



FinTech Evolution in Emerging Markets: India's Digital Leap and the Road Ahead

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Abstract

The financial services sector is undergoing a rapid digital transformation, led by the rise of Financial Technology (FinTech). In emerging markets like India, this transformation is not just technological; it is structural, cultural, and deeply inclusive. This chapter explores how FinTech is reshaping the financial landscape in India, bridging gaps in access, redefining consumer behaviour, and revolutionizing traditional banking norms. It highlights the growth trajectory of digital payments, the role of UPI (Unified Payments Interface), the emergence of neobanks and Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) models, and the increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence, blockchain, and automation in everyday finance. With case studies ranging from Indian startups like Paytm and PhonePe to global disruptors like Revolut, the chapter outlines the shift from transactional banking to experience-driven digital finance. The narrative also delves into policy frameworks and regulatory innovations such as RBI's Regulatory Sandbox and Account Aggregator model, enabling experimentation while protecting consumer interest. Challenges around cybersecurity, data privacy, and digital literacy are critically analysed, especially in rural and semi-urban settings. This chapter concludes by identifying key trends that are likely to shape FinTech's next decade, including embedded finance, AI-led personalization, and digital currencies, while calling for collaborative efforts between governments, innovators, and consumers to build a resilient and inclusive financial ecosystem.

Keywords: FinTech, India, UPI, Neobank, BNPL, Blockchain, Financial Inclusion, RBI, Emerging Markets, Digital Transformation.

Introduction

The financial landscape across the globe has undergone a quiet revolution, fueled not just by technology, but by the need for inclusion, innovation, and accessibility. In emerging markets like India, Brazil, and parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, this transformation is more than a trend, it's a necessity. Traditional financial systems have often left out large portions of the population, and it is here that FinTech steps in as both a disruptor and a bridge.

Having worked closely with two global FinTech companies, **Revolut**, a UK-based neobank, and **Line Financial**, a California-based credit-on-demand app, I've seen this transformation unfold both from a boardroom in Europe and a helpdesk connected to rural India. FinTech isn't just about algorithms or apps, it's about **human problems being solved by intelligent systems**.

For a woman sitting in a Tier 2 Indian city with no access to a physical bank, or a gig worker in Kenya who needs to send money home instantly, FinTech is not just innovation, it's empowerment. Mobile-first banking, digital wallets, AI-led credit scoring, UPI infrastructure in India, and blockchain-based microloans have all played a role in reshaping how money is sent, saved, spent, and secured.

In this chapter, I aim to explore not just the trends, but the **heart of FinTech in emerging markets**. Drawing from personal experiences, real customer stories, and global data, we'll look at how FinTech is solving local problems with global tools, and why the next chapter of finance will be written in code, but spoken in emotion.

What is FinTech? (A Human Definition)

FinTech, short for *Financial Technology*, often sounds like a buzzword, but it's really about making money matters simpler, faster, and fairer for real people. It's about breaking down the traditional walls of banking and finance, and building a bridge using smartphones, data, and empathy.

For me, FinTech became real when I saw a customer at **Line Financial** in the U.S. thanking us for a ₹5000 (USD \$60) instant line of credit, because it meant they could buy groceries without overdrawing their bank account. Or when a student using **Revolut** in the UK said he could finally track his weekly spending without needing to decode complicated bank statements.

At its heart, FinTech is **a problem solver**. It helps:

- A vegetable vendor in Indore accepts UPI payments without a card machine.
- A freelancer in Nairobi sends money home instantly with zero remittance fees.
- A first-time investor in Vietnam starts SIPs (Systematic Investment Plans) with just ₹100.

In human words, FinTech is *access*. It's *trust rebuilt*. It's the power of money being placed into the hands of those who were never given a seat at the table.

It's not just financial evolution. It's financial *inclusion with dignity*.

FinTech in Emerging Markets, Trends and Examples

Emerging markets like India, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Brazil are places where financial dreams often remain locked behind bureaucracy, lack of access, or simply outdated systems. But FinTech is becoming the key.

