

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/13673.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/13673.001.0001)

Global Fintech

Financial Innovation in the Connected World

Edited by: David L. Shrier, Alex Pentland

Citation:

Global Fintech: Financial Innovation in the Connected World

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DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/13673.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262369534

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2022

OA Funding Provided By:

OA Funding from MIT Press Direct to Open



The MIT Press

CONCLUSION

The dawn of the new decade brings numerous innovations to bear on the world's biggest problems. It also brings new intensity to the externalities that impact fintech and financial services, from government instability to global health crises.

While we were working on this book, the SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19 (“novel coronavirus”) pandemic was sweeping the world. Many countries simply shut down in a matter of weeks, sequestering citizens in their homes. Researchers frantically raced to understand how the virus is transmitted, which interventions are best at containing it, and what the effects are of eliminating most in-person aspects of an economy for an extended period of time.

And many of the ideas we discussed in *Global Fintech* suddenly became urgent and immediate. Physical money? That's a transmission vector. Time to go digital. In-person bank branches? Not relevant, since everything is digital. The limits of the old system went from inconvenient to pressing: How can you put a wet signature to paper if you don't own a printer and can't go to a printing store? How does an open-outcry trading pit work when individuals have to stay six feet from others? (Hint: it doesn't.) Markets gyrated wildly. Cryptocurrencies, curiously, appeared to be largely uncorrelated to general equities, and indeed went on a historic bull run, rising more than 300 percent between August 2020 and July 2021.

As educators, the authors in this volume have been tinkering with online learning for years, so perhaps we have been less affected than some of our colleagues as we were already equipped to pivot to a fully virtual instructional model. Yet MBA students pursuing fintech studies reasonably ask their institutions why they are paying such a high sum of money for what often amounted to a series of webinars. Demand began to rise for better education solutions, and competition intensified. Following online platform provider Coursera's IPO, MIT and Harvard, notably, sold the commercial assets of their competing effort edX to course purveyor 2U, Inc. for more than \$800 million. 2U's relationship with MIT began in 2015 when a subsidiary, GetSmarter, first put our MIT fintech class and then our Oxford fintech class online into over 150 countries. We arguably provided foundational knowledge for many of the innovators now shaping the fintech future. And so we come full circle.

Digitization and distance collaboration, along with digital money and fully electronic identity, suddenly become the norm rather than the experiment. Will this continue once the worst of the pandemic has passed? Even as vaccine trials were bridging to initial deployments into global populations, the acceleration of fintech appears to show staying power. Fintech company valuations reached new heights, suggesting that public markets investors believe the digital transformation of financial services has durability in the coming years.

Despite the overcast skies, the innovators described in this book are all working to create a brighter tomorrow that encompasses improved access for the poor, greater stability and more choice for more economies, and enhanced capacities for all. During uncertain times, these digital pioneers are working to shape a new, more positive future.

David L. Shrier and Alex Pentland
Cambridge, MA, and London, UK, July 2021

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The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

This book was set in Stone Serif by Westchester Publishing Services, Danbury, CT.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Shrier, David L., editor. | Pentland, Alex, 1952– editor.

Title: Global fintech : financial innovation in the connected world / edited by David L. Shrier and Alex Pentland.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021030642 | ISBN 9780262543668 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Financial services industry—Technological innovations. | Finance—Data processing.

Classification: LCC HG173 .G636 2022 | DDC 332.1—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021030642>