design, ethical governance, and user empowerment. The framework offers actionable insights for developers, regulators, and researchers aiming to create equitable financial systems that dismantle exclusion by design.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Adopting a conceptual methodology, this research integrates socio-technical systems theory, human-centered design, ethical artificial intelligence (AI), and participatory development paradigms. A critical interpretive synthesis of interdisciplinary literature is augmented by analysis of globally significant case studies including M-Pesa (Kenya), bKash (Bangladesh), and UNHCR blockchain initiatives. BPM principles underpin the modelling of inclusive workflows incorporating decentralized identity, voice-based interfaces, and iterative feedback mechanisms.

**Findings:** The study introduces the “Inclusion Stack”—a layered framework encompassing technological infrastructure, cultural and linguistic accessibility, governance inclusion, and user agency. Modular technologies such as federated learning, edge computing, and multimodal interfaces demonstrate how infrastructural and socio-cultural barriers can be overcome. Embedding explainability and fairness through human-AI collaboration, the study illustrates that co-designed, adaptive processes enable genuine inclusion beyond mere technology deployment.

**Practical and policy implications:** Practitioners are provided with detailed process models for inclusive FinTech deployment, encompassing offline functionality, multimodal interaction, and co-governance mechanisms. Policymakers are urged to institutionalize participatory governance, support regulatory sandboxes, and adopt flexible Know Your Customer (KYC) protocols. The findings underscore the need for investment in community infrastructure and digital literacy to ensure long-term, sustainable inclusion.

**Originality/value:** This research enriches BPM scholarship by integrating ethical, participatory, and socio-technical dimensions into FinTech system design. It reframes financial inclusion as a process innovation challenge rather than solely an access issue, offering a scalable and context-sensitive framework to foster

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equitable digital financial ecosystems.

**Keywords:** Inclusive FinTech, Business Process Management, Financial Inclusion, Ethical AI, Participatory Design.

## **Overview of Financial Inclusion of Santals Tribe in Bangladesh: A Study on Dinajpur**

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**Background:** For building a prosperous nation, inclusive development is very essential. It ensures the active participation of all segments of the society into the mainstream of the economy. Among the many tools of achieving an inclusive economy, financial inclusion of Santals may be an effective one because it will help to bring the Santals, the second largest tribal community of Bangladesh, under the mainstream financial channel who are excluded as a marginal group. However, the initiatives for financial inclusion of Santals will seek the answer of some questions - what is the current scenario of financial inclusion of Santal community in Bangladesh? What are the determinants of financial inclusion of Santals according to their perception? But unfortunately, no earlier studies address the issues as per our knowledge.

**Purpose/Objective:** The objective of this study is to investigate the current picture of Santal tribe's financial inclusion in Bangladesh and determine the significant determinants of financial inclusion based on their own views.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This descriptive research has used primary data of 400 respondents collected through structured questionnaires from Santal dominated nine upazilas of Dinajpur district. Dinajpur has the highest concentration of Santals of any district in Bangladesh. Around 50,000 Santals lived in Dinajpur in 2014, while there were about 145,000 Santals overall in Bangladesh. There are two parts in the questionnaire. First part are designed for exploring the current state of financial inclusion and data are analyzed using frequency distribution. In the second part, questions are designed by 5 point Likert Scale and data are analyzed using factor analysis and structural equation modeling through AMOS. The reliability and validity of the data and that of the analytical model are tested through Cronbach's alpha, KMO test, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity,  $\chi^2$ , CFI, IFI, TLI, SRMR, RMSEA, VIF, CR, and AVE. The underlying structure of the data is analyzed by Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation.

**Findings:** Firstly, it depicted the status of Santals' financial inclusion through many components and revealed a dismal scenario about the Santals' financial inclusion of Bangladesh. A small percentage of Santals have accounts (22.5%) and loans (18.5%) with banks. They did not receive a sufficient loan amount in a timely manner, despite the fact that the majority (89.5%) expressed a desire for a loan. Approximately 89.5% express confidence in the utilization of borrowed funds, asserting that loans would facilitate the enhancement of their economic circumstances. Their financial literacy is inadequate. The interest rate at which they were paying for their loans was unknown to over one-third of the loan users. A mere 10% of them possess insurance policies. Approximately two-thirds of them have an account with mobile banking. NGO is the most prominent channel of financial services providers among the Santals. Finally, the study attempted to investigate the significant determinants (factors) of financial inclusion according to Santals' view. Using factor

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analysis, eleven items from forty three were retained as important determinants for the financial inclusion, with four latent factors based on communalities, factor loading, eigenvalue, cross loading, and scree plot. These eleven items should be given preference while designing a financial inclusion plan for Santals in Bangladesh. The results allowed for the retention of four key factors namely, account (QS6, QS7, QS8), loan (QS15, QS16, QS23), documents (QS18, QS22, QS25) and insurance (QS42, QS23). Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used for testing hypotheses and all four factors were found significant. Lack of income, requirement of documents, complex procedure, lack of security for loan, lack of information, unfavorable terms and conditions, lack of financial literacy etc. are the main factors behind the financial exclusion of Santals in Bangladesh.

**Practical and policy implications:** The study helps in understanding the current picture of financial inclusion of Santal community in Bangladesh. Along with grabbing the current state of financial inclusion, it tries to identify crucial factors for financial inclusion based on Santals' view. Hopefully, the findings of the study can provide valuable insights in designing policies for bringing the Santals into the mainstream financial channel. The traditional financial services don't match with the socio-economic and cultural realities of Santals. The financial services offering entities could customize their product mix to align Santals' needs.

**Originality/value:** The uniqueness of the study lies in the fact that this is probably the first attempt focused on the financial inclusion of Santals community in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Financial inclusion, Santals, Factors of financial inclusion, Financial literacy.

## **Bridging the Gap: The Role of Financial Literacy in Enhancing the Sustainability of Rural SMEs in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Small and medium businesses (SMEs) are very essential for Bangladesh's economy. They create jobs and help reduce poverty. But many small businesses in rural areas face problems. Many owners don't know enough about managing money. They also find it hard to get proper financial services. Because of this, and the strict rules and difficulty getting loans, it is hard for these businesses to grow and last long. The government and other groups have programs to help, but these programs don't always reach rural business owners, especially women.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study wants to learn how teaching money skills and giving easier access to official financial services can help small businesses in rural Bangladesh grow and last longer. It also looks at the problems women business owners face. The goal is to create money education programs that fit women's needs better. In the end, the study hopes to help decision-makers and banks know the best way to support these small businesses.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study looks at existing research to understand how financial knowledge affects the growth and survival of small rural businesses in Bangladesh. Because it wasn't possible to collect new data directly, this study used already published high-quality research to get a broad and reliable understanding. The data came from carefully chosen research papers published between 2019 and 2024. These papers focused on topics like financial knowledge, access to credit, use of digital finance, and how well rural small businesses perform. The study gathered numbers like financial literacy rates, how often informal loans are used, interest rates, and digital banking use. Then, it analyzed these numbers using basic statistics and simple regression to see how poor financial knowledge is linked to things like relying on informal loans and not using digital services. To reduce this problem, the study carefully picked research that used good survey methods and included data about both men and women business owners. It also checked the quality and differences between the studies to make sure the conclusions are reliable.

**Findings:** Key findings show that many rural entrepreneurs lack basic financial skills including budgeting, record-keeping, and debt management. Access to formal financial services remains limited due to collateral requirements, difficult and lengthy lending procedures etc. Although digital financial services have a lot of potential. But its adoption is hampered by digital illiteracy and infrastructural limitations. This study also finds that tax burden, certificate and trade license complexities further limit the growth of small business specially for women. This study highlights previously neglected structural and behavioural difficulties and makes recommendations by combining findings from many sources. These include developing targeted financial literacy initiatives, simplifying legal procedures, promoting digital banking, and personalising support to rural and women-led SMEs. The findings can help policymakers, financial institutions, and development practitioners improve sustainable SME development in Bangladesh.

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**Originality/value:** This study is special because it looks at many different research papers about small rural businesses in Bangladesh, a group that hasn't been studied much before. It points out not just the lack of money knowledge but also bigger problems like confusing laws and trouble using digital tools, especially for women. By combining information from 2019 to 2024, the study gives a clear and new picture that can help make better rules and useful programs to support these rural businesses.

**Keywords:** financial Literacy, rural SMEs, credit access, financial inclusion, informal lending, SME sustainability, gender disparities.

## **Cloud Computing as a Game Changer for SMEs: Driving Digital Transformation in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** In Bangladesh, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) currently contribute approximately 27% to the national GDP, and the Government of Bangladesh, through the draft National SME Policy 2025, has set an ambitious target of increasing the SME sector's contribution to GDP to 35% by 2030. However, if SMEs do not embrace new technologies and adapt with digitalization, they could fall behind, lose their place in the market, and be far away from achieving the government-led GDP contribution target. Lack of digitalization, among other challenges, resulted in the SME segment failing to meet the GDP contribution target established by the National SME Policy 2019.

**Purpose/Objective:** The primary objective of this research paper is to navigate how cloud computing might act as a transformative facilitator for digitalization of SMEs in Bangladesh. The study also connects the idea of Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory with cloud-based solutions to show that they are a cost-effective, scalable, and efficient alternative to traditional IT infrastructure in Bangladesh's quest for digital transformation and achieving SMEs' GDP contribution target of 35% by 2030.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research paper is based on qualitative research methodology that synthesizes data collected from different secondary sources, including government policies, industry reports, academic literature, etc. Besides, the paper incorporates the author's extensive professional experience in banking and hands-on experience in financial analysis across diverse SME sectors, providing practical insights into how cloud computing could address challenges encountered by SMEs in digital transformation.

