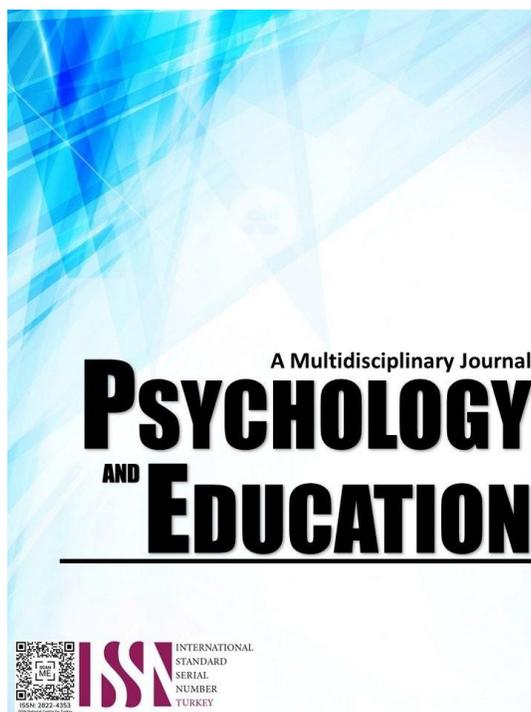


**BUDGETING PRACTICES AND SPENDING HABITS OF GENERATION Z
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Budgeting Practices and Spending Habits of Generation Z Employees: A Descriptive–Correlational Study in Matalam, Cotabato, Philippines

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Abstract

Managing finances is a critical challenge for young workers due to rising expenses and limited financial literacy. Poor budgeting often leads to overspending and debt, whereas effective practices promote stability. This study addressed a notable research gap in local empirical evidence within rural or semi-urban Philippine contexts, specifically in Matalam, Cotabato, regarding the direct link between budgeting and the spending habits of Generation Z employees. Using a quantitative-descriptive correlation design and convenience sampling, data were collected from 100 respondents. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between budgeting practices and spending habits ($r = .802, p < .05$), indicating that improved budgeting directly fosters more disciplined income allocation. These results support the Theory of Planned Behavior, showing that attitudes and social influences shape financial conduct. Practical implications suggest that employers in Matalam can utilize these insights to develop financial literacy programs and employee wellness initiatives to enhance the financial resilience of young workers. The study recommends that Generation Z employees adopt disciplined saving behaviors to mitigate financial stress. Future researchers are encouraged to explore additional variables across a wider locale.

Keywords: *budgeting practices, spending habits, Gen Z, Philippines*

Introduction

In today's fast-changing economic environment, young employees face increasing challenges in managing their finances wisely amid rising expenses and evolving spending norms. As financial demands grow and consumer temptations become more accessible, understanding how young workers handle their income becomes more important than ever. Young Filipino adults in today's society, where purchases can be made with just a click, often demonstrate a growing tendency to spend impulsively on items that appeal to them (Sarmiento, 2024). This behavior has become increasingly evident and has notable social and economic implications, particularly among younger populations (Mani et al., 2024). In a time marked by rapid technological advancement and modernization, financial mismanagement has emerged as a pressing concern among many individuals (Rahayu & Pristiana, 2025). The issue of poor spending habits continues to surface in society, reflected in the rising number of financial difficulties and instability among young people (Bakhtiar et al., 2020). Such circumstances often lead to financial stress, which may affect one's overall well-being and daily functioning (Cappelli et al., 2024).

Financial mismanagement has emerged as a pressing issue, as poor spending habits frequently lead to instability and financial difficulties (Supeno et al., 2024). Such circumstances often result in financial stress, which can negatively impact an individual's daily functioning (Scheres et al., 2023). Because spending habits are a fundamental aspect of personal finance, they play a vital role in shaping an individual's financial well-being and long-term quality of life (Mien & Thao, 2015). This is particularly essential for young adults who are just beginning to make independent financial decisions.

Despite the growing importance of financial resilience, many individuals still struggle to maintain consistent spending patterns that support long-term goals. Previous literature has noted a lack of comprehensive research examining how these specific spending behaviors shape actual financial outcomes in semi-urban or rural locales (Aydin, 2021). While many studies link financial stress to general well-being, most are conducted in urban centers or university settings. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on Generation Z employees in the locality of Matalam, Cotabato, to provide a vivid picture of how their specific economic context shapes their financial behavior.

