The mobile finance report 2020
A global benchmark of banking, payment and investment apps
The world of finance has undoubtedly been disrupted by mobile, with fintech companies offering innovative digital services, including in-store mobile payment platforms and non-bank money transfers. EY’s Global FinTech Adoption Index 2019\(^1\) suggests that internet users’ adoption of financial technology services almost doubled over the past two years, and 64% of digitally active users engage with fintech.

In this report with app intelligence provider Apptopia, we focus on the growth of install and session rates for fintech apps over the first half of 2020, how much time users are spending in-app, and how retention rates perform in this vertical. We’ve selected a geographic spread of apps that paint a picture of finance apps’ health in 2020. Diving into data from Brazil, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States, we’ve outlined regional trends and broader tendencies.

"The impact the pandemic has had on banking and the increase in mobile digital services should not be underestimated. While the banking sector has been adapting to digital disruption for several years, COVID-19 is accelerating the transformation, opening up access and opportunity to millions of un- and under-banked consumers around the world."

Paul H. Müller
Co-founder and CTO of Adjust

\(^1\) https://www.ey.com/en_gl/ey-global-fintech-adoption-index
We also take a look at the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on user behaviors patterns and the industry as a whole.

Our key findings include:

• Activity in investment apps, which allow users to trade stocks directly from their phone, is booming — with an 88% growth in average sessions per day from January to June 2020. Globally, investment apps are the second-fastest-growing vertical tracked by Adjust in 2020, with Apptopia’s data also showing massive growth across the board.

• Emerging markets are driving global growth. With low market saturation of existing solutions, a pool of unbanked users, and demographic factors offering a prime growth opportunity, emerging markets are once again posting massive numbers across all the indicators measured. In these markets, fintech is less seen as disruptors, but rather filling a need that many traditional banks did not supply.

• The number of sessions in payment apps increased by almost half (49% on average across the countries in our survey). The most impressive growth rates were seen in: Japan (75%), Germany (45%), Turkey (39%), the US (33%), and Great Britain (29%). Users are increasingly using mobile to carry out transactions while complying with social distancing.

• Sessions for banking and payment apps combined increased 26% on average across the countries in our survey. While all countries saw an uptick in sessions, stand-out markets by growth rates were Japan (142%), Germany (40%), Turkey (31%), and the US (27%).

• Super-apps remain one of the top trends in mobile. Asia gave rise to the super-app via big names such as WeChat and KakaoTalk, but other regions are catching on, with Revolut — for example — pursuing a ‘super-app’ strategy. A report by KPMG suggests that super-apps could be one of the most disruptive forces in the financial sector. With WeChat and Alipay having exceeded one billion users, and Zalo surpassing the 100 million mark, this forecast looks like a safe bet.

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The pandemic has proven to be a catalyst for the acceleration of mobile app usage, and nowhere is that more visible than in the finance vertical. Adjust data shows that, when comparing 2019 to 2020, global sessions for banking and payment apps combined increased by an average of 26% in 2020. While all countries grew, specific key markets stood out: Japan grew at the rapid rate of 142%, Germany saw a 40% uptake, Turkey increased by 31%, and the US climbed by 27%.
This increase coincides with a Business Insider study, which found that more than half of credit unions surveyed saw an increase in mobile wallet adoption (56%) and transactions (53%). With PayPal, Samsung Pay, Apple Pay, AliPay, PayPay and WeChat having all adapted to processing mobile payments and transactions, this upward trend is predicted to continue. E-commerce is the main vertical driving the mobile payments market, and according to research organization Ecommerce Foundation, more than 25% of consumers make weekly purchases from mobile devices.

Sessions in the US increased by 27% in H1 2020, and Forbes predicts that mobile payments will rise to $138 billion USD in 2020. In addition to the boost by e-commerce, factors influencing this trend include consumer acceptance, the increasing investment in tech infrastructure by big banks, and the growing consumer relevance of digital natives.

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5 https://www.businessinsider.com/mobile-banking-market-trends
Banking from home? Considerable uptake among banking apps

Did lockdowns across the world lead to more banking from home? There was a surge in sessions across the banking app market, with some countries posting huge increases. The overall increase in sessions for banking apps in H1 2020, compared with the same period in 2019, comes in at 26%, according to Adjust data. The countries showing the most significant growth in this category are Japan and Turkey, with total sessions 133% and 119% higher than 2019, respectively. Japan is seeing a huge shift in uptake in mobile banking, with Liftoff revealing to Forbes that time spent in finance apps is up in Japan and South Korea by 85% from December 2019 to March 2020.

