

## From Payment Tools to Platforms: A Qualitative Exploration of Post-Adoption Digital Wallet Behavior in India

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### **Abstract**

The digital wallets and digital payments in India have transformed to be more than just a payment platform to a multifunction digital platform that provides payment, bill services, rewards, and other financial options. Although most of the studies that have been carried out are mostly on adoption intention, there is a lack of research on post-adoption user experiences. The study examines the perceptions and use of wallets among the users of digital wallets after the first adoption. Semi-structured interviews, in which 28 active users of services like Google Pay, PhonePe, Paytm, and so on were interviewed via an exploratory qualitative approach, were used. Thematic analysis indicates an increase in usage to multi service involvement and ecosystem integration. Respondents are becoming more convinced that digital wallets are part of their lives, and they are also built-in financial interfaces. Habitual use, accrued value and convenience are the motivators of sustained engagement as opposed to short term incentives. The results change the perspective towards adoption to post adoption platformization, which points at the transformation of digital wallets to embedded digital platforms in the Indian setting.

**Keywords:** Digital wallets, Post-adoption behavior, Platform ecosystem, Digital payments, User engagement

### **Introduction**

The digital wallet has already become a core element of the digital financial ecosystem, especially in developing markets like India. Digital wallets have evolved quickly to serve a wide variety of services, such as peer-to-peer payments, merchant payment, bill payments, rewards, credit facilities, commerce integration, and embedded financial services, initially targeted at facilitating cashless transactions. With this functional increase, the number of digital wallets that go beyond their initial purpose in the form of payment tools is on the rise and is more of a multi-service digital platform.

In spite of this change, scholarly studies regarding digital wallets have largely focused on adoption and early adoption. The aspects including the perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, and behavioral intention have been widely researched. Although these views have played an important role in establishing why people use digital wallets, they provide little information regarding the usage of wallets by people who have adopted them. Specifically, the extent to which users perceive the expanding catalogue of features, as well as the translation of this expansion into behaviour of platforms, is under understood.

This is a significant gap since the creation of value in platform environments is not comparable to transaction-based systems. Platform-based digital services are based on continued cross-feature interaction, regular use, and ecosystem integration as opposed to single-payment frequency. Since digital wallets are coming to offer multiple services in one place, it is possible that people will start using them as their daily financial centres. But there is no empirical evidence that examines how users experience this development or how interaction intensifies among functions and categories when used in the real world.

In addition, though the platform theory focuses on ecosystem involvement, complementary and lock-in effects, the concepts are hardly considered in terms of individual users in the digital wallet landscape. The literature does not provide a qualitative perspective on the way users perceive and explore the features of their wallets, form habits, and transition to being reliant on an ecosystem rather than using as an incentive.

To fill this gap, the current paper will examine the use of digital wallets as new platforms under a post-adoption lens. The research examines the nature of user engagement, as expressed by active users in India, the distinguishing features of their engagement patterns, and what makes them maintain a platform-oriented behavior. This research will bring a better insight into the platformization of digital wallets as it anticipates user experiences and provide the conceptual basis of how to operationally code out and operationalize a platform maturity in future.

On the whole, the research changes the analytical lens to post-adoption engagement dynamics, which provides the user-centered view of how digital wallets become platform ecosystems, in the situation of Indian context.

### **Problem Statement**

Digital wallets are becoming more of a multi-service digital platform embedded in larger financial and technological systems, but still treated as a payment tool. Recent studies underscore the fact that digital wallets currently combine payment features with identity services, embedded finance, value-added services, and ecosystem alliances and differentiate themselves as platform-based infrastructures and not standalone payment devices (EREMEEVA & AKULOVA, 2024; Sharma, 2025). In the same manner, research on mobile payment platforms indicates the increased role of multi-sided interactions, network effects, and ecosystem orchestration in platform competitiveness and value creation (Zaffar et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, with this shift, most of the available literature remains focused on the intention to adopt, the drivers of acceptance, and factors that hinder adoption, especially in the emerging economies (Ilieva et al., 2023; Lim, 2024; Sodhay et al., 2024). Although such studies are valuable in understanding the reasons behind the adoption of digital wallets, they do not give much insight into user interactions with the wallets once they are adopted to more platform ecosystems. Even the research papers on digital payment platforms frequently focus on market growth, scaling, or competition processes instead of the behavioral development at the user level (Holmström, 2024; Agarwal et al., 2024).

