



Inclusive Cashless  
Payment Partnership



# STRENGTHENING THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL FINANCE FOR WOMEN IN BHATTA BASTI



Development experts argue that digital financial services could empower the poor via new technologies that have the potential to provide greater financial inclusion and expansion of basic services.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, for digital financial services to achieve their full impact through this rapidly growing technology, women must be included as well.<sup>2</sup> Data indicate that when it comes to knowledge and usage of technology, women lag behind.

Recognizing the critical role digital payments can play in deepening financial inclusion, CATALYST adopted a holistic approach towards going digital with a focus on bringing low-income individuals, including women, into the digital payments ecosystem. It initiated an experiment to bring poor households of Bhatta Basti – a low-income slum in Jaipur, Rajasthan – into the formal banking system, promoting active bank usage and providing handholding support to early adopters of digital payment solutions.

This paper covers several field stories, underlining the barriers and opportunities to engaging women in adoption of digital payment solutions.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/04/10/digital-finance-empowering-poor-new-technologies>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/02/business/dealbook/melinda-gates-cellphones-for-women-aid-ascent-from-poverty.html>



# Gender disparity in functional debit card and a smartphone ownership

In order to understand account holders' access to functional debit cards (with the PIN generated) and smartphones, we contacted 619 account holders (48 percent were women and 52 percent were men).

- Only 16 percent of women account holders had a functional debit card compared to 27 percent of male account holders; and
- Only 33 percent of women account holders had a smart phone, compared to 56 percent of male account holders.



*Women queuing up at the local bank branch in Bhatta Basti. A qualitative interview with these women helped us understand that even though banks were not considered part of their trusted service providers, bank accounts, loans and debit cards were desired by them.*



## Women, phones and the role of husband

We visited 16 households of women account holders who owned smartphones, had functional debit cards (with the PIN generated) and mobile numbers that were registered with the bank accounts. Our goal was to provide information about Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and other digital payment solutions, and get them onboarded on the UPI platform. These women explicitly agreed in advance to our visits (they were provided an option to opt out at any point).

We learned that it was the men who were usually in charge of women's smartphones and decisions related to financial products and services. For example, despite allotting female field staff to visit these households, women invited their husbands to be present in the meetings, and men took the lead in communicating with our field staff. In all cases, the men insisted that our field staff install and register the UPI app on their phones as well, which we did. We called these women three weeks after our visits; almost all reported that their husbands were actively using the payment solution, not them.

*Heena had recently received a smartphone from her husband as a birthday gift. However, she did not have access to social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube or WhatsApp when we met her. Her mobile number was not registered with her bank account. On being asked, she said was not interested in downloading digital payment applications, unless her husband had no objection to her using them.*



# Engaging men in reaching women

In Bhatta Basti, women generally provided the mobile numbers of their husbands at the time of opening a bank account. Hence, to understand to what extent men control women's access to information and mobility, we conducted an experiment by calling 94 women account holders. The purpose of the call was to invite these women to attend financial literacy sessions that we had organized in Bhatta Basti in partnership with a trusted community organization, Sewa.

- Forty-six calls (48 percent) were received by men. When we enquired about the woman account holder, only 14 men passed on the phone to the woman. The rest insisted that we explain the purpose of the call to them and they would convey the message to their wives:
  - » From this group, 17 women attended the training (37 percent); and
  - » These 17 women reported that their husbands' knowledge about the training made it easier

for them to attend. All reported that their husbands' positive perception of the training influenced them to participate.

- Forty-eight calls (52 percent) were attended by women and we explained the purpose of the call directly to them without engaging the men:
  - » From this group, 12 women (25 percent) attended the training; and
  - » Even these 12 women reported that they had to inform their husbands about the training before attending the sessions.

We then called those who did not attend the training. Almost all men reported that they had informed their wives but there was no evidence if the information had been conveyed or not. Women who answered the calls reported lack of time as the main constraint for not attending the sessions.