Theoretically, this research is anchored in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). TPB suggests that an individual's actions are driven by intentions shaped by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Applied to this study, TPB explains how the budgeting intentions of Generation Z employees—such as financial planning and saving habits—translate into actual spending behaviors across necessities, leisure, and miscellaneous expenses. By using this framework, the research seeks to establish the strength of the relationship between structured budgeting practices and disciplined spending habits.

Research Questions

This study examined how budgeting practices influence the spending habits of Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato. To achieve this goal, the following questions guided the inquiry:

1. What is the status of spending habits of Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato, in terms of:
 - 1.1. spending on necessities;

- 1.2. spending on leisure activities; and
- 1.3. spending on miscellaneous items?
2. What is the status of budgeting practices of Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato, in terms of:
 - 2.1 financial planning; and
 - 2.2 saving behavior?
3. Is there a significant relationship between budgeting practices and spending habits of Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato?

Methodology

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive-correlation design as a research design. Quantitative research is a methodical way to analyze numerical data to quantify attitudes, ideas, and actions in order to generalize results from a wider sample group (Mohajan, 2020). The descriptive research design was a method used to systematically present an accurate picture of a population, situation, or phenomenon. A correlational research design investigated the relationship between two or more variables to determine whether they were connected or related. A descriptive research design was used to examine the status of budgeting practices and spending habits of Generation Z employees in Matalam, North Cotabato Province. Furthermore, a correlational methodology was employed to investigate whether budgeting techniques were significantly related to these Gen Z employees' spending patterns.

Respondents

The participants of this study comprised one hundred (100) Generation Z employees—individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—representing the emerging workforce within the municipality of Matalam, North Cotabato. This cohort specifically included young professionals across various sectors, including local businesses, government organizations, and the service industry. To maintain ethical standards and data integrity, the study strictly included only legal-age Gen Z employees and excluded minors. This sample size is methodologically aligned with established standards for descriptive, single-location employee research, particularly when justified by logistical feasibility, anticipated response rates, and the requirements of the intended statistical analysis (Mursa et al., 2025; Althubaiti, 2022; Memon et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2021).

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data gathered, participants were recruited directly from the target population (Alvi, 2016) using convenience sampling. While this non-probability strategy selects participants based on their immediate availability and willingness to engage (Nikolopoulou, 2022), its application in this study is necessitated by the absence of a comprehensive, centralized sampling frame of all Generation Z employees across the diverse private and public sectors of Matalam.

Instrument

An adapted survey questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument for this study. The research consultant and members of the research panel thoroughly evaluated the instrument to guarantee its clarity, relevance, and content validity.

The first instrument was adapted from the study of Dorog et al. (2024) titled “Budgeting Practices and Spending Behaviors: Financial Security and Well-Being.” This tool was used to measure the budgeting practices of Generation Z employees, specifically focusing on financial planning and saving behavior. It consists of eleven (11) statements rated using a five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Moderately Agree, 4 – Agree, and 5 – Strongly Agree.

The second instrument measured the spending habits of the respondents. This section of the survey was similarly adapted from the study by Dorog et al. (2024). It consisted of twelve (12) items covering three domains: spending on necessities, spending on leisure activities, and spending on miscellaneous items. These items were scored using the same 5-point Likert scale.

To ensure empirical rigor, the researchers utilized adapted and validated instruments, a strategy that leverages established measurement scales while ensuring the reliability of the primary data collected. This approach further facilitates comparative analysis with existing literature on personal finance and spending behaviors. To align the instrument with the socio-economic context of Generation Z employees in Matalam, North Cotabato, minor linguistic and contextual modifications were applied. These refinements ensured that the indicators remained relevant to the local workforce's unique spending environment.

A pilot study was conducted among a representative group of Gen Z employees outside the primary study area to evaluate the instrument's clarity, consistency, and cultural appropriateness. The results of the pilot test confirmed high internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Budgeting practices obtained a .82 value while spending habits obtained .72, which makes the instrument acceptable and reliable.

Procedure

Before the conduct of the study, the researchers wrote a formal letter to the Dean of the College of Business and Accountancy, requesting approval to administer the survey questionnaires to Generation Z employees in Matalam, North Cotabato. After the Dean's approval was granted, the researchers sought permission from various business establishments, government offices, and private

organizations within Matalam to approach and survey their employees.