Moreover, platform-based studies on the payments field focus mostly on ecosystem governance, value co-creation, and scaling process at firm or industry-level (Aziz, 2023; Zhang and Williamson, 2021). Nevertheless, very little qualitative research has been done on how users view and experience this shift- movement away of using digital wallets as payment instruments and moving towards using them as platforms that are part of daily life.

Digital wallets and mobile payment platforms have grown very fast in the Indian setting, but the studies still focus on adoption determinants and preference factors instead of post-adoption engagement patterns (Kumar et al., 2021; Sodhay et al., 2024). This results in a lack of knowledge regarding how continued engagement, ecosystem reliance, and behavioral persistence become wallets becoming platforms.

Thus, the main issue that this research is going to discuss is the absence of qualitative, user-focused evidence regarding the way digital wallets transform into payment tools to become platforms at the behavioral level. In the absence of such insights, the platformization of digital wallets is still only conceptually recognized but empirically uninvestigated through the eyes of the user in the lived experience.

### **Research Objectives**

**RO1:** To explore how digital wallet users in India describe their post-adoption usage patterns across multiple wallet features and services.

**RO2:** To examine how users perceive the evolution of digital wallets from simple payment tools to integrated multi-service platforms.

**RO3:** To identify the behavioral, experiential, and contextual factors that influence sustained engagement with digital wallets beyond basic payment functions.

**RO4:** To understand how platform-related elements such as ecosystem integration, cross-feature interaction, and value accumulation shape users' continued reliance on digital wallets.

**RO5:** To interpret how users construct meaning around digital wallet usage in everyday life, particularly in terms of habit formation, dependency, switching barriers, and perceived platform value.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do digital wallet users in India describe their post-adoption usage patterns across different wallet features and services?
2. How do users perceive the transformation of digital wallets from simple payment tools into integrated multi-service platforms?
3. What factors influence users' sustained engagement with digital wallets beyond basic payment functions?
4. How do ecosystem-related elements such as cross-feature interaction, value accumulation, and service integration shape users' continued reliance on digital wallets?
5. How do users interpret their long-term digital wallet usage in terms of habit formation, switching barriers, and perceived dependency?

### **Significance of the Study**

The research can be of interest to various stakeholders in the dynamic digital finance ecosystem as it offers a behavioral insight into the role of digital wallets in any use beyond simple payment transactions. To the academic and research community, the paper represents a structured and empirically testable model the Wallet Platform Index (WPI) that allows scholars study digital wallets as platforms based on post adoption user behavior. This facilitates stricter examination of platform maturity, perpetuated involvement, and platform usage in FinTech research, beyond the intention- or adoption-based models.

In the contexts of real-world use, the study will be valuable to users and consumer-oriented research in clarifying the impact of continuity of engagement, interaction of features and accumulated value on long-term dependence on digital wallets. This knowledge can be applied when discussing the formation of financial habits and financial dependency in the daily context of using digital payments.

In the case of startups and other developing FinTech projects, the WPI can be effectively used as a diagnostic tool to differentiate between the short-term incentive-based use and the active platform building. This can guide early product design choices, ecosystem planning and growth strategies that focus more on sustainable engagement than promotional dependency.

In the case of established digital wallet companies and technology firms, the findings indicate that the dimensions of platform usage are connected with retention and less incentive

dependency, which is evidence-based to make more informed decisions regarding feature investment, ecosystem expansion, and positioning the platform.

In general, the research is useful to researchers, users, startups, and industry members because it provides a basis approach on assessing the maturity of digital wallet platforms through real user behaviour.

### **Research Gap**

Although digital wallets and mobile payment platforms are rapidly growing in the international world, the available studies are largely adoption-based in nature. Research has mostly studied the effects of initial adoption intention, perceived usefulness, convenience, social influence, and resistance (Ilieva et al., 2023; Lim, 2024; Sodhay et al., 2024). Although these works are useful in understanding the behavioural intention, they present little information about experiences and perceptions of digital wallets based on post adoption. The network effects, competitive dynamics, and the ecosystem scaling have also been studied within the context of platform-based mobile payments (Kumar et al., 2021; Zaffar et al., 2024; Zhang and Williamson, 2021). Nevertheless, the main approach taken by these studies is at macro, strategic or modelling levels. Instead of analyzing the way in which ordinary people view and use digital wallets, as developing platforms in their daily lives, they concentrate on diffusion patterns, cross-side network effects, and competitive strategy. Recent studies in the ecosystem domain admit that digital wallets have become more than payment tools to be multifunction financial platforms (Eremeeva and Akulova, 2024; Rehnrona, 2024). However, a lot of this is descriptive or structural in terms of focusing on governance, architecture or regulation features, and not on the interpretation of user behavior at the level of user. Correspondingly, studies about digital platform ecosystems emphasize orchestration processes and technological powers (Sharma, 2025), yet fail to explore how the transformation of platforms is perceived on the side of the consumer.

