

Assessing the Impact of Trust and Security on Digital Payment Preference among Digital Payment Users in Muscat, Oman

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of perceived trust and perceived security on digital payment preference among users in Muscat, Oman. As digital payment systems become increasingly integrated into daily financial activities, understanding the factors that influence user preference has become important for financial institutions, policymakers, and payment service providers. The study adopted a quantitative research design and collected data from 128 digital payment users through a structured questionnaire. Perceived trust and perceived security were treated as independent variables, while preferred digital payment method was treated as the dependent variable. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were conducted using MS Excel and PSPP software. The findings revealed that neither perceived trust nor perceived security had a statistically significant influence on users' preferred digital payment method. Trust explained only 1.1% of the variation in payment preference, while security explained only 0.1%. These results suggest that trust and security may be viewed by respondents as basic expectations rather than direct factors influencing payment preference. However, due to the small sample size, gender imbalance, and exploratory statistical approach, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The study recommends that future research should examine additional factors such as convenience, transaction speed, ease of use, promotional benefits, merchant acceptance, and service reliability to better understand digital payment preference in Oman.

Keywords: Digital Payment, Trust, Security, Payment Preference.

INTRODUCTION

Digital payment systems have become an essential component of modern financial activity, enabling users to conduct transactions through debit cards, credit cards, mobile wallets, internet banking, and contactless payment platforms. The rapid growth of financial technology (FinTech) has significantly transformed how individuals and businesses manage financial transactions worldwide. According to World Bank, the increasing use of digital payments is closely linked to financial inclusion, as more individuals rely on digital accounts for payments, savings, and financial management (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). This global shift highlights the importance of digital financial systems in promoting efficiency, accessibility, and economic participation.

In the context of Oman, digital payment adoption is strongly aligned with national development strategies focused on digital transformation. Oman Vision 2040 emphasizes technological advancement, economic diversification, and the development of a knowledge-based economy as key national priorities (Oman Vision 2040, n.d.). Similarly, the Government Digital Transformation Program 2021–2025 aims to establish a digitally integrated government and promote the use of advanced technologies across sectors (Government of Oman, n.d.). These initiatives have created a supportive environment for digital financial services, further strengthened by the regulatory role of the Central Bank of Oman, which oversees the development and security of national payment systems (Central Bank of Oman, 2024).

Despite these advancements, several issues continue to influence consumer behavior in digital payment usage. One of the primary concerns is the perceived risk associated with digital transactions, including fraud, data breaches, identity theft, and unauthorized access to financial information. Although modern digital payment systems incorporate advanced security features such as encryption, biometric authentication, and multi-factor verification, users may still perceive digital transactions as risky. Research has shown that perceived risk can negatively affect users' willingness to adopt digital payment technologies, particularly when users lack sufficient knowledge or experience with these systems (Almaiah et al., 2022).

In addition to security concerns, trust plays a critical role in digital payment environments. Trust refers to the user's confidence in the reliability, integrity, and competence of payment service providers. Since digital transactions involve the exchange of sensitive financial information, users must rely on service providers, financial institutions, and digital infrastructures to ensure transaction safety. Previous studies have consistently identified trust as a key determinant of digital payment adoption and usage, particularly in mobile payment and e-wallet systems (Ghouse et al., 2024). In the Omani context, trust is also influenced by the regulatory environment and the reputation of financial institutions, which can enhance user confidence in digital payment platforms.

However, as digital payment systems become more widespread and regulated, user expectations may evolve. Trust and security may no longer function as strong differentiating factors if users assume that all major payment platforms meet minimum safety standards. In such cases, these factors become baseline requirements rather than key drivers of preference. Consequently, users may begin to prioritize other aspects such as convenience, transaction speed, ease of use, promotional benefits, and service efficiency when choosing between different payment methods. This shift in consumer behavior creates an important research issue, particularly in emerging digital economies like Oman, where digital payment adoption is increasing but user decision-making patterns are still developing.