The researchers individually distributed the survey questionnaires to qualified respondents—Generation Z employees who were currently working in Matalam, North Cotabato, and who met the study's inclusion criteria. During the data collection, the researchers closely monitored the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires to ensure the accuracy and completeness of responses. They also addressed any questions or clarifications raised by the respondents to facilitate proper understanding of each survey item.

The entire data-gathering process was completed within two weeks, providing sufficient time for the dissemination, completion, and retrieval of the survey questionnaires. After collection, all completed questionnaires were reviewed to check for completeness and consistency before being encoded and tabulated for statistical analysis. This systematic approach ensured that the data collected were accurate, reliable, and representative of the budgeting practices and spending patterns of Generation Z employees in Matalam, North Cotabato.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were processed and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to ensure empirical accuracy and objective interpretation. Descriptive statistics, specifically the weighted mean and standard deviation, were calculated to evaluate the central tendency and the degree of dispersion in the respondents' budgeting practices and spending habits. These measures provided a statistical basis for assessing the typical financial behaviors and the level of consensus within the Generation Z workforce in Matalam. Furthermore, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Pearson's r) was employed as the primary inferential tool to examine the strength and direction of the linear association between the two variables. The significance level for all correlation analyses was set at $p < .05$. The resulting coefficients were interpreted using established correlation scales to determine the magnitude of the relationship between budgeting proficiency and spending patterns.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers carefully adhered to ten essential dimensions of research ethics, covering key ethical considerations such as social value, informed consent, vulnerability issues, risk-benefit ratio, privacy and confidentiality of information, justice, transparency, qualification of the researchers, adequacy of facilities, and community involvement. Strict measures were implemented to safeguard the confidentiality of all information gathered during the study, in full compliance with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173). This law highlights the importance of transparency, legitimate purpose, and proportionality in the collection, storage, and processing of personal data. By upholding these principles, the researchers demonstrated a strong commitment to ethical research practices and to protecting the privacy rights of all participants.

Results and Discussion

Status of Spending Habits of Generation Z Employees in Matalam, Cotabato

The analysis of the spending habits table reveals a high level of financial discipline among Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato, evidenced by an overall mean of 3.94. The domain of necessities emerged as the highest priority with a mean of 4.05, underscored by a very high commitment to setting aside funds for food and water, which earned the highest individual mean of 4.33. Respondents also demonstrated strong price consciousness across all categories, specifically through comparing costs for necessities (4.11), miscellaneous items (4.03), and leisure activities (3.98). While spending on miscellaneous items (3.92) and leisure (3.85) both maintain a high descriptive level, the data indicates a more cautious approach to discretionary funds; notably, the practice of setting aside a specific portion of salary for recreation received the lowest rating in the table at 3.56.

The findings indicate that Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato, have adopted a strategic consumer identity characterized by high price sensitivity and utility-based decision-making. The prioritization of essential expenditures, evidenced by high mean scores for food and utility allocations, suggests that financial management serves as a critical mechanism for securing fundamental needs against economic volatility and inflation. This discipline- essentials-first approach is contrasted by the treatment of recreational spending as a residual, non-structured budgetary item. Ultimately, these results refute stereotypes of impulsive youth consumption, revealing instead that rural Gen Z workers employ cautious, analytical spending behaviors to achieve economic resilience. Such patterns imply a significant demand for value-driven financial tools and policies that support long-term stability rather than discretionary consumption.

These findings support the study of Zambonni and Loopstra (2023), which reported that households experiencing financial constraints tend to prioritize essential needs by allocating a greater proportion of their budget to necessities. Similarly, Kumar and Ramesha (2024) emphasized that necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter remain central to individual spending priorities. In addition, Wang (2025) noted that individuals in lower-income groups often demonstrate disciplined spending behavior when it comes to essential goods. Furthermore, these results support previous studies. Iso-Ahola and Baumeister (2023) noted that participation in leisure activities is largely driven by autonomy and personal choice. Similarly, Tutar and Turhan (2023) found that individual preferences and cultural factors influence leisure spending habits. Sander et al. (2021) pointed out that engagement in leisure activities contributes to personality development, highlighting the importance of leisure despite financial constraints. Moreover, supporting these results, Zhang (2023)



emphasized that excessive spending on miscellaneous items may lead to financial stress, while Murphy (2018) described such expenditures as being driven more by personal gratification than necessity. Similarly, Tokmak (2019) noted that socially motivated or conspicuous spending often results in irrational financial choices.