In the US, a study by Finder provided further insight into this overall increase, revealing that 60% of millennials, 54% of Gen X and 56% of baby boomers either already use or plan to use only digital banking. The key reason cited was convenience, with the second most popular reason being that neobanks categorically offer lower fees and easier transfers.

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9 https://www.finder.com/neobank-adoption
"Understanding customer needs and supporting them based on these needs is always our top priority. The impact that COVID-19 has had should also not be underestimated, as branches have closed and social distancing rules have come into place. We’ve seen an increase not only in downloads, but that our users are actually spending more time in the app. We see this largely as a result of adoption - more and more people are banking, and making transactions and payments digitally. We’re happy to be there when our customers need us the most. This results in an increase in mobile penetration for selected products and services during COVID-19."

Tolga Kuzdere, Senior Performance Marketing Manager

The impact that COVID-19 has had on banking and the increase in online and mobile banking use should not be underestimated. While sessions for banking apps increased by 26% when comparing H1 2019 to H1 2020, from May onwards the increase was closer to 59%. According to mobile software company Icarvision, there are numerous factors influencing this uptake, including consumers concerned about going to the bank (82%) and more inclined to try an app (63%). COVID-19 certainly wasn’t the catalyst for digital adoption and innovation in the finance sector, but it is proving to accelerate disruption.

Payment apps are on the money

Payment apps are the real growth rockstars in the financial vertical this year. Payment apps include PayPal One Touch, Apple Pay, Venmo, Zelle, Square Cash, Google Pay, PayPay, Rakuten Pay and super-apps like WeChat, AliPay, Grab, Kakao, and LINE. To make payments, customers simply need to download the given app, add card details, and scan or wave their phone across readers. This is made possible with near-field communication (NFC).

COVID AND PAYMENT

Data from BuyShares.co.uk\textsuperscript{11} revealed that mobile payments would increase up to 50% amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Deutsche Welle\textsuperscript{12} reported that in Germany, where cash has traditionally remained king, 41% more people are making cashless payments than they were before the pandemic.

Adjust data shows that when comparing the first half of 2019 with the first half of 2020, the number of sessions in payment apps increased by 49%. The most impressive growth rates were seen in Japan at 75%, in Germany at 45%, and in Turkey at 39%. Great Britain sessions increased by 29%, and numbers in the US climbed 33%.


Global Sessions Payment Apps H1 2019 & H1 2020

Germany Sessions Payment Apps H1 2019 & H1 2020

Japan Sessions Payment Apps H1 2019 & H1 2020
Loans and credit go mobile

Recently the number of users opting to take out ‘fintech loans’ via lending-apps or neobanks offering loan services has surged. According to Business Matters13, a growth rate of 9.1% is expected for fintech lending in 2020, with the market predicted to reach $291.4 billion in transaction value this year, and $396.8 billion by 2024.

One such business is Credit Sesame, a credit and loan company that gives its members free access to credit score monitoring, credit reports, and identity protection tools. Personalized recommendations for home loans, student loans, and credit cards are also provided with the goal of helping its members improve their credit.

Credit Sesame recently launched a new content platform offering “a one-stop resource for consumers’ entire financial journey to help them minimize the impact of Covid-19 while steering them on a path to financial stability and recovery as soon as possible”, said Adrian Nazari, CEO and Founder of Credit Sesame. He says it’s “the combination of personal finance advice with content that supports our members through this challenging time [that] drives connection and builds trust.”

13 https://www.bmmagazine.co.uk/in-business/fintech-lending-industry-to-hit-291bn-in-2020/
After a blockbuster year for new app launches in 2019, Apptopia data reveals that the number of online banking and payment apps launched in the first half of 2020 was down from previous years. Globally, new finance apps added in the Google Play Store and the App Store combined dropped by 18%. However, in the wider app economy, the number of apps launched in 2020 is significantly lower, with Apptopia data showing that the first half of 2020 saw a drop of 71% in apps launched compared with the same period last year. In this context, it looks like the finance vertical is weathering the current situation better than many other verticals. The US launched the highest number of new finance apps in 2020, and is the only country to see a year-on-year increase of 10% between 2019 and 2020.