The importance of this study lies in its focus on understanding whether trust and security continue to influence digital payment preference among users in Muscat, Oman. While previous research has established the importance of these factors in adoption decisions, there is limited empirical evidence examining their role in determining payment preference among existing users. This distinction is important because users who have already adopted digital payment systems may evaluate platforms differently compared to non-users. Therefore, examining the relevance of trust and security in this context can provide valuable insights for policymakers, financial institutions, and digital payment providers.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the changing role of traditional determinants in a modern digital payment environment. If trust and security are found to have limited influence on user preference, it suggests a shift in consumer priorities, which has important implications for service providers. In such a scenario, digital payment providers may need to focus more on enhancing user experience, improving service efficiency, offering incentives, and increasing accessibility to remain competitive in the evolving market.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of perceived trust and perceived security on digital payment preference among users in Muscat, Oman, and to determine whether these traditionally important factors still play a significant role in shaping user decisions in the current digital payment landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Payment Adoption: Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

Digital payment adoption refers to the acceptance and use of electronic platforms for financial transactions, including mobile wallets, debit/credit cards, online banking, and contactless systems. The expansion of digital payments is closely linked to financial inclusion, efficiency, and economic participation, as users increasingly rely on digital accounts for everyday transactions (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). The adoption of digital payment systems has been widely explained through established theoretical models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). TAM suggests that

perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are primary determinants of technology adoption (Davis, 1989), while UTAUT expands this by incorporating social influence and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Later extensions such as UTAUT2 emphasize hedonic motivation, price value, and habit as additional determinants (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

Recent studies argue that digital payment adoption is a multidimensional process involving technical, behavioral, and institutional factors (Jafri et al., 2023). For example, Liébana-Cabanillas et al. (2020) found that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and perceived risk significantly influence mobile payment adoption across countries. Similarly, Oliveira et al. (2016) highlighted that compatibility, innovativeness, and trust jointly affect adoption behavior. However, while these models explain adoption intention, they do not always explain preference among existing users, which is the focus of the present study. This distinction is important because users who have already adopted digital payments may rely on different criteria when choosing between platforms.

Trust as a Determinant of Digital Payment Behavior

Trust is widely recognized as a central factor in digital financial services due to the intangible nature of online transactions. In digital payment environments, trust refers to the belief that a service provider is reliable, secure, and capable of fulfilling its obligations without opportunistic behavior (Gefen et al., 2003). Several empirical studies have established a positive relationship between trust and digital payment adoption. For instance, Kim et al. (2010) found that trust significantly reduces perceived risk and increases users' willingness to adopt mobile payment systems. Similarly, Zhou (2011) demonstrated that initial trust plays a critical role in mobile banking adoption, particularly in early-stage usage.

In developing and emerging markets, trust becomes even more critical due to lower familiarity with digital systems. Slade et al. (2015) found that trust and perceived risk strongly influence consumer intention to adopt mobile payments in the UK. Likewise, Barkhordari et al. (2021) showed that trust significantly affects users' willingness to use e-payment systems in developing economies. In the Gulf region, trust remains an important factor in shaping digital payment behavior. Ghouse et al. (2024) found that trust influences mobile wallet adoption among Omani millennials, particularly when combined with perceived security and social influence. Similarly, Almaiah et al. (2022) confirmed that trust is a significant predictor of mobile payment acceptance in Middle Eastern contexts.

Despite this strong empirical support, some studies suggest that the role of trust may decline over time. As digital payment systems become more regulated and standardized, users may develop institution-based trust, where confidence is placed in the overall system rather than individual providers (McKnight et al., 2002). In such environments, trust may become a hygiene factor—necessary but not sufficient to influence preference (Kim et al., 2009). This perspective provides a possible explanation for the findings of the present study, where trust did not significantly influence payment preference. It suggests that users may already assume a baseline level of trust across payment platforms.

Security and Perceived Risk in Digital Payments

Security is closely related to perceived risk and is considered a fundamental requirement in digital payment systems. Perceived security refers to the extent to which users believe that a system can protect their financial and personal information from threats such as fraud, hacking, and identity theft (Flavián & Guinalú, 2006). Numerous studies have found that perceived security significantly influences digital payment adoption. For example, Featherman and Pavlou (2003) demonstrated that perceived risk negatively affects technology adoption, while enhanced security reduces user resistance. Similarly, Shin (2009) found that perceived security directly influences trust and adoption of mobile payment systems.

Research in mobile payment contexts further confirms this relationship. Oliveira et al. (2016) identified perceived risk and security as critical determinants of adoption intention. Liébana-Cabanillas et al. (2017) also reported that security concerns significantly affect users' willingness to adopt mobile payment technologies. In

the Middle East, Almaiah et al. (2022) found that perceived security is a key factor influencing mobile payment adoption. In Oman specifically, increasing awareness of digital fraud has led users to adopt precautionary measures, indicating that security remains a relevant concern in digital financial transactions (Visa, 2025).

However, similar to trust, the role of security may evolve as digital payment systems mature. When users perceive that all major platforms meet minimum security standards, security may no longer act as a differentiating factor. Instead, it becomes an expected feature, and users may base their preferences on other attributes such as convenience and usability (Kim et al., 2010). This aligns with the findings of the present study, where security did not significantly influence payment preference among respondents.