Table 1. *Spending Habits*

<i>Indicators / Domains</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Descriptive Level</i>
<i>Spending habits on necessities</i>			
1. Individuals tend to purchase food, drinks, etc., only when necessary.	4.04	1.07	High
2. When purchasing food, drink, etc., Individuals tend to examine their benefits first.	3.73	0.99	High
3. Individuals often compare the costs of various foods, water, etc., before making purchases.	4.11	0.91	High
4. When receiving their salary, individuals tend to set aside a certain amount of money for things like food and water.	4.33	0.90	Very High
<i>Category</i>	4.05	0.90	High
<i>Spending habits on leisure activities</i>			
5. Individuals tend to spend on hobbies only when necessary.	3.88	0.97	High
6. Before spending on items or activities that bring pleasure, individuals tend to consider their advantages.	3.96	0.95	High
7. When spending on recreational activities, individuals tend to compare prices first.	3.98	0.96	High
8. When receiving their salary, individuals tend to set aside a portion for recreational activities.	3.56	1.09	High
<i>Category</i>	3.85	0.78	High
<i>Spending habits on miscellaneous items</i>			
9. Individuals tend to purchase miscellaneous items only when necessary.	3.97	0.92	High
10. When spending money on miscellaneous expenses, Individuals tend to examine their benefits first.	3.92	0.87	High
11. When spending money on miscellaneous expenses, Individuals tend to compare their costs before buying.	4.03	0.86	High
12. When receiving their salary, individuals tend to set aside a portion of money for miscellaneous expenses.	3.77	0.95	High
<i>Category</i>	3.92	0.69	High
<i>Overall</i>	3.94	.62	High

Legend: 4.20-5.00 =very high, 3.40-4.19=high, 2.60-3.39=moderate, 1.80-2.59=low, 1.00-1.79=very low

Status of Budgeting Habits of Generation Z Employees in Matalam, Cotabato

The statistical analysis reveals that Generation Z employees in Matalam, Cotabato, possess a high level of financial discipline. The study recorded a very high overall mean of 4.21 for budgeting practices, where specific indicators showed that employees are highly proactive, particularly in setting aside money for savings with a mean of 4.19 and adjusting expenses to stay within budget with a mean of 4.24. This structured approach directly influences their spending habits, which earned a high overall mean of 3.94. Within the spending domains, the respondents prioritized necessities with a mean of 4.05; notably, the indicator for setting aside food and water upon receiving salary reached a very high mean of 4.33, while comparing costs of essential goods scored 4.11. Miscellaneous spending also showed discipline, with a mean of 3.92, highlighted by a mean of 4.03 for comparing costs before purchasing. Leisure activities, while still rated high at 3.85, showed the most restraint, as the indicator for comparing prices for recreation scored 3.98. In contrast, the tendency to set aside money specifically for recreational activities was the lowest rated at 3.56.

The findings demonstrate that financial discipline among Generation Z employees is a cultivated outcome of structured planning rather than an inherent trait. By prioritizing essential physiological needs as a primary buffer against economic volatility, these workers exert high agency over their financial outcomes. This preference for essentials-first allocation suggests that financial literacy programs focusing on automated savings and price-comparison strategies would be highly effective for this demographic. Ultimately, the data reveal that rural Gen Z employees utilize disciplined budgeting as a foundational tool for economic resilience, maximizing limited resources for long-term stability over short-term gratification.

These findings support the study of Shedje (2024), who emphasized the importance of regular financial planning and monitoring. Similarly, Shah and Bhatt (2016) and Karodia et al. (2016) highlighted that financial planning guides decision-making and promotes effective cash-flow management. Furthermore, these results align with Nawi et al. (2022), who described saving as a forward-looking financial behavior, and Pacheco et al. (2024) and Prakash and Thanduthapani (2024), who emphasized saving as essential for future security and long-term financial well-being.