The music has slowed down, but the party continues – the state of banking and online payment apps
Mobile payments are set to dominate globally

A recent report by eMarketer shows that mobile payments will reach new heights in 2020, with more than 1 billion people worldwide predicted to make a mobile payment. Apple Pay, Google Pay and Samsung Pay are the top providers globally, while Alipay and WeChat dominate in China; Paytm leads in India; and Rakuten Pay, PayPay and LINE Pay are big in Japan. Mobile Pay, Vipps and Swish are demonstrating strong adoption rates in the Nordics, and Mercado Pago is making inroads in LATAM.

While the overall number of new apps added has decreased, growth in the Finance sector has been significant. The very high number of apps launched in 2019 has been followed by an uptick in usage in 2020, suggesting that while there are fewer new entrants into the market, those already there are thriving and growing.

https://www.emarketer.com/content/global-mobile-payment-users-2019
Installs show areas with growth opportunities

Users turn to mobile payment

Apptopia tracked installs of the top payment apps across a geographic spread, comparing installs per app in H1 2019 to H1 2020. These findings show the regional differences in how much payment apps grew (or didn’t) across the past 12 months.

Japan saw massive growth in payment apps in the first half of 2020, a trend that was repeated — though not to the same extent — across Brazil, Great Britain, Argentina and the US. Russia and Ukraine were the only regions to see a reduction in the number of new installs over the period.
Although known as an enthusiastic early adopter of technology, Japan has had a comparatively low adoption rate for payment apps\(^\text{15}\). A big change in consumption patterns in Japan coincided with the introduction of the Japanese government’s cashless payment reward system, which was implemented after October 2019. As part of the changes, consumers can get a rebate of up to five percent when they purchase from small and medium enterprises (SMEs)\(^\text{16}\). Introduced to offset an increase in the consumption tax to 10%, this economic incentive has been a huge benefit to Japanese firms like PayPay or LINE Pay. This scheme ended in June 2020, but Japan now seems to be moving toward the international norm of mobile finance uptake for advanced economies — meaning there is plenty of scope for the right app in the right niche.

In Russia, the decrease in payment app growth could be linked to the widespread adoption of the Faster Payments System (FPS) launched by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and supported by all the major Russian banks\(^\text{17}\). The success of this system, which allows customers to pay for goods, receive government benefits, or send transfers via QR codes or other instant tools, has led to consolidation among the established finance companies, many of whom are not offering app solutions.

The spread of results across geographic regions highlights the tricky territory that payment apps have had to overcome in 2020. While consumption patterns have slowed due to the pandemic and lockdowns, users are increasingly turning to mobile solutions for contactless delivery or other social distancing requirements\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{16}\) https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/07/business/million-businesses-join-tax-refund/
\(^{17}\) https://ctmfile.com/story/twelve-russian-banks-pilot-faster-payments-system

“Currently, Japan is promoting a cashless society nationwide, and there has been a significant increase in the last 12 months. In the future, cashless payments will be attracting more attention from the viewpoint of virus infection prevention in addition to the conventional merits. The Rakuten Group would like to contribute by providing a full lineup of services such as credit cards, debit cards, electronic money, QR codes / barcodes payment, and point cards.”

R Pay
Yusaku Matsuda,
Deputy General Manager
Banking on the unbanked – emerging markets are a boost for banking

Japan again leads the pack for banking app downloads among countries analyzed in this report, but it is also more of an outlier. The other advanced economies are seeing falling install numbers over the past 12 months. This may be partly due to market saturation, with mobile users in Great Britain particularly showing strong installs in the period from 2017-2019, or COVID-related factors that may make people think twice before switching banks during lockdown, but other factors cannot be ruled out.

It is in emerging markets where banking is showing real gains. Turkey, Ukraine and Brazil all demonstrated strong growth for banking firms.

Banking app install growth H1 2019 to H1 2020
Investing apps are a bull market

The standout performer among finance apps are investing apps, with Apptopia’s data showing massive growth in installs across the board.

Investment app install growth H1 2019 to H1 2020

The investment subvertical has been abuzz in 2020 and, according to the Wall Street Journal, investors on trading platform E*Trade opened roughly 260,500 retail accounts in March alone — more than any full year on record. Reports of a boom in investment app activity is supported by Adjust data, which registered a 88.14% growth in average sessions per day from January to June.