In India, UPI (Unified Payments Interface) is more than a buzzword; it's a revolution. From my time working in **customer experience at Line Financial and Revolut**, I witnessed how people from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities embraced digital banking not out of luxury, but out of *need*.

Here are some emotional, real trends I've personally observed:

- **Micro-credit and BNPL (Buy Now Pay Later):** A cab driver in Pune once told me how he could pay for his daughter's school books using BNPL on a FinTech app, without touching his savings.
- **Women Empowerment through Digital Wallets:** In Rajasthan, women artisans now sell their products online and receive direct payments, no middleman, no hidden cuts.
- **Cross-border remittances:** An immigrant mother in the U.S. sent \$100 home with a single tap, and no agent took 10% in between.

These are not just "users," they're stories. Each transaction is a heartbeat. Each feature we designed carried emotion, dignity, and trust.

And the beauty is, in emerging markets, people *leapfrog*. They never had credit cards, so they jumped straight to QR codes. They didn't wait for banking reforms; they downloaded an app and created their economy.

- FinTech here isn't a luxury.
- It's survival.
- It's empowerment.
- It's the future and it's already here.

The Indian FinTech Ecosystem, Growth, Infrastructure & Innovation

India's FinTech journey has been nothing short of revolutionary. What started as a digitally underpenetrated economy is now one of the world's fastest-growing FinTech hubs. At the heart of this transformation lies a potent mix of digital infrastructure, policy support, and a consumer base that leapfrogged straight from cash to mobile payments.

A defining feature of India's FinTech rise is the **India Stack**, a set of APIs that includes Aadhaar (identity), UPI (payments), eKYC, DigiLocker, and more. This public digital infrastructure has enabled financial inclusion at scale, bringing millions into the formal financial system.

I remember being at Revolut and hearing the buzz around UPI, how a real-time payment system in India was processing billions of transactions monthly, with no transaction fee. It wasn't just innovation; it was inspiration. The world was watching India, and I felt proud, even as an insider of a global FinTech company, to see how a developing country had redefined financial access.

Apps like **Paytm**, **PhonePe**, **Google Pay**, and **BharatPe** became household names. For example, Paytm started as a mobile recharge app but swiftly evolved into a full-stack financial services provider. Similarly, PhonePe's user-first approach and vernacular UX helped it reach deeper into Tier II and III cities, areas where traditional banking had little reach.

Meanwhile, **Line Financial**, where I later worked, focused on building credit infrastructure for people underserved by formal finance. I could see firsthand the challenges, limited credit histories, lack of formal documentation, and mistrust of financial institutions. But I also saw the impact of micro-lending, AI-based risk assessment, and flexible repayments, real people getting access to money when they needed it most, without shame or struggle.

India's FinTech isn't just growing. It's growing differently, driven by **necessity**, **scale**, and a sense of **purpose**.

Opportunities & Challenges for FinTech in Emerging Markets

FinTech offers a beacon of hope for emerging markets, not just as a means of financial inclusion, but as a catalyst for economic empowerment. When done right, it bridges the gap between formal finance and the underbanked, brings women into the financial fold, helps small businesses scale, and fuels local innovation.

Opportunities

- **Financial Inclusion:** In countries like India, Brazil, Nigeria, and Indonesia, millions still lack access to basic banking. FinTech steps in where banks hesitate, offering mobile wallets, instant credit, savings, and even insurance with minimal documentation. UPI, M-Pesa, and bKash are glowing examples.
- **Youth-Driven Markets:** With over 60% of the population under 35 in many emerging economies, digital-first solutions resonate. I remember how Line Financial's personalized microcredit products gained traction with gig workers and students; they wanted fast, flexible solutions, not paperwork and long queues.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure:** India's success with the India Stack shows how government-backed digital frameworks can supercharge FinTech innovation. Countries like Kenya (with Huduma Namba) and Bangladesh are replicating similar models, signaling a global shift.