Moreover, the existing qualitative studies on the topic of digital payments do not consider the circumstances of crisis-driven adoption or subsistence entrepreneurs (Agarwal et al., 2024), which creates a gap in the literature regarding persistence of post-adoption use in mainstream users of digital wallets in the emerging markets like India.

The qualitative evidence pertaining to the understanding of the shift in the domain of payment tools to embedded digital platforms is scarce even though the studies have recognized the multifunctional character of digital wallets and the tendency toward further integration of value-added services (Anshari et al., 2021). Specifically, not much is known about the way users feel ecosystem integration, switching costs, and habit-forming and dependence on a platform once adopted.

Thus, there is an obvious gap in the literature: the lack of qualitative and user-focused research, which would investigate how digital wallets develop on the basis of payment tools into perceived digital platforms during the post-adoption phase. Filling this gap, the current research expounds upon the way in which the Indian users perceive, experience and use digital wallets as platform ecosystems after adoption.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

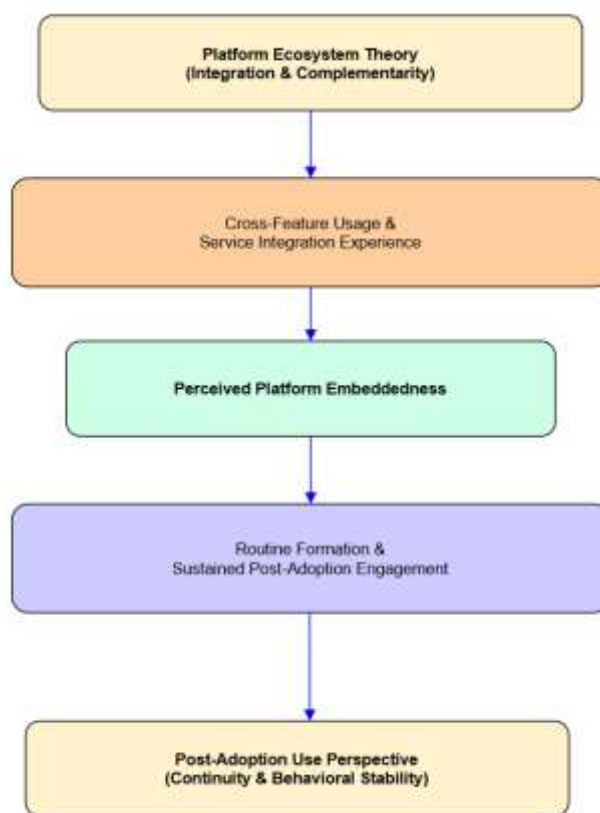
This paper relies on the theory platform ecosystem and post-adoption use perspectives to investigate the development of digital wallets as a payment tool into a digital platform in the post-adoption phase.

Platform ecosystem theory is a theory that views digital platforms as multi-sided systems that generate value by integrating services, being complementary, and having cross-network interactions (Kumar et al., 2021; Zhang and Williamson, 2021). The recent study emphasizes

the fact that digital wallets are becoming more of an ecosystem platform and less of a payment utility (Eremeeva and Akulova, 2024). This work, however, mostly takes structural or macro-level views; the interpretation of users has not been explored thoroughly.

The post-adoption research changes the analytical point of focus on the initial adoption to the continuity of the engagement and behavior (Ilieva et al., 2023; Lim, 2024). Although current research works analyse continuance intention and factors of resistance, the effects of feature expansion, cross-service interaction, and platform embeddedness after adoption have received little information on how users experience these features.