19 https://www.wsj.com/articles/everyones-a-day-trader-now-11595649609
In fact, investment apps are the second-fastest-growing vertical tracked by Adjust in 2020, beating out other hot verticals, such as casual and hyper-casual games.

Jeff Myers of US-based investment app Gatsby explains that “the options markets are exploding right now, especially among younger investors. More than half of Gen Z and millennial investors say they’re trading derivatives more frequently since the pandemic, according to a recent E*Trade study. It’s been critical for us to have a robust attribution system as we entered this fast-growing market, to be able to nimbly hone our marketing strategies. We’re taking on five times the new funded accounts per day than we did this time last year, which gives a sense of the booming interest in trading.”

Session investment apps 2020

#:::text=More%20than%20half%20of%20Gen%20by%20E*Trade%20Financial%20Corp.
User Behavior

Beyond the macro trends, behavior by users who are already in an app has shifted over the past 12 months. Some of this may be COVID-19 related, but for some behaviors it is a sign of how the finance industry is evolving on mobile.
Paying for acquisition doesn’t necessarily lead to loyal users

Payment apps

Android users, both paid and organic, are more active payment app users 30 days after install, registering slightly more sessions per user than users with Apple devices. On iOS, organic and paid users register an identical amount of sessions 30 days after install, whereas paid users are slightly more active on Android.

Banking apps

For banking apps, paid users on any device are more active than organic users, with Apple users slightly more likely to register a number of sessions 30 days after install. This trend repeats itself among organic users, with Apple users slightly more active than Android users after a month of use.

Investment apps

Would-be investors on mobile devices are highly active after 30 days, with the average user across all channels and sources registering around 3 sessions a day, a full session more — on average — than users in other finance sub-verticals. Among these users, iOS users acquired in paid campaigns are the most active, but interestingly, Android users acquired the same way are less active than organic users on either operating system.

Across all finance sub-verticals analyzed, users are highly active even 30 days after install, meaning there are plenty of opportunities to retarget or re-engage users who are showing signs of lapse — either by campaigns showcasing features or offers, or encouraging deeper user interaction with the app.
Time spent in-app is up

Not only have sessions and installs for apps in the finance vertical increased significantly in 2020, but the amount of time that users are spending in those apps is also on the rise. In the first half of 2019, users were spending an average of 7.7 minutes per session in-app, but by 2020 that rose to 8.35 minutes — an increase of 8.9%.

Forbes reports that overall growth of fintech apps Europe in 2020 is at 72%, and that COVID-19 has been the driving factor. Adjust data confirms that the most significant growth for time spent in apps in the fintech sector occurred in Q2 of 2020, as lockdowns began worldwide — but also suggests that growth was already trending here.

Time spent in app per user

The increase in time spent in-app correlates with recent findings in a DepositAccounts survey, which found that 91% of Americans banked virtually in August 2020. The survey also revealed that just over four in 10 consumers are using their bank’s mobile app more than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic. Gen X showed the most significant growth, with 57% now using their bank’s mobile app more often.

According to the same survey, more than half of Americans (52%) are visiting their bank’s branches less amid the pandemic, and 49% of respondents said that they would gladly never visit their bank’s branch again.

Adjust data shows that the country spending the most time in-app in 2020 is Russia, with users averaging 11.5 minutes per session in banking and payment apps. The average in Argentina is also significantly higher than the global average of 8.35 minutes at 11.3 minutes. Ukraine and Turkey are also high, at 10.6 minutes and 10 minutes respectively.

High time spent in-app tends to correlate with countries that have a relatively higher proportion of unbanked people, with figures from the World Bank finding that processes to digitize government payments have led to a surge in digital banking users in Russia and Ukraine23. 25% of all bank account owners in Argentina, the Russian Federation, and Turkey opened a bank account for the first time to receive digital payments24.

Countries with a more established legacy banking industry correlate with users spending less time in-app — likely because they still carry out more banking functions via desktop or in their local branch. Apps targeting unbanked users tend to offer a more educational approach to banking, which may mean users are in-app longer. For instance, Vicky Saputra, CEO of Indonesian FinTech Netzme, says “financial inclusion and financial literacy is quite a big issue [in Indonesia], especially for people in small cities and rural areas.”

To combat this, the company uses a social approach, where users have access to all their banking needs — such as a scan-to-pay function and their transaction history — while also building networks, posting stories, and using hashtags to view and create trending topics. The app also has a discovery feed, group chats and entrepreneurial tools.