- **Cross-Border Innovation:** Emerging markets are learning from each other. I was part of discussions where Brazilian open banking policies were being studied to build API-driven transparency in Asia. FinTech is no longer West-led; it's becoming truly global.

Case Studies

- **Brazil – Women Entrepreneurs & Conversational AI:** Conversational-AI tools helped women micro-entrepreneurs navigate credit applications, improving transparency and trust despite informal work environments.
- **Kenya – Mobile Money & Financial Inclusion:** Kenya's celebrated M-Pesa platform enabled millions to access savings, remittances, and micro-loans without traditional banking, a model other emerging markets can replicate.
- **Bangladesh – Rural Digital Finance:** Mobile wallets and agent banking have brought micro-savings and digital remittances to rural women, boosted by literacy programs and simplified user interfaces.

Challenges

- **Regulatory Ambiguity:** Many emerging markets still lack clear FinTech regulations. This creates uncertainty for startups. I've witnessed how founders at Line Financial had to constantly realign compliance due to evolving norms.
- **Cybersecurity & Trust:** With digital finance comes the risk of fraud and misuse. Convincing a first-time user to trust an app with their salary or savings isn't easy. Local language support, human-like UX, and strong grievance redressal become vital.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** Smartphones may be widespread, but digital literacy lags. Many users don't understand credit scores, EMIs, or phishing risks. At Revolut, we built entire modules just to educate new users in low-trust regions.
- **Funding Gaps:** Unlike developed markets, VCs are still hesitant to invest heavily in local FinTechs in Africa or Southeast Asia. The result? Many startups build great products but struggle to scale.
- **Market Concentration:** India's UPI ecosystem remains dominated by a few large apps (PhonePe, Google Pay). Regulatory caps to curb concentration are under discussion but implementation delays sustain competitive imbalance.

Key Growth Drivers in FinTech

As FinTech continues to mature across emerging markets, several powerful forces are shaping its future. These aren't just trends, they're tectonic shifts that redefine what finance looks like in daily life.

Blockchain and Cryptocurrency

Blockchain is no longer a niche buzzword; it's the backbone of a new, decentralized financial reality. Cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum offer peer-to-peer, trustless transactions with reduced costs and no middlemen. In emerging economies with unstable currencies or limited banking access, crypto has become a grassroots alternative.

For instance, in Nigeria, citizens use crypto to hedge against inflation and access global commerce. Meanwhile, startups are experimenting with blockchain for remittances, smart contracts, and even government-backed digital currencies (CBDCs).

This isn't just about money, it's about trust, transparency, and access.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

I touched on AI earlier, but its role is too significant to leave underdeveloped. In FinTech, AI goes beyond chatbots; it powers real-time fraud detection, alternative credit scoring, automated customer support, and hyper-personalized financial guidance.

At **Revolut**, we used AI to categorize transactions and alert users instantly on anomalies, preventing fraud before it could take root. At **Line Financial**, machine learning models assessed gig worker income patterns to extend microloans where banks saw only risk.

AI, when ethically implemented, doesn't just automate, it includes, predicts, and protects.

Financial Inclusion & Digital Financial Services

This is the heart of FinTech's mission, especially in emerging markets. Millions now access banking through their mobile phones, bypassing the physical and bureaucratic hurdles of legacy systems.

I've seen women in Rajasthan selling crafts and receiving UPI payments, and auto-drivers in Chennai saving via digital gold apps. FinTech is no longer urban-centric; it's reaching the heartlands.

At **Line Financial**, regional language onboarding, micro-credit options, and simple repayment terms empowered users in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. True financial inclusion doesn't stop at access; it empowers informed financial behavior.

Together, these growth drivers are not just reshaping how finance works; they're redefining whom finance works for.