By combining these views, the current study conceptually sets the digital wallet development as the passage of transactional utilization to the ecosystem-centered utilization. Instead of attempting to determine causal relations, this framework is used to lead an interpretive search on how users in India make sense of platform integration, routine formation and continued dependence in their daily financial activities.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework demonstrates a stratification of the adoption of digital wallets as a payment tool and as a perceived digital platform in the post-adoption stage. The platform ecosystem theory is presented on the first level, offering the analytical perspective of the study of the influence of feature integration and complementation of the service on user experience. Informed by this view, the framework initially takes into consideration users experiences of integrating multiple features and services in their interactions as a manifestation of the proliferation of wallet interaction beyond simple transactions. With the expansion of engagement with a wide range of services, users can perceive the platform embeddedness, and the wallet is part of financial daily activities. This embeddedness in its turn leads to formation of routines and long-time post-adoption activities, which is behavioral stabilization and not episodic utilization. The last level is based on the post-adoption use perspective to explain how

the continued use and habitual use are the indicators of technology maturation after the original adoption. Instead of portraying causal hypotheses, the model gives a process-based conceptual flow of ecosystem integration to long-term behavioral continuity, hence the qualitative exploration of the digital wallet platformization in the Indian background.

### **Research Methodology**

The proposed research paper will use a qualitative approach to evaluate the ways in which users of digital wallets in India make sense of their post-adoption experiences as wallets transform into a more developed digital platform. A qualitative method is suitable since the nature of the study aims at being exploratory, and interpretive. The study does not test already established hypotheses or determine statistical correlations; instead, it aims to learn how users create meaning with regard to the changing patterns of use, expansion of features, and long-term involvement in daily financial situations.

The approach is aimed at the rich and multifaceted nature of the user experiences, especially how the engagement is more than just the simple transactional use but entails becoming a part of the daily financial experiences. With the focus on the narrative descriptions and experience, the study will seek to determine how the features of platforms, including service-integration and cross-feature interactions are perceived and internalized by users as they spend time on the use of the platform. By doing so, the qualitative approach will facilitate a context-sensitive explanation of the behavioral shift in the transactional usage to the perceived platform embeddedness which is consistent with the conceptual goals of the research.

### **Research Design**

This study employs an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate how digital wallet users in India experience the transition from payment tools to integrated digital platforms in the post-adoption stage. The exploratory design is appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation—platformization at the user-behavior level—remains underexamined in existing literature. While prior research has largely focused on adoption determinants and continuance intention, limited empirical attention has been given to how users interpret evolving platform characteristics in everyday usage contexts.

The design is interpretive in orientation, enabling the study to examine subjective meanings, experiential narratives, and behavioral evolution over time. Rather than seeking to test relationships between predefined variables, the research aims to generate insight into how users perceive feature integration, routine formation, ecosystem reliance, and platform embeddedness after initial adoption. Such depth-oriented inquiry requires a flexible and context-sensitive design that allows patterns and themes to emerge from participant accounts. A qualitative research design is therefore selected to capture the complexity of post-adoption engagement and to provide a nuanced understanding of digital wallet platform transformation from the user's perspective. This design aligns with the study's objective of conceptually examining behavioral shifts rather than statistically measuring them.

### **Data Collection and Sampling Criteria**

The present study opts to use an exploratory qualitative research design to determine how users of digital wallets in India experience the concept of the change in terms of payment tools to built-in digital platforms during the post-adoption phase. The exploratory design is suitable since the phenomenon of interest platformization on the user-behavior level has not been studied thoroughly in the literature available. Although much of the previous studies have been mainly on determinants of adoption and continuance intention, scanty empirical studies have

been conducted on how users perceive changing platform properties in the context of daily usage.

The study design is oriented towards the interpretive approach giving the study a chance to explore subjective meaning, experience in narrative form, and behavioral development over time. Instead of attempting to establish the relationships between predefined variables, the study attempts to produce the insight regarding the perception of feature integration, the establishment of routines, system dependence, and platform embeddedness following the initial adoption by the user. This depth based questioning must involve a pervious and context sensitive design that can permit patterns and themes to be formed through narrations of participants.

The qualitative research design is thus chosen to address the complexity of the post-adoption engagement and give a subtle picture of the transformation of the digital wallet platform as viewed by the user. Such a design is in line with the aim of the study that is a conceptual analysis of behavioral changes as opposed to statistical quantification.

### Instrumentation

The number of participants was 28. The sample size was calculated according to the principle of thematic saturation, according to which the data collection was to be maintained until there were no new conceptually important results of the interviews.

Domain	Interview Questions
Post-Adoption Usage	1. How do you currently use your digital wallet in your daily life?
	2. Has your usage expanded beyond basic payments? If yes, how?
Perceived Platform Evolution	3. Do you see your wallet as just a payment tool or as a broader financial platform? Why?
Ecosystem Integration	4. Do you use multiple services within the wallet (e.g., payments, rewards, bill payments, shopping)? How do these services connect in your experience?
Habit & Engagement Continuity	5. Has using the wallet become part of your routine? In what situations do you automatically use it?
Value Accumulation & Switching	6. What keeps you using this wallet over time? Would it be difficult to switch to another one? Why?