**Findings:** Although the current digital maturity of Bangladeshi SMEs is low, cloud computing can bridge the gap between resource limitations and digital transformation. It enables SMEs to access technologies that were once limited to only large corporations. Globally, cloud adoption has become a key component of digital transformation, and as such, it will be able to achieve SMEs' GDP contribution target by 2030.

**Practical and policy implications:** A comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach, including the government, is necessary to fully realize the potential of cloud computing as a driver of SMEs' digital transformation in Bangladesh. Developing a national cloud adoption strategy, enacting cloud-friendly and enabling regulations, improving access to finance, creating awareness, and expanding infrastructure and support services could be the probable solutions for driving digitalization in SMEs.

**Originality/value:** The study provides crucial insights by contextualizing the use of cloud computing within the unique socio-economic and technological framework of Bangladeshi SMEs, an area that has received relatively little attention. Cloud computing's strategic implications for SMEs in developing countries have not been sufficiently examined from a theoretical and practical standpoint, despite the fact that it has been thoroughly examined in developed economies and large organizations.

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**Keywords:** Cloud Computing, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Digital Transformation, Technology Adoption.

## **Cost Efficiency as a Financial Competency: Revitalising Distressed Manufacturing Firms in China through Internal Recovery Strategies**

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**Background:** China's manufacturing sector is experiencing rising financial strain. Slowing economic growth and evolving industrial structures have led many publicly listed firms into distress. These firms are categorised as Special Treatment (ST), signalling poor financial health and triggering trading restrictions. Such labels reflect deeper problems in internal governance and cost management.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study explores whether internal financial competency—specifically cost efficiency—can support the recovery of distressed firms. It focuses on how cost efficiency, as a reflection of operational discipline, may reduce the need for external intervention.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The analysis covers 182 Chinese A-share manufacturing firms that exited ST status between 2009 and 2023. Cost efficiency is assessed using the New-Cost Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) model. To handle endogeneity and firm-specific effects, a two-step System Generalised Method of Moments (GMM) approach is used. Financial performance is evaluated through ROA, ROE, Tobin's Q, and the  $Z_{China}$ -score.

**Findings:** Cost efficiency shows a strong positive impact on ROA, ROE, and  $Z_{China}$ -scores. These results suggest firms that manage costs effectively are more profitable and financially stable. Tobin's Q also improves, though less consistently, indicating that market value may also depend on external perceptions, such as innovation or long-term growth potential.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings encourage firms to strengthen internal competencies, especially in cost management. For policymakers, the study offers evidence to support integrating financial literacy into corporate training and governance reform. Reducing reliance on government aid could promote more resilient and accountable enterprises.

**Originality/value:** This study positions cost efficiency as more than a financial metric—it represents organisational capability. By linking cost control to long-term recovery, it provides a practical framework for empowering firms from within. It highlights a shift in thinking: recovery is not about rescue but about readiness.

**Keywords:** Cost Efficiency; Financial Recovery; Financial Competency; GMM; Organisational Resilience; Chinese manufacturing.

## **Empowering Third-Gender Individuals: Enhancing Economic Well-Being Through Digital Financial Literacy**

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**Background:** The third gender community, popularly known as “Hijra” in Bangladesh, constantly faces multiple barriers such as discrimination and social isolation and economic difficulties. They also lack complete acceptance from society and so they receive very limited access to educational opportunities, employment possibilities and financial assistance. Multiple traditional or informal income sources such as begging along with dancing at ceremonies and socially discouraged forms of income have become the main options for them to survive. Moreover, many banks and institutions continue to exclude third-gender individuals from receiving services due to several reasons. The situation establishes a cycle of poverty combined with social isolation and lack of digital financial knowledge.

**Purpose/Objective:** The primary objective of this study is to examine literacy on digital financial tools as potential means to enhance third-gender economic conditions in Bangladesh. The focus of the study is to find policies and implications which will help third-gender individuals improve their financial situation by utilizing digital financial literacy. The study seeks to identify productive methods of improving financial literacy through digital platforms through semi-structured interviews and secondary data. This study also examines how acquiring digital proficiency combined with financial literacy enables third-gender individuals toward economic well-being.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The approach to this study is qualitative and exploratory. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with professionals from NGOs that work with the third gender community to collect primary data. The insights from these interviews will be narrowed down to some of the challenges and opportunities that this community faces. Government reports, publications, academic papers, and news articles will also be used as secondary data. This study will use thematic analysis to find common ideas and patterns about economic well-being, financial knowledge, and use of digital tools.

**Findings:** The study will also examine the challenges that third-gender individuals face regarding digital financial inclusion such as lack of digital financial knowledge, limited access to technology, gender-based discrimination, and the absence of proper ID documents etc. This study expects to propose several key strategies to solve the problems. It will recommend the development of digital financial training programs for third-gender people in local communities. It will also discuss initiating awareness campaigns that will help change the way society views them. Other ideas that can help support this community in the future will also be included in the Study.

**Practical and policy implications:** The introduction of digital financial knowledge can enable third gender people to escape poverty and live with dignity which will enable them to set up business for themselves, join the digital economy or seek employment. It will also support the national economy when they will become more economically independent. The contribution of this study lies in the fact that it provides practical

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recommendations and shows how digital financial literacy can become powerful means of empowerment for a neglected group in society. That is a step to make a true equal, inclusive and progressive nation.

**Originality/value:** This report reflects the financial challenges the third gender community usually faces in a developing country like Bangladesh while suggesting that introducing and training the community with digital financial tools can increase their economic well being. As the other currently available papers which align with this report, focused mainly on the social exclusion and discrimination towards the third gender community. Hence, it can be claimed that through emphasizing the necessity of digital financial literacy for this marginalized community, this research adds substantial importance and value in the sector of financial and economic development. This paper uniquely illustrates different factors and policy implications which will be helpful towards the NGOs, policymakers, social workers and financial analysts.

**Keywords:** Digital financial literacy, third gender, social isolation, discrimination, economic independence.

## **Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Ensuring financial inclusion for women is not only a developmental priority but a moral responsibility for developing countries like Bangladesh. According to the 2021 World Bank Global Findex database, a notable portion of the Bangladeshi population, specifically 47 percent of individuals aged 15 and above, do not have access to formal financial services in terms of account ownership. Among adult residents, 43.46 percent of females utilize formal financial services, whereas 62.86 percent of males have access to such services. The Global Findex surveys for Bangladesh conducted by World Bank reveal that there is significant gender gap in the financial inclusion in Bangladesh.

**Purpose/Objective:** The study uses nationally representative data sets to investigate the relationship of women's access to formal financial services and areas of women empowerment that have not been explored extensively before. Financial inclusion is defined as formal account ownership at banking or financial institutions. Women's empowerment encompasses healthcare autonomy, domestic decision-making participation, earnings spending control, and protection from spousal violence.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This Study uses IPUMS DHS 2018 data for Bangladesh. The sample size comprises 20,127 married women aged between 15 to 49. The study also uses four rounds of Global Findex Databases for Bangladesh each comprising 1000 nationally representative observations. However, financial inclusion is an endogenous variable. The possible reasons are reverse causality, simultaneity, and measurement error. To address the potential endogeneity challenge, the research relied on Propensity Score Matching (PSM) identification strategy.

**Findings:** The results illustrate that women who have a formal financial account are more likely to have autonomy in accessing health care and spending their own earnings as well as greater participation in household decision-making. However, no significant effect of women's financial inclusion on spousal domestic violence attitude is observed. Therefore, the study claims that financial inclusion of women helps in achieving gender equality and inclusive economic well-being.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study advances the existing body of literature by exploring the impact of financial inclusion on women's empowerment within the context of emerging economies. Specifically, it offers policy-relevant insights pertinent to Bangladesh's pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). The findings underscore the need for comprehensive policy reforms, including the removal of legal and institutional barriers within the banking sector, the design of gender-responsive financial products, and the implementation of targeted financial literacy and skill development programs, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

**Originality/value:** The study uses nationally representative dataset and explores the impact on financial

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inclusion on the previously unexplored areas of women empowerment in the context of Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Women Empowerment, Propensity Score Matching, Bangladesh.

## **Analyzing the Impact of FinTech on Traditional Banking, Consumer Behavior, and Financial Inclusion: Implications for Economic Development in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Financial inclusion is vital for economic development, yet 47% of adults in Bangladesh are outside the formal financial system. FinTech, introduced in the NFIS 2021-2026, aims to include more citizens in the system. As of 2023, Bangladesh has over 160 million bank accounts, with 47.11% in rural areas and 32.36% held by women. While 61% of the population uses formal financial services, 38% rely on traditional bank accounts. Mobile financial services have expanded access with 216 million accounts, but gender disparities persist. This study explores FinTech's impact on traditional banking, consumer behavior, and financial inclusion in Bangladesh.

**Purpose/Objective:** The study evaluates FinTech adoption's influence on traditional banking and consumer behavior, focusing on:

- **Financial Inclusion:** How mobile financial services, no-frill accounts, and FinTech solutions provide access to underserved groups.
- **Changes in Consumer Behavior:** How digital services impact saving, spending, investing, traditional banking, and financial literacy.
- **Implications for Economic Development:** How financial inclusion contributes to poverty alleviation, economic stability, and growth.

**Methodology:** A mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess FinTech's impact.

- **Quantitative Data:** Collected from Bangladesh Bank's Financial Inclusion Reports, World Bank Global Findex, and consumer surveys.
- **Statistical Techniques:** Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests.
- **Regression Model:** Multiple Linear Regression analyzes the relationship between FinTech adoption, consumer behavior, and financial inclusion.
- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups will identify consumer experiences with FinTech, triangulated with quantitative data.

### **Findings:**

- **H1:** FinTech adoption improves financial inclusion, with 216 million MFS accounts, mainly in rural and marginalized areas.
- **H2:** Increased FinTech use correlates with a 15% increase in savings and more transactions.
- **H3:** Gender and income affect FinTech adoption, with policies improving access for women.