Future Trends in FinTech: Human-Tech Synergy, AI, and Ethics

The future of FinTech in emerging markets isn't just about technology, it's about creating human-centric ecosystems that understand real people, real problems,

and real dreams. Over the period 2024-25, India has witnessed explosive growth in digital payments and AI adoption.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) now accounts for over 83.7 % of all digital payment transactions by volume in FY 2024-25, rising from about 79.7 % the previous year.

In FY 2023-24 alone, UPI facilitated 185.8 billion transactions valued at ₹261 lakh crore, demonstrating both consumer trust and unprecedented scale. Overall digital payments in India have grown at an annual CAGR of roughly 50-51 %, with UPI as the key driver.

On the AI front, a recent NITI Aayog report estimates that faster adoption of artificial intelligence across sectors could add US \$500-600 billion to India's GDP by 2035.

By mid-2025, over 90 % of Indian employees were using generative-AI tools in some capacity well above global averages.

The Reserve Bank of India has also proposed a regulatory framework (FREEAI) to ensure responsible, ethical use of AI in financial services.

These indicators suggest that FinTech is moving toward deeper integration of AI, real-time payments, and digital public infrastructure.

Offline payment modes, UPI Lite, P2M growth in low-value transactions, and stronger onboarding in rural and semi-urban areas will likely define the next growth wave.

Human-Tech Synergy

FinTech will only succeed when it stops feeling like “tech” and starts feeling like “trust.” The most successful innovations ahead will blend machine precision with human empathy.

At Revolut, we learned that even the most advanced features, like AI-driven budgeting, only worked when presented in a friendly, conversational way. Users responded more to “Hey Priyanka, here’s where your money went last week ” than cold charts and graphs.

The takeaway? Tech needs to *feel* like it’s on your side.

Artificial Intelligence & Personalization

AI is redefining how financial services operate, from fraud detection to lending decisions. In emerging markets, where traditional credit histories often don’t exist, AI helps evaluate alternative data (like mobile usage or social behavior) to make credit more inclusive.

I recall a time at Line Financial when a single mother was denied a loan by traditional banks, but our AI model, trained on non-traditional parameters, approved

her micro-loan, which she repaid in full. That moment proved that AI, when ethical and inclusive, changes lives.

But with great power comes great responsibility...

Ethical Considerations

- **Bias & Fairness:** Algorithms can inherit societal biases. If not checked, AI may replicate exclusion instead of eliminating it. We need transparency in decision-making, especially when money is involved.
- **Privacy & Consent:** People must know how their data is being used. Consent can't be buried in legal jargon, especially in communities with low digital literacy.
- **Accessibility:** True FinTech must work in local languages, offline modes, and low-end devices. Otherwise, it widens the digital divide it seeks to close.

FinTech is not just a revolution of banking, it's a reflection of how we *care* in the digital age. When designed with purpose, it has the power to uplift, include, and inspire.

Conclusion & Way Forward

The FinTech journey in emerging markets is not just a story of apps, wallets, or UPI IDs; it's a story of hope, resilience, and transformation. It's the story of a farmer who now gets his subsidy directly into his Jan Dhan account... a house help who confidently saves money through a digital gold platform... a girl from a tier-3 town who tracks her expenses using a finance app in her regional language.

This isn't fiction, this is the *pulse* of Bharat.

From my time working at Revolut and Line Financial, I've seen firsthand how technology, when thoughtfully built, doesn't replace humans. It empowers them.

But the work is far from over.

The Way Forward: A Shared Responsibility

- **For Innovators:** Build not just for the privileged, but for the next billion users. Think in vernaculars. Design for emotion. Build for trust.
- **For Policymakers:** Support startups. Regulate with empathy. Protect user rights without slowing innovation.
- **For Users:** Stay informed. Ask questions. Know that your financial data has power, use it wisely.
- **For Educators & Institutions:** Include FinTech literacy in academic curriculum, especially in commerce and management fields. Financial empowerment begins with awareness.

As I close this chapter, I don't see FinTech as an industry. I see it as a movement, one that demands empathy as much as efficiency, heart as much as code.

And in this movement, we all have a role to play.

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