Table 2. Budgeting practices

Indicators / Domains	Mean	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Level
Financial Planning			
Making a weekly or monthly budget to keep track of expenses.	4.05	0.98	High
Constantly keep a check on weekly spending.	3.98	0.97	High
Adjusting expenses following the budget.	4.28	0.91	Very High
Prioritizing essential expenses (e.g., rent, food, and transportation).	4.55	0.78	Very High
Budgeting helps avoid pointless purchases.	4.36	0.76	Very High
Category	4.24	0.71	Very High
Saving Habits			
Saving a certain amount of salary regularly.	4.07	0.95	High
Saving money for emergencies or unexpected costs	4.19	0.83	High
Monthly savings enable putting needs before wants.	4.25	0.82	Very high
Consistent saving helps better control daily spending efficiently.	4.09	0.85	High
Feeling more stable financially when prioritizing saving over unnecessary purchases.	4.24	0.83	Very High
Saving money makes individuals feel in control of their financial condition.	4.27	0.85	Very High
Category	4.19	0.71	High
Overall	4.21	0.66	Very High

Legend: 4.20-5.00 =very high, 3.40-4.19=high, 2.60-3.39=moderate, 1.80-2.59=low, 1.00-1.79=very low

Relationship Among Variables

The correlation was made to see the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The table shows that the correlation between Budgeting practices and Spending habits is significant ($p < 0.05$), thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.56$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This suggests that individuals with good budgeting practices, such as financial planning and saving behavior, are more disciplined in spending habits on necessities, leisure activities, and miscellaneous items.

Table 3. Relationship Between Variables

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Remarks	Decision on Ho
Spending Habits and Budgeting Practices	.56	.00	Significant	Reject

These findings signify that individuals with better budgeting practices tend to demonstrate more responsible spending behaviors as budgeting practices improve. Employees who have better budgeting practices are more likely to properly plan their spending, manage their money, and make smart purchases. The result also shows that employees from Generation Z who regularly budget are more likely to distinguish between necessities and miscellaneous expenses. Furthermore, the result indicates that practicing good budgeting practices helps promote responsible spending habits and support a more stable financial lifestyle.

The findings of the study provide valuable insights into the relationship between budgeting practices and spending habits. The outcome of this study is supported by the results of the study conducted by Simamora et al. (2024), stating that a significant relationship exists between Generation Z employees' spending habits and their financial management skills. Additionally, Supeno et al. (2024) propose that effective budgeting techniques have a direct impact on overall money management abilities and financial behavior, while a better understanding of finances and budgeting techniques indirectly leads to better money management abilities.

Moreover, Maina and Waweru (2024) reported that there is a clear and substantial positive correlation between spending habits and budget practices, suggesting that solid budget planning improves financial control. Furthermore, the results of this investigation are consistent with Lulaj (2024), who suggested that spending habits are a critical driver in Budgeting Practices. For controlling excessive spending and preserving financial stability, effective budgeting practices are crucial. To maximize financial resources. It also shows that effective spending and strategic budgeting practices are essential for building resilience against unanticipated financial difficulties, which in turn leads to better financial well-being.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the Generation Z workforce in Matalam, Cotabato—primarily composed of single, female young adults with modest incomes—exhibits a strategic consumer identity where demographic factors significantly shape disciplined financial behaviors. Respondents demonstrate high accountability by prioritizing essential physiological needs, such as food and water, while treating leisure and miscellaneous expenditures as residual, non-structured budgetary items. This cautious approach is supported by robust budgeting practices that emphasize long-term stability and proactive saving, refuting stereotypes of impulsive youth consumption. Crucially, a significant positive correlation exists between budgeting proficiency and spending discipline, suggesting that structured financial planning directly facilitates a more critical and controlled consumption lens. Ultimately, this integrated model of money management serves as a foundational mechanism for economic resilience, where intentional resource allocation ensures survival and stability amidst localized economic volatility.

Icek Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides the theoretical framework for this study, asserting that financial actions are driven by behavioral intentions shaped by three factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. For Generation Z employees, budgeting practices and spending habits are not arbitrary but are systematically influenced by their personal beliefs, social pressures, and perceived financial capacity. By applying TPB, this study elucidates the psychological drivers of financial decision-making, highlighting how intentionality and perceived control foster disciplined resource management among young professionals.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that local government units and financial institutions collaborate to develop targeted financial literacy programs that move beyond basic savings toward advanced inflation-hedging and micro-investment strategies, catering to the demographic's existing stability-oriented mindset. Banks and cooperatives should introduce automated budgeting and "goal-based" savings tools that align with the respondents' "essentials-first" habits and the high correlation between structured planning and spending discipline. Additionally, employers should integrate financial wellness into benefit packages—such as automated retirement deductions—to support the economic resilience of modest-income workers. Finally, future research should utilize longitudinal designs and probability sampling to determine if these disciplined behaviors persist across different life stages and higher income brackets.

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