**Impact on Financial Inclusion:** FinTech innovations, like No-Frill Accounts (NFAs), have impacted marginalized groups. By March 2025, 32.76 million NFAs were active, 37.08% linked to SSN programs.

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**Consumer Behavior Changes:** FinTech adoption led to a 15% increase in savings, improved spending, and better access for micro-entrepreneurs. Remittances via NFAs reached BDT 7.78 billion by 2025.

**Gender Disparities:** 42% of MFS accounts are held by women, showing progress in female empowerment.

**Economic Development:** Financial inclusion through FinTech raised household incomes by 20% among NFA users and increased CMSME financing, supporting economic stability.

**Challenges:** Challenges include limited literacy, infrastructure, and unclear regulations. Gender disparity persists, with 43.46% of women availing formal services compared to 62.86% of men.

### **Practical and Policy Implications:**

- **Integration of FinTech:** Banks should collaborate with FinTech firms to improve service delivery.
- **Financial Literacy Programs:** Programs for women and rural communities can increase participation.
- **Regulatory Frameworks:** Regulators should create innovation-friendly frameworks to protect consumers.

**Originality/Value:** This study shows how FinTech improves financial inclusion for marginalized groups and empowers people to participate more in the economy.

**Keywords:** FinTech, Financial Inclusion, Traditional Banking, Consumer Behavior, Development, Bangladesh

## **Free to Lance: Digital Skills and Economical Empowerment for Underserved Youth in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Bangladesh’s rural community faces a significant digital divide and financial illiteracy, hindering economic progress. Only 36.5% of rural residents use the internet, compared to 71.4% in urban areas (The Daily Star, 2024). Poor infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and economic constraints contribute to “digital exclusion,” leading to broader rural underdevelopment (Salemink, 2015). This exclusion deepens financial vulnerability by limiting access to income-generating opportunities and digital financial tools, exacerbating poverty and socio-economic inequality. In response, the Free to Lance project was launched in 2023 at Rahmatullah Model High School to bridge this gap. Among 246 students, 214 lacked digital access, and many came from extreme poverty. The initiative aimed to provide digital and freelancing skills, along with leadership, accountability, and advocacy, creating a ripple effect of financial empowerment through digital inclusion.

**Purpose/Objective:** The initiative trained students in marketable skills such as photography, content creation, graphic design, and data entry, aiming to bridge the digital divide and introduce freelancing opportunities. The objective was to achieve 100% digital literacy awareness, a 70% increase in digital skill proficiency, and encourage at least 30% of students to access further online learning resources. **Financial Inclusion:** How mobile financial services, no-frill accounts, and FinTech solutions provide access to underserved groups.

**Methodology:** The project was completed in three months and implemented in three phases:

- **Educate Phase:** Workshops provided foundational knowledge on freelancing and digital literacy. Career talks by BRAC professionals and 10 Minute School educators showcased real-world opportunities.
- **Activate Phase:** Students joined workshops covering basic digital competencies. Content creation, including video editing and digital storytelling, emerged as a popular path. High-achieving students were selected for scholarships to online courses.
- **Advocate & Sustain Phase:** The final phase ensured long-term impact through peer-to-peer learning and institutional support. Initiating a “Human Library” model as a sustainable solution for the problem, student volunteers acted as peer leaders, sharing knowledge learned via online content. The school revived its unused computer lab, enabling regular digital learning classes. A post-project survey measured changes in confidence, career interest, and class engagement.

### **Findings:**

- 83% of students reported increased confidence using digital tools.
- A 47% average increase in digital skill proficiency was recorded.
- 10 students accessed extended learning through online scholarships.
- Reviving the school’s computer lab increased digital learning hours by 81%.

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- 72% of participants expressed interest in digital careers, compared to just 18% before the intervention.

**Practical and Policy Implications:** This project demonstrates a scalable model to bridge the rural digital divide. However, sustainability may be challenged by limited funding, ongoing teacher training, and evolving digital content relevance. Policymakers are urged to:

- Integrate freelancing and digital literacy into the national curriculum for marginalized rural learners.
- Invest in infrastructure (e.g., internet connectivity, computer labs).
- Support community-based peer learning models like the Human Library to make it autonomous.

By narrowing the digital divide, Bangladesh can accelerate inclusive economic growth and resilience in underprivileged communities

**Originality/Value:** This initiative presents a novel integration of digital literacy, freelancing skills, and peer learning in underserved schools. Unlike conventional ICT training programs, Free to Lance emphasizes sustainability through educational institutions and community-led learning. The model is unique in its child-centered, localized approach, offering a blueprint for similar low-resource settings. It demonstrates how digital empowerment can influence financial literacy, career readiness, and economic mobility for marginalized youth.

**Keywords:** freelancing, digital inclusion, financial literacy, youth empowerment, economic empowerment, peer learning

## **FinTech: Impacts on Financial Inclusion for the Unbanked Population in Rural Bangladesh**

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**Background:** The financial technology (FinTech) revolution holds transformative potential for reshaping financial landscapes in developing countries, particularly by extending services to unbanked rural populations (Ozili, 2018). Thus, FinTech has emerged as a powerful tool for bridging the financial inclusion gap. The convergence of technology and finance has not only resulted in improved financial solutions, but also in regulatory frameworks that adapt to and promote the growth of novel financial technologies (Elsayed, et al., 2024). However, the banking literature lacks agreement on the effect of FinTech on banks (Aleemi, Javaid, & Hafeez, 2023). As a result, a systematic study is needed to understand how FinTech promotes financial inclusion for the rural unbanked population.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study explores the effects of financial technology on enhancing financial inclusion for the unbanked population in Bangladesh. The study also measures the impact level of FinTech solutions such as mobile financial services, app-based banking, internet banking, agent banking, digital nano loans, digital onboarding, and AI-based chatbots on financial inclusion by providing access to financial services for the unbanked population.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study used primary data for quantitative research. After reviewing the literature, a conceptual framework and eight hypotheses have been developed. A non-probability sampling technique has been applied which is a judgmental sampling. A survey was conducted to 120 bank employees mostly from rural areas to gather primary data through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Consequently, PLS-SEM analysis was performed through SmartPLS 4 using a reflective measurement model. First, the outer model was evaluated to check reliability and validity of constructs. Then, a structural model was examined to assess the path coefficients, and test the hypotheses.

**Findings:** The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed using indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. All outer loadings were above 0.70, indicating strong correlations between observed indicators and latent constructs. CR values exceed the recommended cutoff of 0.70, confirming internal consistency. All constructs had AVE values above 0.50, proving convergent validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios proved discriminant validity. The constructs are distinct because their AVE square roots were greater than their correlations and their HTMT values were below 0.85. After verifying the measurement model, the structural model was assessed using path coefficients,  $R^2$ , effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). Many significant paths were found by testing the hypothesized relationships, and all hypotheses were accepted based on the structural model assessment results.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study provides empirical insights into how FinTech solutions are

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improving access to financial services for the unbanked population in rural Bangladesh, highlighting usage patterns and remaining barriers. The findings indicate that targeted policies promoting digital education, gender-inclusive product design, and improved rural connectivity are critical for realizing FinTech's inclusive potential. Policymakers should prioritize the development of FinTech solutions to improve access, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, creating regulatory frameworks that support financial technology innovations can foster competition and drive down costs.

**Originality/value:** FinTech solutions have been extensively studied in urban financial ecosystems, but their impact on rural, unbanked populations has not. This study addresses this gap by examining how FinTech solutions affect financial inclusion in rural Bangladesh. It is one of the first empirical studies to analyze FinTech's impact on financial inclusion in Bangladesh from a rural perspective using the PLS-SEM approach.

**Keywords:** FinTech, Financial Inclusion, Financial Access, PLS-SEM, Bangladesh.

## **Digital Financial Literacy and Readiness for Cashless Economy: A Study of Rural and Urban Consumers in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** As Bangladesh transitions toward a digital and cashless economy, supported by mobile financial services (MFS) and FinTech innovations, the success of this transformation depends not only on access to digital platforms but also on the population's digital financial literacy (DFL). DFL is a multidimensional construct encompassing consumers' ability to understand, trust, and effectively use digital financial services. This study conceptualizes DFL as a second-order construct, formed by four critical first-order dimensions: functional digital literacy, financial literacy, security awareness, and digital self-efficacy. Existing studies consistently highlight digital financial literacy (DFL) as a key determinant of cashless payment adoption, directly shaping user readiness and acceptance (Salman & Saleem, 2017). Evidence from emerging economies demonstrates a strong positive correlation between DFL and cashless behavior, yet findings also reveal disparities—particularly by gender, with lower-literate individuals, especially women, showing greater reluctance to adopt digital payments (Srouji, 2020; Shehadeh et al., 2024). While global research supports DFL's critical role, empirical insights remain limited in the Bangladeshi context, especially regarding rural-urban.

**Purpose/Objective:** The main objective of this study is to investigate to what extent does digital financial literacy—conceptualized as a multidimensional construct—predict consumers' readiness to adopt a cashless economy in the context of Bangladesh?. Moreover, to what extent Bangladesh is going to a cashless economy? The success of this readiness will be measured through individuals' preference for digital transactions, (use the following digital tools – debit and credit card, ATM, CRM, electronic fund transfer, Online and Internet banking, QR Code payment, e-wallet etc.) intention to reduce cash use, and willingness to receive income through digital platforms.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This is a quantitative and cross-sectional study. The data were obtained from 450 participants by using purposive sampling techniques across rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. The study tested the relationship between the second-order construct of DFL and the dependent variable, readiness for a cashless economy through PLS-SEM technique. The hierarchical or second-order construct is type II i.e reflective-formative. The two-stage approach is followed for analyzing second-order constructs. Furthermore, its predictive power is tested on readiness for a cashless economy through pls-predict and rural-urban disparity is checked through multi-group analysis (MGA).