Dependency & Embeddedness	7. If this wallet stopped working tomorrow, how would that affect your financial activities?
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**Table 1: Questionnaire For The Qualitative Study**

### Data Analysis and Guide

The research utilized thematic analysis in the interpretation of the post adoptive digital wallet experiences of participants. Inductive analysis was applied to all interviews in form of transcription. The coding involved the analysis of the data through the use of Microsoft Excel to organize the data in codes, sub-categories, and broad thematic categories in an organized manner.

Firstly, there was repetition of reading and familiarization transcripts. Open codes were then given to meaningful text sections in terms of usage or how they were perceived to be used, ability to integrate with other systems, sense of habituation, and ability to switch. Codes akin to each other were combined into sub-categories, which were then summarized into more advanced themes of the experience of users during the conversion of the payment tools into the digital platform.

The organised coding system which was in Excel format promoted transparency, traceability and consistency during the analysis process. The concluded themes were interpreted within the conceptual framework of the study, which allowed making the coherent interpretation of the post-adoption platformization behaviour in Indian digital wallet context.

### Validity and Reliability

**Qualitative Reliability Technique: Member Checking:** To increase the reliability and credibility of the findings, member checking was done. Out of the total sample of 28 respondents, a sample of respondents was re-contacted around two weeks after the preliminary interviews. A concise overview of the inferred themes based on their interviews was given to them and they were requested to verify whether the interpretations were true to their experiences.

The follow-up responses showed some consistency in theme interpretations as compared to the initial accounts of the participants. No revisions in the point of view were noted. This helped to enhance the validity of the results because it made sure the interpretations were based on real-life experiences of the participants.

**Qualitative Validation Technique: Content Validity Ratio (CVR):** In evaluating the content validity of the interview instrument, 28 subject experts as well as those who frequently use the digital wallet were used to review the semi-structured guide. Twenty-eight evaluators rated the interview items as essential (25), whereas three rated them as useful but not essential. The CVR was obtained by the use of the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) formula by Lawshe as follows:  

$$CVR = (N_e - N/2) / (N/2) = (25 - 14) / 14 = 0.79.$$

The CVR value of 0.79 shows a high level of consensus on the relevance of the items that are necessary. Thus, the interview guide has a high content validity and a conceptual fit with the purpose of the study in regard to post-adoption digital wallet behavior and platform evolution.

### Qualitative Analysis

A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were held with active users of digital wallets in India, with the main users of Google Pay, PhonePe, and Paytm. The purpose of the analysis was to

study the usage behavior after adoption and learn the perception of digital wallets outside the simple payment functionality.

Thematic analysis indicated that there were three key themes, namely, (1) Usage Expansion and Platform Evolution, (2) Ecosystem Embeddedness and Value Accumulation, and (3) Behavioral Stabilization and Switching Considerations. These themes were further subdivided into minor themes that depicted the trend in the use of features, integration of services, addiction, and platform dependency.

Respondents always reported an extension of the usage past peer-to-peer payments to bill payments, recharges, ticket reservations, merchant dealings, and reward-based communications. It is stated that in the long-term, most users to have tested their digital wallets indicated that their wallet began as a mere payment service but eventually grew into a versatile financial interface that became part of daily life.

Ecosystem integration became an important theme wherein users engaged with several services in one wallet ecosystem. Combination with cashback rewards, subscription management and linked bank accounts as cross-feature engagements also contributed to perceived platform value. Some participants also stated that transaction history, rewards and their associated services generated a continuity and weak lock-in.

Habitual usage patterns indicated behavioral stabilization. The vast majority of the respondents mentioned that nowadays they used the digital wallet as a matter of course when making transactions. The motivation to switch was not mainly technical but based on an embedded routine, value stored, familiarity to interface design, and view of being convenient.

In general, the results indicate that the use of digital wallets after adoption in India is an indicator of the move to platform interaction as opposed to transactional one.