Women attending a financial literacy session

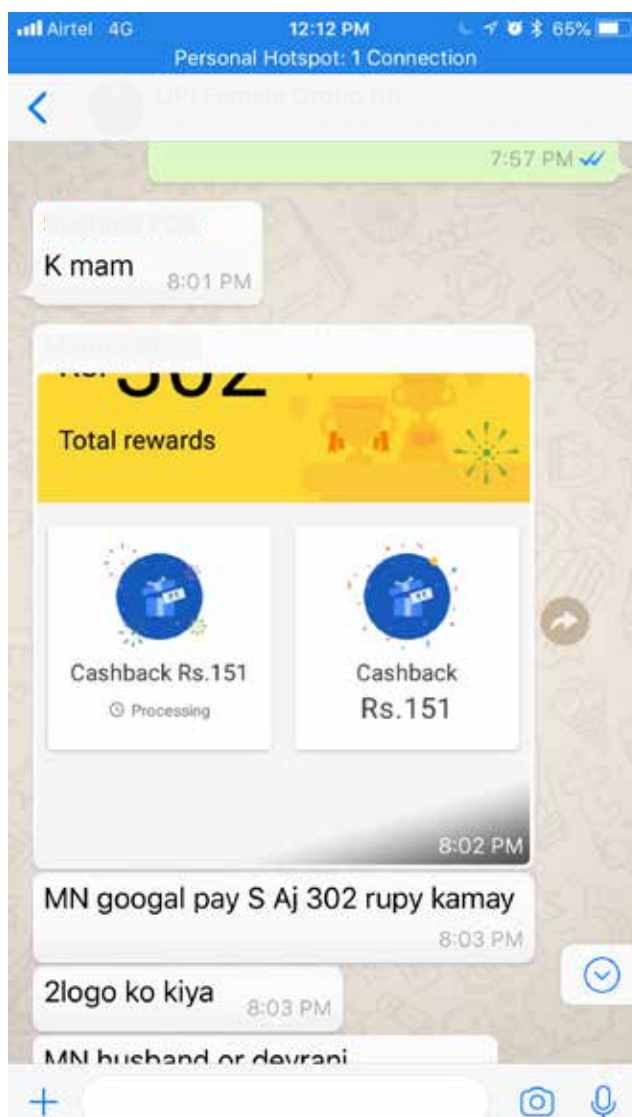
# Engaging women using WhatsApp

We also learned that the best way for women to learn more about technology and gain some independence was through on-device learning; in other words, teaching the women through the phone itself.

After onboarding the six women, we decided to create a WhatsApp group so we could encourage group discussions and send out reminders via the WhatsApp social group to promote conversations on digital payment solutions. The members were active in generating interest and sharing good news with each other. For example, when a woman received her first cash back offer, she shared it with others which encouraged other women to make digital transactions too. It is to be noted that we had created such a WhatsApp group with the men too which was not as active as the women's group.



*Mamta had attended the financial literacy training, where she heard about the benefits of phone-based digital payment solutions, such as the UPI app. She reached out to our female field staff to help her download and register the UPI app. When Mamta made her first transaction, she received a cash back offer of INR 100. A week after onboarding, Mamta reached out to the field staff again. She had formed a group of six women who were willing to adopt the UPI app to take advantage of the cash back offers.*



*A screenshot of a WhatsApp conversation. Mamta is sharing that she transferred money using Google Pay and earned INR 302. She transferred money to two people – her husband and sister-in-law.*



# Profile of women who adopted digital payment solutions in Bhatta Basti



*Mamta revealed, "The biggest benefit of this app is that we have control on recharging our own phone. Since we cannot go to mobile shops to recharge the phone, we had to rely on our husbands. Now with cash back offers, we not only get additional money but we can use this money to recharge our phones using the UPI app. We feel more in control of our phones."*

Like other women in Bhatta Basti, these women also faced certain restrictions on mobility; were running home-based enterprises; and did not have any financial decision-making authority. They owned smartphones which was given to them by their husbands.

While the household income played a key role in the adoption of digital payment solutions, in the women's case, two distinct characteristics – education (college graduates) and relationship with their husbands – influenced their decision to adopt digital payment solutions. Additionally, the ability to recharge their phones on their own, using the UPI platform, was the biggest value proposition for these women to actively adopt digital payments.

# Key learnings

1

If financial providers or organizations plan to engage women, it is important that they engage with men as well and make the messaging on products and services relevant to the entire family, not just the women.

2

The task of getting new women account holders onboarded onto digital payment platforms requires the highest degree of handholding support throughout the process ending with helping an account holder make the first transaction. Nevertheless, providing handholding support to every woman is not possible. Hence, it is important to understand the profile of potential early women adopters who should be targeted for handholding support. While education and income of a woman might be an important metric for segmentation, we learned that any intervention is affected by the household and gender relations. It is, therefore, important to explore intra-household gender dynamics as well. For example, the woman who adopted the UPI app and influenced a few others to join was educated and independent compared to the majority of women in Bhatta Basti. Nonetheless, she would have rejected the use of the UPI app had her husband strongly opposed it.

3

The best way for women to learn more about technology and gain some independence is through the phone itself. However, the penetration of smartphones is still low among women in urban slums. Given that the ownership of smartphones is on the rise in emerging economies, the likelihood of more women owning smartphones is high in the near future. Hence, context-specific financial literacy using technology (the power of media such as WhatsApp groups, mobile and the internet) is a key to promoting the concept of digital payment solutions in a community such as Bhatta Basti. One can create a user-friendly app using pictures and videos while keeping the local context in mind, by including familiar physical locations and using the local language to communicate information so as to provide a value proposition to women for using digital payment solutions.

4

Generalized marketing messages without customization aimed at women customers might not generate sufficient motivation to adopt digital payment solutions as women cannot relate to messages that do not resonate with their day-to-day lifestyle. For example, the ability to recharge their mobile phones on their own (without depending on their husbands) using mobile-based digital payment solutions such as the UPI app might be a powerful message to attract early adopters.





**Technical Writer:** *Deepti Kc*

**Acknowledgements:** *The author would like to thank our female field staffs Sushma and Priya.*

*Views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.*



Inclusive Cashless  
Payment Partnership



[www.facebook.com/CashlessCatalyst](https://www.facebook.com/CashlessCatalyst)



[www.twitter.com/cashlesscatalyst](https://www.twitter.com/cashlesscatalyst)



[www.linkedin.com/company/catalyst-inclusive-cashless-payment-partnership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/catalyst-inclusive-cashless-payment-partnership)

H-5, Second Floor, Green Park Extension, New Delhi - 110016  
011-49096529 | [info@cashlesscatalyst.org](mailto:info@cashlesscatalyst.org) | [www.cashlesscatalyst.org](http://www.cashlesscatalyst.org)