**Findings:** The analysis revealed that digital financial literacy significantly predicts readiness for a cashless economy. Among the three first-order constructs, security awareness had the strongest loading on DFL, followed by functional digital literacy, financial literacy and digital self-efficacy. The results of multi-group analysis (MGA) also indicated substantial rural-urban disparity, with urban respondents demonstrating higher levels of literacy and cashless readiness.

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**Practical and policy implications:** The findings highlight DFL is a key enabler of a cashless economy and enhancing users' skills in navigating financial apps, recognizing fraud, and building confidence in digital finance usage can accelerate cashless transitions, particularly in underserved communities. The study recommends that policymakers and fintech providers should prioritize digital education campaigns, simplifying user interfaces in mobile platforms especially focused on security and self-efficacy, to bridge literacy gaps and ensure equitable participation in Bangladesh's financial digitalization.

**Originality/value:** This study offers original insights by conceptualizing DFL as a multidimensional, second-order construct and empirically validating its role in shaping consumers' readiness for a cashless economy. By integrating functional, financial, security, and psychological dimensions, and highlighting rural-urban disparities, the research advances both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for inclusive digital transformation in emerging economies like Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Digital financial literacy, Cashless Economy, Functional digital literacy, Financial literacy, Security awareness, Digital Self-Efficacy.

## **The Impact of Digitalization of Banking Channels on Financial Literacy Across Demographics in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** The financial services landscape in Bangladesh has undergone a significant transformation due to the rapid digitization of banking channels, particularly through mobile financial services (MFS), agent banking, and fintech solutions. The regulatory environment, led by the Bangladesh Bank, has played a central role in promoting digital financial services (DFS) by establishing enabling frameworks and licensing agreements for mobile money operators like bKash and Nagad, as policies like Regulatory Guidelines for Mobile Financial Services (2011), Guidelines for Agent Banking (2020), and Mobile Financial Services Regulations (2022) were introduced. (Islam & Mamun, 2021). Collaborations between telecom companies and financial institutions have accelerated DFS adoption, yet stark digital divides remain. Despite substantial growth in DFS usage, challenges in user education, especially among rural and less literate populations, pose barriers to inclusive financial empowerment (Hasan et al., 2020).

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to explore the relationship between exposure to digital banking services and financial literacy across different demographic groups in Bangladesh. It seeks to determine whether there exists a causal link, rather than just a correlation, between the adoption of digital financial tools and improved financial knowledge and behavior. The research focuses on understanding how demographic factors (such as age, education, and geographic location) influence users' ability to independently utilize and benefit from DFS platforms.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study used a mixed-methods research methodology that used quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to look at how people use digital banking, how financially literate they are, and what problems they face. We utilised a stratified random sample method to poll 1,200 bank clients from both cities and the countryside. Financial literacy metrics measured things like how confident users were, how well they understood financial concepts, how engaged they were with their behaviour, how well they knew how to utilise digital technologies, and how comfortable they were with financial instruments. We found challenges by looking at the percentage of users who faced problems, including not having enough internet connectivity, not being very good with technology, and worrying about security. We employed Pearson's correlation and multivariate regression analysis to look at the link between digital banking use and financial literacy. We used difference-in-differences (DiD) models and comparisons of scores before and after to figure out the causal effect. We also had 20 key informant interviews with bank officials, fintech executives, and policy experts

**Findings:** The findings indicate that although digital banking has greatly improved financial inclusion, particularly through mobile financial services such as bKash and Nagad, it has not uniformly enhanced financial literacy among all demographic groups. Users who are urban, younger, and more educated show a stronger relationship between digital engagement and financial literacy. Conversely, older, less educated, and

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rural users continue to depend heavily on agents or informal assistance, which restricts their ability to independently comprehend digital financial tools. Significant barriers, including the absence of localized language support and a lack of trust in digital systems, further complicate these challenges particularly in indigenous communities.

**Contribution:** This research contributes to the broader literature on financial inclusion by presenting empirical evidence of the uneven impact of DFS on financial literacy. It extends prior work by linking user behavior with structural and educational gaps in digital adoption (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). Moreover, the study provides a nuanced view of how technology alone is insufficient for empowerment without corresponding investments in digital education and inclusive design. The study’s dual-method approach enriches our understanding of both user experiences and institutional dynamics in Bangladesh’s DFS ecosystem.

**Practical and policy implications:** The paper recommends a multi-stakeholder approach to address the digital literacy gap. This includes embedding mandatory financial education modules within banking applications, launching targeted awareness campaigns in local languages, and scaling public-private initiatives for digital training in rural areas. While the Bangladesh Bank and NGOs have initiated some programs, their limited reach and lack of contextual customization hinder effectiveness. The paper calls for integrated efforts involving banks, telecom companies, regulatory agencies, and civil society to align digital financial services with inclusive education strategies, ensuring that digitalization does not exacerbate existing socioeconomic inequalities.

**Originality/value:** The paper recommends a multi-stakeholder approach to address the digital literacy gap. This includes embedding mandatory financial education modules within banking applications, launching targeted awareness campaigns in local languages, and scaling public-private initiatives for digital training in rural areas. The paper calls for integrated efforts involving banks, telecom companies, regulatory agencies, and civil society to align digital financial services with inclusive education strategies, ensuring that digitalization does not exacerbate existing socioeconomic inequalities.

**Keywords:** Digital Banking, Financial Literacy, Financial Inclusion, Mobile Financial Services (MFS), Urban-Rural.

## **Does Financial Inclusion Gender Gap Persist in the Digital World?**

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**Background:** Financial inclusion is recognized as a key driver for economic development and gender equality. With the spread of digital technologies such as internet access, mobile banking, and digital payments, it is widely assumed that financial services have become more accessible to traditionally marginalized groups, particularly women. However, whether digitalization effectively reduces the financial inclusion gender gap in low- and lower-middle-income countries remains an open question.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study investigates whether the gender gap in financial inclusion persists in the digital world, specifically in account ownership, saving, and borrowing from formal financial institutions.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) panel regression models to analyze an unbalanced panel dataset of 37 low and lower-middle-income countries from 2011 to 2021. The dependent variables are gender gaps in account ownership, saving, and borrowing at formal financial institutions. Key independent variables include internet usage, digital payment usage, and the country-level technology and innovation index. Control variables include GDP growth rate, number of bank branches, and regulatory quality. The control function approach is applied to search for endogeneity in the models.

**Findings:** The results reveal a mixed relationship between digitalization and the gender gap in financial inclusion. For account ownership, digital variables were not statistically significant. Internet usage, digital payments, and technological innovation did not directly affect the reduction of the gender gap in opening financial accounts. For saving, internet usage, and digital payments were statistically significant. Increased Internet access significantly reduced the gender gap in saving. On the other hand, higher adoption of digital payments places women in a larger gender gap. The model demonstrated moderate explanatory power. Lastly, for borrowing, none of the digital variables were significant. Gender disparities in borrowing persist despite greater internet access and digital payment use, suggesting that deeper structural barriers, such as creditworthiness requirements, lack of collateral, and gender-based discrimination, continue to limit women's borrowing opportunities. Overall, internet access among the population is associated with progress in narrowing the savings gap, but it does not appear sufficient to close gaps in account ownership or borrowing.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings suggest that digitalization contributes to narrowing the gender gap in saving but has a limited impact on other aspects of financial inclusion. Policymakers should continue expanding digital infrastructure and promoting digital financial literacy among women. However, these efforts must be complemented by broader structural reforms, including improving women's legal rights, financial regulations that promote inclusive lending, and addressing socio-cultural barriers. Comprehensive strategies beyond technology adoption are necessary to achieve genuine financial inclusion for women in lower-income economies.

**Originality/value:** Unlike previous literature that often treats digitalization as a uniform enabler of inclusion,

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this research disaggregates its effects on account ownership, saving, and borrowing, revealing nuanced outcomes. Using a control function approach further strengthens the methodological rigor by addressing potential endogeneity. The findings underscore that digital access alone is insufficient to ensure gender-equal financial participation, highlighting the need for integrated policy approaches that combine digital infrastructure with institutional and socio-cultural reforms.

**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Gender Gap, Digitalization, low- and lower-middle-income countries.

## **Buy Now, Regret Later: Transforming BNPL into a Path to Financial Responsibility**

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**Background:** Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) services are transforming how consumers access short-term credit. By allowing immediate purchases with deferred, interest-free installments, BNPL has become popular among tech-savvy and credit-constrained users in countries like Australia, the USA, and India. In Bangladesh, BNPL is beginning to gain ground as a tool to increase financial access and promote digital payments. However, its rapid and unregulated expansion raises critical concerns about impulsive consumer behavior, debt accumulation, and long-term financial instability. These risks call for a deeper understanding of how BNPL impacts users in the Bangladeshi context, especially as the service targets financially inexperienced youth with limited access to traditional credit systems.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to assess the socio-economic and behavioral impact of BNPL usage in Bangladesh. It focuses on three main research questions: (1) How does financial literacy influence responsible BNPL usage and repayment behavior? (2) How do regulatory frameworks in countries like Australia, the USA, and India reduce BNPL-related debt risks, and what lessons can be adapted for Bangladesh? (3) Can behavior-based credit scoring systems improve credit assessment for users lacking formal financial histories?

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study adopts a quantitative methodology. Primary data is collected through structured surveys administered to urban BNPL users in Bangladesh, capturing data on financial literacy, spending habits, credit access, and repayment patterns. A comparative policy analysis of regulatory practices in Australia, the USA, and India is conducted to identify strategies such as affordability checks, transparency mandates, and credit reporting requirements. Additionally, the research investigates the feasibility of behavior-based credit scoring models that analyze user behavior, such as purchase frequency, repayment consistency, and savings trends to support more inclusive and responsible lending practices.