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	CODES
<b>Usage Expansion &amp; Platform Evolution</b>	Feature Breadth	1. Expansion beyond P2P payments 2. Bill payments and recharges 3. Merchant QR payments 4. Ticket and travel bookings 5. Integration with bank accounts
	Perceived Platform Shift	1. "More than just payment" perception 2. All-in-one financial tool 3. Replacement of multiple apps 4. Centralized financial management
<b>Ecosystem Embeddedness &amp; Value Accumulation</b>	Cross-Feature Interaction	1. Using rewards during payments 2. Linking payments with offers 3. Subscription and auto-pay usage 4. Combining wallet services within one transaction flow
	Accumulated Value & Lock-In	1. Cashback accumulation 2. Transaction history reliance 3. Linked services and accounts 4. Familiarity with wallet interface
<b>Behavioral Stabilization &amp; Switching Considerations</b>	Habit Formation	1. Automatic wallet usage 2. Preference over cash 3. Default payment choice 4. Routine daily transactions

	Switching Hesitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convenience retention</li> <li>2. Reluctance to relearn new interface</li> <li>3. Loss of rewards/history concerns</li> <li>4. Comfort with current ecosystem</li> </ol>
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**Table 2: Thematic Analysis**

**Key Findings**

To begin with, the usage was rampant beyond the basic payment. Although the majority of participants started to use digital wallets to transfer money to peers or pay in QR, in the long term, the usage of digital wallets was extended to pay bills, charge their mobile, send money to merchants, book tickets, make subscriptions, and have interactions based on rewards. This growth reveals that post-adoption contact does not remain the same but increasingly ambiguates.

Second, users are becoming more inclined to view digital wallets as a platform instead of a tool of payment. Several participants referred to their wallet as an all-in-one financial area, which concentrates various services. Integration perception generated as opposed to the single feature use alone contributed to the perception of wallets as a digital platform.

Third, embeddedness of ecosystem promotes continued interaction. Interaction between features, e.g. the ability to use cashback rewards with payments, auto-pay and linked bank accounts helped to create a feeling of continuity. The history of transactions made, the history of preferences and familiarity with the interface instilled the continued dependence.

Fourth, it has been subject to habitual use instead of choice. According to the participants, digital wallets have become a routine activity in daily transactions. The wallet turns out to be the standard method of payment, and this is an indicator of behavioral stabilization during the post-adoption phase.

Lastly, embedded routines are the motivation behind switching hesitation than technical impediments. Although there are other types of wallets, the participants were not keen to change as they had gained some benefits, because of the convenience, familiarity and it was seen to bring inconveniences into the financial routine of these people.

In general, the results can be interpreted as indicating that digital wallets in India are being used more as embedded financial services than payment utilities, meaning that the behavioral shift in India is a trajectory towards the platform as opposed to episodic transactions.

**Scope and Delimitations**

The current research is aimed at examining the post-adoption digital wallet usage in India among the active users. In particular, it explores the perception and experiences of the users of the digital wallets in regards to the transformation of the digital wallets as a mere payment system to an integrated digital platform. It is restricted to the knowledge of expansion of usage, perceived platform evolution, integration of ecosystem, habit formation and switching in the post-adoption phase. The research covers the users of the main digital wallets like Google Pay, PhonePe, and Paytm as these are the most popular among the Indian community.

It is a qualitative type of research and was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with 28 participants. This purpose is not measurement-based or hypothesis-testing, but the purpose is exploratory, interpretive. Thus, the results will be more of insightful content instead of statistical generalization.

A number of limitations are involved. To begin with, the study is limited to active digital wallet users and does not analyze non-users and people at the adoption stage. Second, the study is limited geographically to India and represents the socio-economic and technological situation

within the Indian digital payment ecosystem. Third, the research lacks a quantitative measure of the maturity of platforms or measure indices, associating with user perception and lived experience. Lastly, the institutional, the regulatory, and the provider-side standpoints are out of the range of this study.

These limitations provide a conceptual clarity and enable the study to focus specifically on user-level post-adoption platformization behavior within a specific contextual boundary.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined consumer engagement as a post-adoption adoption experience of digital wallet users in India as the service changes into a digital platform beyond payment services. According to the results of the qualitative analysis of 28 users, the idea of communication has developed an extension of application beyond simple transactions to multi-service interaction and ecosystem integration.

Users are getting more and more convinced that digital wallets are centralized financial interfaces that are integrated into their everyday activities. The long-term interest is motivated by the habitual usage, value acquisition, and convenience, not by the short-term incentive. Switching hesitation is associated with routine and perceived disturbance, as opposed to the technological obstacles.

Comprehensively, the analysis changes the spirit of adoption to post-adoption platformization, and it is the way digital wallets are becoming a behaviorally integrated digital platform in the Indian scenari

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