Digital Payment Ecosystem in Oman

The development of digital payment systems in Oman is closely linked to national digital transformation initiatives. Oman Vision 2040 emphasizes the role of digital technologies in economic diversification and modernization (Oman Vision 2040, n.d.). The Government Digital Transformation Program 2021–2025 further promotes the adoption of digital services across sectors (Government of Oman, n.d.). The Central Bank of Oman plays a critical role in regulating and developing payment systems, ensuring transaction security and financial stability (Central Bank of Oman, 2024). These institutional frameworks contribute to a high level of system-level trust, which may reduce the importance of individual-level trust in decision-making. Additionally, increased smartphone penetration, internet access, and fintech innovation have accelerated digital payment adoption in Oman. However, empirical research on consumer preference behavior in Oman remains limited, particularly in relation to trust and security.

Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The existing literature consistently identifies trust and perceived security as key determinants of digital payment adoption. However, most studies focus on intention to adopt rather than preference among existing users. This creates a gap in understanding how users make choices between different payment methods after adoption. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the influence of trust and security may change over time. In mature digital ecosystems, these factors may become baseline expectations rather than differentiating variables. Despite this, empirical studies testing this shift—especially in the context of Oman—are limited. Therefore, this study addresses two key gaps: It examines digital payment preference, rather than general adoption intention. It tests whether trust and security remain significant predictors in a developing digital economy like Oman. The findings of this study, which show that trust and security are not statistically significant predictors, contribute to the evolving understanding of digital payment behavior by suggesting a potential shift in consumer priorities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine whether perceived trust and perceived security influence digital payment preference among digital payment users in Muscat, Oman. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to test specific hypotheses and measure the statistical relationship between selected independent variables and users' preferred digital payment method. The target population consisted of digital payment users living in Muscat. Respondents were required to have experience using at least one digital payment method, such as debit cards, credit cards, mobile wallets, internet banking, Apple Pay, Google Pay, or other contactless payment services. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were used to support the theoretical background and literature review.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic information, including gender, age, education level, occupation, and monthly income. Section B measured perceived trust using statements related to provider reliability, confidence, transparency, and protection of user interests. Section C measured perceived security using statements related to fraud protection, transaction safety, data privacy, and prevention of unauthorized access. The perception-based items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques was used to collect responses. This approach was selected because of practical

limitations in reaching a wider population of digital payment users. A total of 128 valid responses were collected and used for analysis. However, since the sampling method was non-probability-based and the sample was not fully balanced in terms of gender and age, the findings should be interpreted as sample-based results rather than fully generalizable conclusions for all digital payment users in Oman.

The collected data were analyzed using MS Excel and PSPP software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and their digital payment awareness. Regression analysis was then applied to examine the relationship between perceived trust, perceived security, and preferred digital payment method. The significance level was set at 0.05. A p-value below 0.05 was considered statistically significant, while a p-value above 0.05 was considered statistically insignificant. In this study, perceived trust and perceived security were treated as independent variables, while preferred digital payment method was treated as the dependent variable. However, because payment preference is categorical in nature, the use of simple linear regression should be treated as an exploratory statistical approach. For stronger future analysis, chi-square analysis may be used to examine associations between categorical variables, while multinomial logistic regression would be more suitable if the preferred payment method includes more than two categories. If the dependent variable is re-coded into two categories, binary logistic regression may also be applied.

Variables of the Study

The study included two independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables were perceived trust and perceived security. Perceived trust refers to the respondent’s confidence in the reliability, honesty, and competence of a digital payment provider. Perceived security refers to the respondent’s belief that the payment system protects financial data, personal information, and transactions from fraud or unauthorized access. The dependent variable was preferred digital payment method, which refers to the payment option most commonly or most favorably selected by the respondent.

Reliability of the Instrument

To strengthen the validity of the questionnaire, the internal consistency of the trust and security items should be tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. Cronbach’s Alpha is commonly used in social science research to assess whether multiple questionnaire items consistently measure the same construct. A value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable. Therefore, Cronbach’s Alpha should be calculated separately for the perceived trust items and perceived security items before final submission.

Table: 1 Cronbach’s Reliability Analysis

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Perceived Trust	6	0.778	Acceptable
Perceived Security	6	0.723	Acceptable

Source: Computed data

The reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha to examine the internal consistency of the measurement constructs. The results indicate that the construct Perceived Trust, consisting of six items, achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.778, demonstrating an acceptable level of reliability. Similarly, the construct Perceived Security, also measured using six items, recorded a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.723, which is likewise considered acceptable.