**Findings:** Preliminary analysis shows that higher financial literacy is associated with more responsible BNPL behavior, including better budgeting and timely repayments. International case studies demonstrate that targeted regulations, such as those in Australia and India, can reduce default rates by enforcing borrower protection mechanisms. Moreover, behavior-based credit scoring offers promise for identifying creditworthy individuals who are excluded from traditional lending systems due to a lack of formal credit history.

**Practical and policy implications:** The study recommends that Bangladesh implement affordability assessments for BNPL providers, integrate financial literacy programs into school curricula and fintech platforms. Additionally, pilot behavioral credit scoring models through collaborative efforts between government and private fintech companies.

**Originality/value:** This research is among the first to examine BNPL in Bangladesh, offering original insights into consumer behavior, regulatory adaptation, and credit scoring innovation. It contributes timely evidence to support safer, more inclusive digital finance in developing economies.

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**Keywords:** Buy Now Pay Later, Financial Literacy, Regulatory Framework, Alternative Credit Scoring, Debt Accumulation.

## **Digital Financial Literacy, Financial Behaviour and Locus of Control: Do They Matter for Financial Well-Being? Moderating Role of Risky Investment Intention**

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**Background:** In an increased digital financial ecosystem, the financial well-being of individuals depends not only on available resources but also on psychological factors and personal knowledge. Digital financial literacy shapes individuals with the necessary skills to navigate complex financial systems, while financial behaviour and locus of control shape their financial decisions. Risky investment intention, which is defined as individuals' propensity to invest in high-risk financial instruments, may further shape the impact of these factors on personal financial outcomes.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study examines the role of digital financial literacy, financial behaviour, and locus of control in shaping financial well-being and explores how individuals' risky investment intentions moderate these relationships.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A quantitative research design was adopted by developing indices for each variable, collecting primary data through a structured questionnaire targeting undergraduate students from both public and private universities. Financial literacy is measured from both basic and digital knowledge perspectives, including digital financial knowledge and practical know-how, awareness, decision-making, and self-protection related to financial literacy, where the measurement questionnaire is adopted from Van Rooij et al. (2011) and Abdallah, Tfaily, and Harraf (2025). Similarly, the measurement questionnaire for Financial Well-being, Financial behaviour and Locus of Control is adopted from Mahdzan et. al (2022) and Risky investment intention from Dinç Aydemir and Aren (2017). For gathering data, a questionnaire-based survey method was employed, reaching 229 university students. The study utilises confirmatory factor analysis for scale validation and multiple regression for hypothesis testing. Considering the potential endogeneity bias, the instrumental variable 2SLS regression model was executed.

**Findings:** The findings of the study reveal that financial behaviour and locus of control positively impact the subjective financial well-being of individuals, where financial behaviour works as a strong predictor of financial well-being, which includes the attitude towards budgeting and savings, setting financial goals, passive income, etc. Initially, digital financial literacy fails to improve the financial well-being of individuals. However, risky investment intention moderates the relationship, such that the positive effects of digital financial literacy and locus of control on financial well-being are stronger for individuals with higher intentions to invest in risky assets. The results from instrumental variables also support these relationships. Individuals with any scope of employment show significant positive results in predicting financial well-being.

**Practical and policy implications:** From an individual perspective, the results suggest the importance of personalized financial education initiatives that develop not only traditional literacy but also digital financial skills and psychological readiness for managing financial risks. Programs should encourage proactive financial behaviors while helping individuals understand their risk tolerance. Financial advisors and educators

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should tailor their strategies to individual profiles, supporting people in building a balanced approach to financial decision-making. At the governmental level, policymakers should prioritize the integration of digital financial literacy and behavioural finance modules into national education curricula.

**Originality/value:** This study advances the understanding of financial well-being by framing it as a product of individual skills, behaviours, and psychological orientations. It moves beyond conventional models that focus solely on financial literacy by integrating digital competencies and risk attitudes. The findings provide evidence that individual differences significantly shape financial outcomes, especially in an era of widespread digital financial engagement.

**Keywords:** Financial well-being, Digital financial literacy, Financial behaviour, Locus of control, Risky investment intention.

## **Building Integrating Localized Credit Facilities into Global Digital Payment Framework for International Travelers**

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**Background:** With international tourism gaining momentum in the aftermath of the pandemic, travelers are increasingly dependent on efficient, secure, and adaptable financial systems. While tools like prepaid cards, mobile wallets, and short-term financing plans are widely used, they often fall short in addressing location-specific financial needs, especially for travelers with limited international credit backgrounds. This highlights a gap in cross-border financial access that localized credit systems could help bridge.

**Purpose/Objective:** The study explores how host countries can integrate Local Credit Facilities (LCFs) within their financial ecosystems to serve foreign visitors. The goal is to design a system that provides short-term credit access to travelers while ensuring compatibility with their home-country financial data and platforms.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A mixed-methods design was applied. The study draws on data from industry reports, digital payment usage statistics, and case examples from tourism-heavy regions such as Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with professionals in fintech, banking, and regulatory bodies. The research also reviews regional compliance structures concerning data protection and financial regulations. Technological tools such as AI-driven credit assessment, open banking interfaces, and digital ID verification systems were evaluated for integration potential.

**Findings:** The research supports the feasibility of implementing LCFs that combine host-country banking practices with tourists' financial profiles. Real-time credit scoring, enabled by open APIs and secure identity tools, can allow seamless credit issuance. While challenges such as cybersecurity, inconsistent legal frameworks, and data-sharing limitations exist, these can be addressed through layered governance systems. A well-executed LCF model can improve the financial experience for travelers and generate economic value in host destinations.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings provide a roadmap for policymakers and fintech developers aiming to align localized financial services with global digital payment infrastructure. Key recommendations include:

- Encouraging cross-border collaboration on API and data standards.
- Supporting local financial institutions in offering traveler-focused credit lines.
- Building public-private frameworks to promote trust, scalability, and compliance.

By enabling host countries to extend inclusive credit services to visitors, this model enhances both financial inclusion and local economic participation, contributing to the broader agenda of global financial integration

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**Keywords:** Local Credit Facilities, Digital Payments, Cross-Border Fintech, AI Credit Scoring, Financial Inclusion, Travel Finance.

## **Exploring Mobile Financial Services (MFS) Adoption and Basic Financial Literacy among Market Merchants in Sylhet**

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**Background:** Mobile Financial Services (MFS), such as bKash and Rocket, have advanced financial inclusion in Bangladesh. MFS supports a potential cashless economy. Post-COVID-19 shifts have increased MFS usage, yet many Sylhet market merchants use personal MFS accounts for business transactions, potentially reducing customer trust. Basic financial literacy, encompassing skills like bookkeeping and budgeting, is critical for effective MFS adoption. This study explores barriers to MFS merchant account adoption and gaps in basic financial literacy among Sylhet's merchants to enhance financial inclusion.

**Purpose/Objective:** This research aims to identify factors influencing merchants' MFS account preferences, examine merchant-reported customer reactions, and assess basic financial literacy to propose interventions for improving MFS adoption and financial management in Sylhet's markets.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This qualitative study used convenience sampling to interview 24 merchants (9 small, 11 medium, 4 large business size) across Sylhet in April 2025, covering 4 grocery stores, 3 clothing, 3 restaurants, three book/stationery stores, 4 confectioneries, 2 ration stores, 1 electronic shop, 1 gift/toy shop, 1 tailor, and 2 cosmetic/beauty shops. Convenience sampling suited exploratory research. Open-ended questions explored account preferences (15 personal and 9 merchant accounts), merchant-reported customer reactions, basic financial literacy, and support needs. Responses were thematically analyzed manually, with data saturation beyond 21 participants ensuring reliability. Limitations include recall bias from unrecorded responses, mitigated by immediate note-taking and cross-verification, and sampling bias from convenience sampling, addressed by diverse business types and data saturation.

**Findings:** Large merchants used MFS merchant accounts for credibility and flexibility, medium merchants variably used merchant or personal accounts based on business needs, while small merchants relied on personal accounts due to convenience and cash, unawareness, or registration complexity. Merchants reported post-COVID-19 increases in customer MFS use, though many paid in cash; some MFS users hesitated with personal accounts due to distrust. Basic financial literacy gaps were evident: large merchants maintained bookkeeping, medium merchants showed mixed practices, but small merchants often lacked records or emergency funds, citing irregular income. Merchants requested lower cash-out fees and training on MFS and literacy.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings suggest that Government and regulatory bodies incentivize MFS merchant accounts for business transactions, supported by simplified registration, reduced cash-out fees, and workshops on basic financial literacy (e.g., bookkeeping, budgeting) and MFS usage. Partnerships with MFS providers could deliver tailored training, boosting financial inclusion. Theoretically, the study applies a behavioral economic lens to enrich MFS and financial literacy literature with region-specific insights, linking trust and perceived formality to adoption behaviors, and informs scalable urban strategies.

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**Originality/value:** Among the first to examine MFS adoption and basic financial literacy in Sylhet's unique market context, this study offers a scalable framework for other Bangladeshi cities. It introduces a novel behavioral economic lens, linking MFS adoption to trust and perceived formality in merchant-customer interactions, supports a cashless society by addressing adoption barriers, while bridging the often-separate conversations of financial literacy and fintech adoption to address a critical research gap.