Argentina grew the most in terms of time spent in-app, when comparing 2019 to 2020, increasing by 72%, then Russia which increased by approximately 50%. Japan saw a 21% jump.
Payment app users – here today, gone tomorrow

30 day user retention rate

Banking app customers are slightly more likely than users of apps in our reference verticals (news, music or shopping) to churn in the first few days; however, this difference is short-lived, and by Day 10 users of banking apps churn about as regularly as users in other verticals. Payment app users, on the other hand, are incredibly fickle, churning quickly and remaining below the mean in terms of retention for the first 30 days.

That banking users are relatively loyal is in keeping with the trends in wider society of customers usually sticking with their bank. In fact, 2019 marked the lowest-ever level of bank switching in the US, with the J.D. Power US Retail Banking Satisfaction Study finding just 4% of customers switched banks.

However, users of payment apps seem to be much more willing to churn, suggesting that they use the app to solve individual problems and require some persuasion to stay – or simply make payments via app infrequently.

Benchmarks

While many marketers hit the brakes once lockdowns were introduced in March 2020, for many apps the lockdown provided an opportunity to acquire more users for the same budget. This led to some interesting market dynamics.
Coinciding with the onset of the economic and social changes wrought by COVID-19, banking and payment apps saw a precipitous drop in acquisition costs. Starting in February, Effective Costs Per Install (eCPIs) dropped 77.49% before hitting a bottom in May. However, even with a slight rally, banking apps are still able to acquire users at a fraction of the price they were at the start of the year.

While the payment app slide began immediately after the holiday period in January, it saw a 56.31% drop from March to April alone, as COVID-19 took hold across the world.

Nevertheless, with other key indicators still growing, low eCPIs provide an opportunity for the savvy user acquisition manager.
Conclusion

Even in the face of uncertainty and strong economic headwinds around the globe, the mobile finance industry is showing strong resilience and bumper growth in 2020. Based on the data we have gathered in this report, we want to highlight the following tips for app marketers.
Less friction, less churn

Once the user has downloaded your app, the next challenge is keeping them there. Our data suggests that finance app users are a fickle bunch. Prevent churn by making users’ journeys as simple and easy as possible. Friction has always been seen as just a part of the traditional banking experience. But where neobanks like N26 have really disrupted the market is by making their offering as seamless as possible — something all banking and payment apps can learn from. It’s important to start at the beginning. Often users can churn when presented with sign-up forms or asked to disclose too much unnecessary personal information. When asking for these details, always explain why it is necessary and how it will be used. This is a smart way to ensure users are comfortable with the information they are submitting to you and also allows you to show your brand’s transparent approach.

Invest in UA

With eCPI levels low, now is a great time to ensure you’ve got a good marketing mix. While organic performs extremely well in the mobile finance vertical, performance marketing is an important part of a winning user acquisition strategy — especially for iOS users, who are more loyal than average in both payment and investment apps. In fact, Apple users are some of the best performing investment app users across the board. By keeping your budget steady, you can acquire more users for the same outlay at lower eCPIs. Our data suggests that there is plenty of growth potential in the finance industry, and paid acquisition is an essential part of getting those users into your app.

Be open to your customers

A key differentiator for apps in the finance industry is customer feedback. With traditional banks closing branches across the developed world, coupled with a reputation for difficult customer service, apps in the banking sector have found a lot of success by paying attention to what their customers are saying. In fact, poor customer service is cited by consumers as a top reason they change banks. Fintech firms like Monzo have pioneered different approaches to ensure customer satisfaction, including a community forum where users can submit suggestions.
Adjust is a global app marketing analytics platform committed to ensuring the highest privacy and performance standards. Adjust’s solutions include attribution and measurement, fraud prevention, cybersecurity, as well as automation tools. The company’s mission is to make mobile marketing simpler, smarter and more secure for the more than 50,000 apps working with Adjust.

Want to learn how we can help you? Contact us now to find out how we can fit your specific use case.

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Apptopia provides competitive intelligence for the mobile app economy. Data points include downloads, active users, revenue, store rank, audience intelligence, reviews analysis, and SDK intelligence. Apptopia was founded on the belief that the mobile app community requires transparency to level the playing field and make way for innovation and industry advancements. Mobile publishers and developers, service providers, and investors use Apptopia on a daily basis to understand and monitor competitors, inform business strategies, and identify emerging consumer interests and trends.

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