Although the study provides useful insights, it has several methodological limitations. First, the sample size of 128 respondents is relatively small. Second, the sample was not fully balanced, as female and young respondents were highly represented. Third, the use of convenience and snowball sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Fourth, the study examined only trust and security, while other important factors such as convenience, transaction speed, ease of use, rewards, merchant acceptance, service reliability, and customer satisfaction were not included. Finally, since the dependent variable is categorical, future studies should apply chi-square analysis, binary logistic regression, or multinomial logistic regression to obtain stronger and more statistically appropriate findings.

RESULTS

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	52	40.6
	Female	76	59.4
	Total	128	100
Education	Secondary School Education	3	2.3
	Diploma	16	12.5
	Advance Diploma	14	10.9
	Bachelor's Degree	90	70.3
	Master's Degree	4	3.1
	Professional Degree	1	0.8
	Total	128	100
Occupation	Government Services	31	24.2
	Public Sector Companies	7	5.5
	Private Sector Companies	23	18.0
	Self Employed	7	5.5
	Others	60	46.9
	Total	128	100
Monthly Income	Less than RO 500	89	69.5
	RO 501 to RO 1,000	24	18.8
	RO 1,001 to RO 1,500	8	6.3
	RO 1,501 to RO 2,000	1	0.8
	RO 2,001 to RO 2,500	2	1.6
	RO 2,501 and above	4	3.1
	Total	128	100

Source: Computed data

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. With respect to gender, the majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 59.4% (76 respondents), while male respondents constituted only 40.6% (52 respondents). This indicates that the study sample was predominantly represented by females.

Regarding educational qualifications, most respondents possessed a Bachelor's Degree, representing 70.3% of the total sample. Respondents with Diplomas and Advance Diplomas accounted for 12.5% and 10.9% respectively, while only a small proportion held Master's Degrees (3.1%) or Professional Degrees (0.8%). This suggests that the respondents were generally well educated, with the majority having undergraduate qualifications.

In terms of occupation, the highest proportion of respondents belonged to the "Others" category, accounting for 46.9%, followed by Government Services at 24.2% and Private Sector Companies at 18.0%. Respondents working in Public Sector Companies and those who were Self Employed each represented 5.5% of the sample. The findings indicate that the respondents came from diverse occupational backgrounds.

With regard to monthly income, a substantial majority of the respondents (69.5%) earned less than RO 500 per month, while 18.8% earned between RO 501 and RO 1,000. Only a limited number of respondents reported higher income levels above RO 1,500. This indicates that most respondents in the study belonged to the lower-income category.

H1: There is significant association between trust provided by provider and choice of digital payment method by customer.

Table 3: Regression Analysis- Model 1and Summary

Model 1 Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.105 ^a	.011	.003	1.294
a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust				

Source: Computed data

Table 4: Results of Anova for Model 1

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.355	1	2.355	1.407	.238 ^b
	Residual	210.888	126	1.674		
	Total	213.242	127			
a. Dependent Variable: Preferred Digital Payment						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust						

Source: Computed data

The regression result for trust in table 3 and 4 revealed a very weak relationship with preferred digital payment method. The R value was 0.105, which indicates a weak positive association between trust and payment preference. The R Square value was 0.011, meaning that trust explained only 1.1% of the variation in respondents' preferred digital payment method. This is extremely low and suggests that trust alone does not meaningfully explain why respondents prefer one digital payment method over another. The ANOVA result also showed that the model was not statistically significant, with $p = 0.238$, which is greater than the accepted significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived trust significantly influences digital payment preference was not supported. This finding suggests that, within this sample, respondents may already assume that most digital payment providers are trustworthy. As a result, trust may not act as a strong deciding factor when choosing between payment methods. Instead, users may consider trust as a basic requirement that every payment provider must already have.

H2: There is a significant association between the security provided by a digital payment provider and the likelihood of customers choosing that provider over others.