**Keywords:** MFS adoption, basic financial literacy, merchant accounts, Sylhet merchants, financial inclusion.

## **Does Digital Financial Literacy Escalate Savings in Formal Financial Institutions?**

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**Background:** Despite considerable expansion in financial services, citizen engagement with formal financial institutions remains low across many regions. While prior studies emphasize the role of digital financial literacy in promoting savings, they often focus on self-reported financial knowledge within narrow cohorts, limiting the generalizability of their findings. Additionally, there is limited understanding of how different dimensions of financial literacy, like financial skills, behavior, and attitude, affect savings behavior, especially in digital financial services.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study examines how various dimensions of financial literacy influence savings behavior within formal financial institutions, specifically focusing on incorporating digital aspects of financial literacy. It aims to confirm the predictive power of financial literacy, with its three dimensions, skill, behavior, and attitude, in determining savings in formal financial platforms.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study employs a cross-sectional, cross-country analysis using data from over 135 countries, utilizing secondary data from the Global Findex Database 2021 and the Standard & Poor's Global FinLit Survey 2014. A multiple regression analysis is employed to assess the impact of digital financial literacy on savings behavior in formal financial institutions, controlling for seven macro, institutional, and structural level control variables. While skill measures an individual's knowledge about financial matters and handling their own account without anyone's help, behavior measures their financial management in their everyday lives. Lastly, attitude measures trust in the financial platform and confidence in financial matters. Robust statistical methods were applied to examine the predictive strength of each dimension across diverse cultural and economic contexts.

**Findings:** The regression analysis reveals that skills ( $\beta=0.309$ ,  $p=0.004$ ) and behaviors ( $\beta=0.580$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) are strong positive predictors of savings, while attitudes (such as trust in financial institutions and confidence in financial matters) show a negative impact ( $\beta=-0.206$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). This counterintuitive result suggests that certain prevailing financial attitudes may discourage formal savings, possibly due to cultural preferences for informal saving methods or behavioral biases, which warrant further research. The study also found that financial literacy predicts 78.8% ( $R^2=0.788$ ) of the variance in savings behaviors across countries. Cross-validation results reconfirm the robustness of the model, showing the importance of skills and behavior in enhancing savings.

**Practical and policy implications:** For policymakers and financial educators, the findings suggest that to promote digital financial inclusion, efforts to enhance digital literacy should focus on vulnerable groups like minorities, women, and the elderly, who are most affected by the digital divide. Investment in the ICT sector is essential, as its underdevelopment hinders progress. Additionally, financial literacy programs should be integrated into financial services, supported by well-trained employees. The government should allocate more resources to financial education through curriculum development and digital tools to help the country

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progress toward high-income status. It also suggests that programs aiming to increase formal savings should focus heavily on improving financial behavior and practical financial skills, rather than solely promoting financial knowledge or altering attitudes without addressing deeper behavioral patterns.

**Originality/value:** This study makes several contributions to the literature on financial literacy and formal savings. First, it integrates digital financial literacy elements within a traditional framework, offering a more holistic understanding of financial decision-making in the modern economy. Second, by analyzing separate financial literacy components, the study moves beyond generalized self-assessments and provides actionable insights. Third, unlike prior studies that focus solely on specific financial literacy dimensions or individual countries, this research adopts a cross-national perspective, enhancing the generalizability and external validity of the findings.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Digital Financial Literacy, Savings, Financial Inclusion.

## **Evolution of Distribution Models in Bangladesh's Digital Payment Ecosystem: A Path towards Inclusive Financial Services**

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**Background:** Digital payments in Bangladesh have evolved significantly over the past 15 years. Initially, the financial ecosystem was largely cash-based, with digital payments limited to card transactions. As mobile financial services grew rapidly, fintech startups and payment service providers emerged, offering simpler, integrated systems. This revolutionized the market and contributed to building inclusive financial services, supported by Bangladesh Bank's regulatory interventions. Despite challenges like digital literacy, affordability of smartphones, and agent network development, digital payments continue to thrive. This report explores how the distribution model can address these challenges and improve financial inclusion.

**Purpose/Objective:** This report aims to understand the distribution model in Bangladesh's digital payment ecosystem, identify obstacles and key drivers in distribution model strategies, evaluate the effectiveness of current distribution channels in promoting inclusivity, assess the role of policies and regulations in driving these models, and offer insights to enhance digital financial services' accessibility, affordability, and efficiency for all demographic segments.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data:

- **Secondary Data Review:** Reports from the Central Bank of Bangladesh, World Bank, and other market analyses were reviewed.
- **Industry Expert Interviews:** Interviews with experts from key market players like bKash, Upay, and Rocket.
- **Case Studies:** Service delivery models in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas were studied.
- **User Surveys:** Surveys were conducted to identify challenges and patterns in digital payment usage.

### **Findings:**

- **Hybrid Distribution Model:** The model involves servicing retail shops, with service officers visiting 30 to 60 shops in a cluster. These retailers are categorized by location (urban, semi-urban, rural) and onboarded using KYC and legal documents. Officers troubleshoot merchant issues rather than handling cash.
- **Physical to Digital Transition:** Initially, DFS relied on USSD and agent-based services. Now, the system uses QR code payments, unified payment integration, and interoperable services.
- **Global Vision, Local Approach:** DFS emphasizes local recruitment and marketing to build trust and serve local merchants.
- **Agent Banking:** Inspired by local banks, agent banking allows agents to perform functions similar to ATMs, ensuring widespread coverage and trust.
- **Regulatory Obstacles:** Data security, licensing, and interoperability issues have hindered innovation, despite supportive efforts from Bangladesh's Central Bank.

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- **Infrastructural Constraints:** Smartphone scarcity, lack of telecom infrastructure in rural areas, and limited anti-money laundering (AML) measures remain significant barriers to financial inclusion.

### Contributions:

- Describes the hybrid distribution model's impact on digital financial systems.
- Highlights the model's effectiveness and challenges in serving the masses.
- Explores the connection between innovation, digital literacy, and policy frameworks

### Practical and policy implications:

- **Interoperability Expansion:** Implementing straightforward solutions to improve platform spread and efficiency.
- **Developing Agent Network:** Enhancing agent literacy and compliance with AML policies in rural areas.
- **Simplifying Digital Literacy:** Launching campaigns to improve digital literacy in rural and semi-urban areas.
- **Smartphone Subsidy:** Collaborating with tech firms to make smartphones affordable.
- **Regulatory Sandboxes:** Encouraging public-private collaborations to foster innovation.
- **Gender-Focused Financial Inclusion:** Addressing logistical, cultural, and financial barriers for women

**Originality/value:** The distribution model integrates collaboration, innovation, and interoperability, significantly impacting DFS networks. Despite progress, areas for improvement remain, and the study provides a framework for future interventions and policy reforms to create an inclusive digital financial ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Payment, DFS Network, Distribution, Interoperability.

## **Economic Abuse and Financial Illiteracy: A Study of Marital Power Dynamics Among Women in Dhaka's Slums**

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**Background:** Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is home to over 5,000 slums, where approximately 40% of the population lives in extreme poverty, with inadequate housing, limited access to clean water, and unstable livelihoods (World Bank, 2020). This increases the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV), especially when economic resources are involved. A BRAC study (2020) found that most women in these slums cannot control household income, and due to their low financial knowledge, they may be exploited by abusive partners who confuse their finances, limit savings, or force them into debt (Stark, 2007).

**Purpose/Objective:** The purpose of this research is to look at how economic abuse and a lack of financial knowledge can shape marriage power dynamics in Dhaka's slum areas (Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Uttara). It identifies how economic abuse may increase when people are poor or subject to gender inequality and shares findings to guide the making of programs aimed at improving women's financial education, helping them gain financial independence and combating economic abuse.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This quantitative study investigates financial illiteracy and economic abuse among 100 married women aged 18–50 in Dhaka's slums, selected for high poverty and IPV prevalence. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews in Bengali using a 19-question standardized questionnaire pre-tested with 10 women (Cronbach's alpha >0.7). The questionnaire covered demographics, power dynamics, violence, financial independence, debt management, employment, institutional support, legal awareness, and mental health. SPSS was used for descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression to test predictors, controlling for demographics.

**Findings:** Descriptive statistics showed that many women felt financial independence could help them escape abuse, with 44.0% reporting abuse related to money arguments. Only 40.0% managed their finances, and 89.0% were unaware of financial literacy programs. Ordinal regression analysis indicated that knowledge of financial literacy programs was a strong predictor of women believing that financial independence could free them from abuse.

**Practical and policy implications:** This research conflicts with the idea that money on its own brings advantages to women. Many women in Dhaka's slums have jobs, yet they do not control their money. Real progress is possible once we address the underlying problems by teaching people about money and creating new laws. Below are key policy recommendations for NGOs and government agencies:

1. Design Educational Programs On Financial Literacy
2. Offer free financial advice and allow people to use banks safely
3. Include Financial Empowerment as part of Social Services.

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4. Strengthen Economic Support Policies for Women
5. Lawmakers should add and enforce laws that shield those suffering from economic abuse.

**Originality/value:** This study offers a novel contribution by revealing how economic dependency in Dhaka's slums functions as both a cause and consequence of abuse, a duality rarely explored in existing research on intimate partner violence (IPV). The Power and Control Wheel from the Duluth Model is the factor that makes this work truly original in Dhaka's slums, a unique and under-resourced setting. The analysis of income restriction, difficulty finding jobs and imposed debt shows that patriarchal values make it easier for men to keep their influence in marriage.

**Keywords:** Economic Abuse, Financial Illiteracy, Marital Power Dynamics, Dhaka's Slums, Intimate Partner Violence, Power and Control Wheel.

## **Enhancing Financial Literacy Among SMEs in Bangladesh: A Qualitative Exploration**

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**Background:** Bangladesh's economy relies significantly on small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). However, a lack of financial literacy (FL), defined as the ability to understand and apply financial concepts to make informed decisions, often leads to financial instability among these businesses. Most existing research emphasizes quantitative methods and overlooks the lived experiences and socio-cultural factors that influence financial behavior. The study will investigate how SME owners of Bangladesh understand financial knowledge within a real business and social context. This research will be guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Remund's concept of financial literacy.

**Purpose/Objective:** The study aims to explore financial literacy (FL) behavior among Bangladeshi SME owners in depth. Due to a lack of knowledge of financial principles, SMEs frequently struggle with financial sustainability while making a substantial contribution to GDP and jobs. This research is essential as it addresses the qualitative gap regarding how small business owners perceive and utilize financial decisions within their day-to-day life.

