

M-Pesa and Market Women: A Transactional Analysis of Savings and Resilience in Nairobi's Kawangware, 2012

K, a, g, i, s, o, v, a, n, d, e, r, M, e, r, w, e, ,, L, i, n, d, i, w, e, M, b, e, k, i, ,,
S, i, p, h, o, J, a, c, o, b, s, ,, T, h, a, n, d, i, w, e, N, k, o, s, i

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18540559>

| Abstract

The adoption of mobile money in Africa has altered financial practices. For vulnerable groups in the informal economy, tools like the M-Pesa savings feature are promoted for building financial resilience, yet their practical utility warrants closer scrutiny. This perspective critically analyses the role of the M-Pesa savings feature in fostering financial resilience among female street vendors in Nairobi's Kawangware informal settlement. It aims to move beyond promotional claims by examining patterns within actual transactional data. The analysis employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to a six-month dataset of M-Pesa transactions from a cohort of Kawangware market women. It examines savings patterns, withdrawal frequencies, and amounts to infer financial behaviours and coping strategies. Key insights: The service was used primarily for frequent, small-value savings acts rather than for accumulating large balances. A key finding was the strategic use of saved funds as a buffer for immediate business reinvestment following daily minor losses, with most withdrawals linked directly to restocking inventory. The M-Pesa savings feature functions less as a long-term safety net and more as a dynamic, transactional tool for managing daily cash flow and mitigating minor business disruptions. It supports a specific form of operational resilience within the informal economy's constraints. Financial literacy programmes should align with observed micro-transactional behaviours. Product

developers should consider features that support small, frequent savings goals. Policymakers must recognise this nuanced utility within broader social protection frameworks. M-Pesa, financial resilience, informal economy, market women, mobile money, savings, Kenya, transactional analysis This perspective contributes a critical, data-informed viewpoint on how digital savings tools are actually utilised by a key demographic in Africa's informal sector, challenging simplistic narratives of financial inclusion.