Table 5: Regression Analysis- Model 2and Summary

Model 2 Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	.031 ^a	.001	-.007	1.300
a. Predictors: (Constant), Security				

Source: Computed data

Table 6: Results of Anova for Model 2

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	.199	1	.199	.118	.732 ^b
	Residual	213.043	126	1.691		
	Total	213.242	127			
a. Dependent Variable: Preferred Digital Payment						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Security						

Source: Computed data

The regression result for security in table 5 and 6 also showed a very weak relationship with preferred digital payment method. The R value was 0.031, indicating an almost negligible association between perceived security and payment preference. The R Square value was 0.001, meaning that security explained only 0.1% of the variation in digital payment preference. The model was statistically insignificant, with $p = 0.732$, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived security significantly influences digital payment preference was not supported. This means that perceived security did not significantly predict respondents’ choice of digital payment method in this study. However, this does not mean that security is unimportant. Rather, it may indicate that respondents expect all major payment methods to provide a minimum level of security. Therefore, security may be viewed as a standard feature instead of a factor that influences preference.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study differ from much of the previous literature, where trust and security are often identified as important factors influencing digital payment adoption. Prior studies suggest that users are more likely to adopt digital payment systems when they trust the provider and perceive the system as secure (Kim et al., 2010; Oliveira et al., 2016). However, the present study found that neither trust nor security had a statistically significant influence on payment preference among the sampled users in Muscat. One possible explanation is that this study focuses on payment preference among existing digital payment users rather than initial adoption intention. For first-time users, trust and security may reduce fear and uncertainty, but among existing users, these factors may become baseline expectations.

Another possible explanation is that Oman’s banking and payment environment is relatively regulated. Users may believe that banks, card networks, and payment service providers already follow minimum security standards. This reflects the idea of institution-based trust, where confidence is placed in the wider system rather than only in an individual provider (McKnight et al., 2002). As digital payment use becomes more routine, users may rely more on habit, convenience, usability, and service value when choosing payment methods (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Oliveira et al., 2016).

The demographic profile of the sample may also have influenced the findings. Most respondents were young adults, especially those aged 21–30, and the sample was highly female-dominated. Younger users are often more familiar with digital technologies and may feel more confident using online and mobile payment systems. As a result, they may be less sensitive to trust and security concerns compared to older or less digitally experienced users. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted carefully and should not be generalized to the entire Omani population.

The low R Square values also indicate that the model has weak explanatory power. Trust and security explained only a very small portion of the variation in payment preference. This suggests that other variables not included in the study may be more important in explaining digital payment preference. Future studies should include factors such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, transaction speed, service reliability, promotional offers, social influence, merchant acceptance, and user satisfaction. Overall, the results suggest that trust and security remain important foundations of digital payment systems, but they may not be the strongest factors influencing payment preference among users who already use digital payments. For payment providers, this

means that maintaining trust and security is still essential, but competitive advantage may depend more on improving user experience, transaction convenience, platform reliability, and value-added services. The regression analysis showed that both hypotheses were rejected. Trust did not significantly influence preferred digital payment method, as the relationship was weak and statistically insignificant. Similarly, security did not significantly influence preferred digital payment method. These findings suggest that trust and security may be considered basic expectations by respondents rather than direct predictors of payment preference. The results also indicate that other factors beyond trust and security are likely to have stronger influence on users' choice of digital payment method.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of perceived trust and perceived security on digital payment preference among users in Muscat, Oman. Based on the regression analysis, both hypotheses were not supported. Perceived trust showed a very weak and statistically insignificant relationship with digital payment preference, with an R Square value of 0.011 and a p-value of 0.238. Similarly, perceived security showed an almost negligible and statistically insignificant relationship, with an R Square value of 0.001 and a p-value of 0.732. Therefore, the findings indicate that trust and security did not significantly predict respondents' preferred digital payment method in this sample. The results do not mean that trust and security are unimportant in digital payment systems. Rather, they suggest that users may already consider these factors as basic requirements that all major payment providers should satisfy. Since digital payment systems in Oman operate within a regulated financial environment, respondents may assume that formal payment platforms already provide an acceptable level of reliability and protection. As a result, users may give greater attention to other practical factors such as convenience, speed, ease of use, availability, rewards, cashback, and merchant acceptance when choosing their preferred payment method.

The study contributes to the literature by shifting attention from general digital payment adoption to payment preference among existing users. While previous studies often found trust and security to be important adoption factors, this research suggests that their influence may become weaker once users are already familiar with digital payment systems. This finding is useful for banks, payment service providers, and policymakers because it indicates that maintaining trust and security remains essential, but competitive advantage may depend more on improving user experience and service value. However, the study has some limitations. The sample size was limited to 128 respondents, and the sample was not fully balanced in terms of gender and age. The use of convenience and snowball sampling also limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study examined only two independent variables, while digital payment preference may be affected by several other factors. Future studies should use a larger and more representative sample and include variables such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, transaction speed, service reliability, promotional offers, social influence, merchant acceptance, and customer satisfaction. Future research may also apply chi-square analysis, logistic regression, or multinomial regression if the dependent variable is categorical.

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