**Design/methodology/approach:** To learn more about the FL experiences and perspectives of SME owners throughout Bangladesh, the study will use qualitative methodologies. The study sample will consist of 30 SME owners from various sectors, including technology, textiles, and agriculture. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, each lasting approximately 40 to 60 minutes. Voice recording of the interviews with consent will secure accuracy and provide a detailed method for analysis.

The main interview queries contain two points that ask the participants, "What are your opinions about financial literacy?" followed by "Please describe your experience in managing finance for your business." The questions allow interviewees to explore their financial behavior patterns, sources of economic understanding, and decision-making procedures.

A qualitative analysis of seven relevant studies from Ghana, India, and Bangladesh will also be included in the research. These studies will be selected based on their thematic relevance and methodological capabilities. (Islam et al., 2023; Nazim et al., 2023; Agbanyo, 2023; Benardi et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2024). They provide more insight into the acquisition of financial knowledge, informal learning techniques, obstacles to formal education, and the usage of digital financial instruments. It will be easier to confirm and put the results in perspective if trends from the evaluated research and the interviews are compared.

**Findings:** The study is expected to reveal how Bangladeshi SME owners may manage their finances, particularly highlighting their limited use of digital financial tools and lack of associated education and training. To establish confidence, entrepreneurs need to interact with financial institutions.

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**Practical and policy implications:** Policymakers, financial institutions, and NGOs may find useful suggestions in the findings. The research might help create training programs and capability-building initiatives tailored to the specific needs and cultural contexts of SME owners.

**Originality/value:** This study takes a qualitative, experience-based approach to understand SME financial literacy, in contrast to previous quantitative studies. It will offer a new perspective on how cultural norms, institutional dynamics, and individual experiences shape financial behavior.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy SME; Social Cognitive Theory; Thematic Analysis; Qualitative Research; Meta-Analysis.

## **bKash Loan: A Pseudo–Credit Card Facility for Young Students and Early Professionals in Bangladesh**

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**Background:** In Bangladesh, a large section of young people—including university students, freelancers, and recent graduates—remain excluded from traditional credit systems due to a lack of financial history, formal employment, or collateral. As the country's financial sector undergoes digital transformation, mobile-based credit options have emerged to address this gap. One such option is the bKash loan, a digital microloan service that offers short-term, low-limit credit through mobile phones. While not a credit card in form, its features mirror key credit card functions such as small revolving credit, flexible repayment terms, and digital access—making it a potential alternative for underserved youth.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study explores whether bKash loans can function as a practical substitute for traditional credit cards for young, financially excluded populations in urban Bangladesh. The research examines how the product is used, how it influences user behavior, and whether it supports financial inclusion goals.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyze data. A structured survey was conducted with 423 respondents aged 18–30 across Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet, covering students, gig workers, and entry-level professionals. Questions focused on loan use, repayment patterns, and financial habits. Additionally, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights into user experiences and perceptions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and basic regression models to explore correlations, while qualitative data were coded thematically to identify common patterns and concerns.

**Findings:** The study found that a significant number of respondents rely on bKash loans for short-term needs such as tuition, rent, or emergency expenses. Features like instant disbursement, mobile accessibility, and the absence of paperwork were major advantages. Many users saw the loan as a stepping stone toward managing credit responsibly, especially when paired with incentives such as interest rebates for on-time payments. However, concerns about interest clarity, limited financial knowledge, and repayment pressure were raised, especially among first-time borrowers. Digital tools that promote financial literacy and provide spending insights were found to encourage more thoughtful use of credit.

**Practical and policy implications:** This research provides evidence that mobile-based microloans, when designed responsibly, can serve as an accessible form of credit for young people outside the formal banking system. The findings suggest a need for clearer interest communication, stronger digital financial education, and risk-based credit limits to avoid over-indebtedness. Policymakers and fintech stakeholders should work together to create a regulatory environment that protects consumers while promoting innovation. Collaborations with educational institutions and gig platforms can also help scale outreach. Overall, the bKash loan model shows promise as a tool for advancing youth financial inclusion in Bangladesh.

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**Keywords:** Fintech in Bangladesh, Youth Credit Access, Mobile Microloans, Digital Lending, Financial Inclusion

## **Advancing Youth Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh through Comparative Insights from Ghana and the UK.**

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**Background:** Despite nearly 45% of Bangladesh's population being under the age of 25 (Islam, Akash, Farhan, & Jahid, 2023), youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge. One major contributing factor is the absence of structured financial literacy, which hinders both individual empowerment and broader economic development. In contrast, countries like Ghana and the UK have taken concrete steps to embed financial literacy within youth development frameworks. Ghana has achieved tangible outcomes through targeted programs such as youth savings clubs and digital financial initiatives (Berry, Karlan, & Pradhan, 2018), while the UK has successfully embedded financial education within its national curriculum, offering real-world business exposure and decision-making skills (UK Finance, 2024; Smith, 2020). However, Bangladesh still lacks a scalable and cohesive model to build financial capabilities and entrepreneurial skills among its youth.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study aims to explore how financial literacy influences youth entrepreneurship in Bangladesh by drawing comparative insights from Ghana (a developing country) and the UK (a developed economy). The key objective is to recommend scalable educational and policy frameworks that can be adopted in Bangladesh to bridge the youth financial capability gap and promote inclusive entrepreneurship for a developed economy.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative data were collected via a survey of 113 Bangladeshi youth aged 18–35 from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey assessed their financial literacy levels and entrepreneurial intentions. Complementing this, a qualitative review of government policies, program documents, and educational strategies from Ghana and the UK was conducted to draw actionable comparisons.

**Findings:** The survey revealed that over 62% of youth lack basic financial literacy, particularly in budgeting, saving, and credit management; even among those with bachelor's or master's degrees. Despite this gap, 94.81% expressed a strong desire to improve their financial knowledge, reflecting high awareness of its value for future financial independence and entrepreneurship. Respondents with prior informal exposure to financial concepts demonstrated significantly higher entrepreneurial intent and confidence in managing money. The majority also advocated for integrating financial literacy into formal education and community-level programs, underscoring the need for structured, early interventions.

Insights from Ghana and the UK reinforce the survey findings. Ghana's school-based financial education and youth savings clubs have led to greater financial engagement (Berry, Karlan, & Pradhan, 2018). Meanwhile, the UK's curriculum-based approach has equipped students with essential financial skills and early business experience, enhancing entrepreneurial readiness (UK Finance, 2024; Smith, 2020). These comparative examples highlight the effectiveness of structured, early-stage financial education in fostering entrepreneur-

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**Practical and policy implications:** The research recommends embedding financial literacy into Bangladesh's national education system, starting from secondary levels. Additionally, promoting community-based programs such as youth-led business clubs and peer-to-peer financial learning initiatives could widen access and impact. Collaboration among government, educational institutions, and the private sector is essential to develop a comprehensive youth financial empowerment framework. Drawing insights from the experiences of Ghana and the UK, Bangladesh can introduce customized financial literacy programs to help address systematic barriers and enhance the entrepreneurial capacity to contribute to long-term economic resilience.

**Originality/value:** The study contributes to the limited empirical research connecting youth financial literacy and entrepreneurship among Bangladeshi youth, with a unique comparative perspective. By incorporating learnings from countries with varying economic contexts, the research presents scalable and practical policy recommendations relevant to policymakers, educators, and development organizations in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** youth, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, economic wellbeing.

## **Assessing the Mediating Role of Digital Marketing between Digital Financial Dynamics and Financial Inclusion among Youth: Emerging Evidence from Bangladesh**

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**Background:** Financial inclusion allows all to access vital financial services which are critical for economic development. In Bangladesh, a significant portion of the youth are still excluded as a result of low financial literacy, access and regulatory constraints. Digital financial variables including self-efficacy, FinTech, and regulation affect inclusion, yet hinder learning in the young. Digital marketing may act as a moderator of these barriers by raising awareness and trust but its role among Bangladeshi youth is not sufficiently examined.

**Purpose/Objective:** The study examines how digital marketing serves as mediator in the connection among digital financial dynamics, which has financial self-efficacy, financial literacy, FinTech, behavioral intention, and financial regulations, on the financial inclusion in the context of Bangladesh.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Primary Data from 498 respondents were collected from Bangladeshi youth through a structured survey. Data has been evaluated by means of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS4.

**Findings:** The findings indicate that some dynamics make a significant difference in bringing about financial inclusions. Digital marketing has also played a key role in terms of mediation for awareness, trust, and engagement with financial technologies. Behavioral intention proved to be significant with the full mediation of digital marketing, while financial literacy, even with the help of digital marketing interventions, remained found to be inadequate for fostering financial inclusions.

**Practical and policy implications:** This study strengthens the theoretical literature on financial inclusion by incorporating digital marketing as a mediator and provides practical insights for financial institutions, policy-makers, and technology providers. Stakeholders could advance financial inclusion and hence economic empowerment for youth through structural barriers and the leveraging of digital technologies.

**Originality/value:** This study contributes to the existing literature in a novel way, including digital marketing as an intermediary in the financial inclusion model. Therefore, it not only provides more theoretical knowledge about how marketing strategies and digital financial dynamics co-exist, but also in practical aspects, for instance when it comes to strategies for the youth in Bangladesh, which is overlooked in most of the literature. The results add value to academic research and practical applications and can be helpful for both academia and real life, especially for developing countries like Bangladesh.

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**Keywords:** Financial Inclusion, Digital Marketing, Financial Self-Efficacy, FinTech and Behavioral Intention.

## **Financial Literacy and Economic Growth in Arab Countries: An Empirical Investigation**

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**Background and Objective:** Financial literacy is increasingly acknowledged as a pivotal component of economic development. It empowers individuals with the knowledge and skills to make informed financial decisions, access financial services, and contribute productively to the formal economy. In Arab countries—marked by youthful demographics, uneven access to education, and financial system inefficiencies—financial literacy levels remain low, particularly among the younger population. This deficiency is widely viewed as a constraint on inclusive growth and long-term economic resilience. The aim of this study is to empirically investigate the relationship between financial literacy and economic growth in Arab countries, offering valuable insights into how improving financial capability can contribute to sustainable development within the region. Enhancing financial capability not only strengthens individual financial decision-making but also empowers marginalized groups, promotes financial inclusion, and supports the growth of sustainable and digital financial systems. These outcomes collectively contribute to the success of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while fostering long-term economic resilience and advancing social equity in the region.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study employs a panel data econometric framework to assess the impact of financial literacy on economic growth across selected Arab countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Egypt). As this is ongoing research, the period of analysis will be determined based on the availability and consistency of data. Economic growth is measured by real GDP per capita growth. Financial literacy will be proxied through various indicators such as formal financial access, number of digital payment transactions, number of active accounts. In addition, the inclusion of other variables such as female labor force participation and education attainment. Control variables such as inflation and investment are included to mitigate omitted variable bias. Fixed-effects and random-effects models will be estimated, with robustness checks and diagnostics applied to address potential endogeneity, omitted variable bias, and autocorrelation. The analysis seeks to establish whether statistically significant relationships exist between financial literacy improvements and economic performance in the region.

**Preliminary Findings and Theoretical Expectations:** Although final estimations are in progress, theoretical and empirical literature strongly suggest that financial literacy enhances economic growth by improving household savings behaviour, investment decisions, entrepreneurial success, and credit management. These mechanisms are particularly relevant in the Arab context, where structural challenges such as limited financial access, low public spending on education, and underdeveloped capital markets persist. The study anticipates that stronger financial literacy contributes not only to individual financial wellbeing but also to broader economic dynamism.

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**Novelty/Implication:** This study contributes to the existing literature by employing real-world, measurable proxies of financial literacy, specifically formal financial access, digital payment transactions and the number of active financial accounts rather than relying on traditional literacy survey scores. Furthermore, the study includes female labor participation and education attainment for developing countries which are particularly significant factors in financial development for developing countries where gender inclusion and education access remain critical challenges. By providing a multi-dimensional analysis, the study captures the diverse channels through which financial literacy can influence economic growth. Unlike existing research that typically emphasizes on micro-level outcomes, this study explores the macroeconomic impact, offering new insights into the role of financial inclusion and digital financial behaviour in fostering national economic performance. The findings are expected to offer evidence-based insights for national policymakers, educational institutions, and regional development bodies. It also aligns with the ICFLEW 2025 conference theme, especially in its emphasis on financial literacy, education, and economic empowerment as mutually reinforcing elements of inclusive growth.

**Conclusion:** This ongoing empirical investigation is designed to evaluate the extent to which financial literacy influences economic growth in Arab countries. By doing so, it aims to fill a critical gap in the literature and offer practical recommendations to integrate financial literacy within national development strategies. The final results will enhance policy discourse and inform strategic investments in human capital and financial education across the region.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Economic Growth, Arab Countries, Financial Education, Human Capital, Inclusive Development, Empirical Study.

## **E-Wallet Inclusion Usage on Regional Economic Growth in Indonesia: Traditional Market Penetration**

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**Background:** Indonesia's national financial inclusion index reached 75.02% in 2024, reflecting substantial progress. However, inequalities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas, with rural regions having limited access to financial services. Traditional markets, vital to rural and semi-urban economies, remain underrepresented in financial inclusion. These markets rely on cash-based transactions due to barriers like poor infrastructure, low digital literacy, and skepticism toward formal systems. Recent digital advancements, including e-wallet adoption and the Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard (QRIS), have begun transforming financial behavior, simplifying transactions, and fostering interoperability. The increase in QRIS adoption from 10 million merchants in 2021 to over 32 million by 2024 highlights the growing penetration of digital tools. Institutional support from Bank Indonesia, the Financial Services Authority (OJK), and local governments has facilitated e-wallet usage among micro and small enterprises. However, challenges persist, such as unreliable internet, limited smartphone access, and a lack of financial education in rural areas, which necessitate a holistic, community-based approach to bridge these gaps.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study investigates the role of e-wallet inclusion in promoting regional economic development, specifically focusing on traditional market adoption in Indonesia. It aims to examine how digital financial tools, particularly QRIS-based e-wallets, can bridge economic disparities, formalize informal enterprises, and contribute to inclusive growth. The research also explores the transformation of financial behaviors in rural and semi-urban areas and the challenges that remain in achieving full financial inclusion.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by secondary data analysis to examine the role of e-wallet inclusion in enhancing regional economic growth in Indonesia, with a specific focus on traditional market penetration. The methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital financial tools, particularly QRIS-based e-wallets, contribute to financial inclusion and regional development dynamic. The study relies primarily on secondary data sources obtained from various credible institutions. Key sources include: Bank Indonesia (BI) reports, especially the Statistik Sistem Pembayaran Indonesia (SSPI) for QRIS and e-wallet transaction volumes; OJK (Financial Services Authority) publications on financial literacy and inclusion surveys; Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) and many journals.

**Findings:** This study has examined the transformative potential of e-wallet inclusion within Indonesia's traditional market landscape and its broader implications for regional economic development. Despite significant national achievements in financial inclusion, the findings emphasise that rural and semi-urban communities, where traditional markets are central, remain underserved by formal financial services. The expansion of QRIS and the adoption of e-wallets mark a critical shift in this context, offering tools that can modernise

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transactions, improve financial transparency, and lay the groundwork for formalisation within the informal economy.

**Practical and policy implications:** The findings of this study suggest that increasing e-wallet usage can enhance transaction efficiency, improve local tax revenues, and contribute to regional economic growth. However, challenges such as digital infrastructure gaps and behavioral resistance in rural regions persist. The research proposes a comprehensive policy framework that integrates education, infrastructure development, and fintech innovation to foster inclusive growth. This could support local governments in implementing strategies to expand digital financial inclusion, particularly in underserved areas, and address barriers to adoption among traditional market vendors.

**Originality/value:** This research provides a novel approach to understanding the role of e-wallet adoption in enhancing regional economic development within Indonesia's traditional markets. It combines policy analysis with empirical data to show how digital financial services can transform informal markets, improve financial transparency, and contribute to local economic resilience. The study highlights the importance of institutional support and coordinated public-private partnerships in promoting e-wallet usage and offers actionable recommendations for overcoming the challenges faced by rural and semi-urban areas.

**Keywords:** e-wallet adoption, traditional markets, regional economic growth, financial inclusion.

## **Financial Literacy & Credit Consumption: A Study of Spending Behavior of Generation Z Professionals**

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**Background:** Previous studies (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; OECD, 2020) have shown that financial literacy significantly impacts economic decision-making. However, developing economies often show low levels of financial awareness, especially among youth (Kempson et al., 2013). Generation Z, a digitally native and socially influenced group, is emerging as a key consumer segment for credit products but often lacks the foundational knowledge for responsible financial management. The rise in Buy-Now-Pay-Later (BNPL) trends and social media-driven consumption has exacerbated financial risks for this generation.

**Purpose/Objective:** This study analyzes the spending behavior of Generation Z professionals regarding credit consumption and financial literacy. The main objectives are to understand how they perceive and utilize credit and assess how financial literacy influences their spending behavior. The study is guided by two core questions:

1. How do Generation Z professionals perceive and use credit cards?
2. What role does financial literacy play in shaping their financial decisions?

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research adopts a qualitative approach, using secondary resources like academic journals, books, research papers, and reports. Additionally, the researcher's personal observations and autoethnographic insights from engaging with Generation Z professionals in career counseling sessions enrich the study. These semi-structured interactions provided valuable qualitative insights into financial literacy, credit usage, and spending behavior.

**Research Focus:** The study focuses on four key areas: Trends in Credit Card Usage, Credit Card-Linked Consumer Offers, Product Preferences and Underlying Psychology, and Socio-Cultural Influences on Financial Behavior

### **Findings:**

1. **Low Financial Literacy:** Many Generation Z professionals lacked sufficient financial literacy. They frequently used credit cards for high-value items like mobile phones, bikes, and luxury goods through installment plans.
2. **Cycle of Debt:** Overspending without consideration led many into debt cycles, struggling with repayment and accumulating long-term financial burdens.
3. **No Saving Culture:** A lack of structured savings plans and budgeting tactics was prevalent. Financial decisions were often based on short-term indulgence, leading to financial distress in the future.
4. **Root Causes:** Key factors included a lack of formal education in budgeting, saving, investing, and debt management, insufficient parental guidance, and consumer culture encouraging impulsive spending.
5. **Credit Temptations:** Easy access to credit facilities and aggressive marketing strategies, such as BNPL

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schemes, exacerbated irresponsible spending behavior. Social media-driven consumption also influenced their spending..

**Practical and Policy Implications:** Financial illiteracy can result in debt, poor credit scores, lack of savings, and financial stress. To prevent a debt crisis among youth in developing economies, the study recommends:

- **Financial Education:** Tailored programs for Generation Z to enhance their financial intelligence.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents should teach basic money concepts, budgeting, and price comparison.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Educational institutions should offer programs on credit management, budgeting, saving habits, and debt repayment.
- **Workplace Training:** Employers and financial institutions should organize workshops on responsible spending and savings.
- **Transparent Financial Products:** Banks should promote clear financial products, ensuring young consumers understand their financial obligations before borrowing.

**Originality of the Study:** This study fills a research gap by focusing on credit consumption behavior in developing economies, a topic underexplored in existing literature. The study highlights a strong relationship between financial illiteracy and irresponsible credit consumption among Generation Z professionals. It offers strategies for policymakers, educators, and financial institutions to enhance financial literacy and improve the overall economic well-being of society.

**Keywords:** Financial Literacy, Credit Consumption, Generation Z Professionals, Spending Behavior, Debt Cycle



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