

Exploring Financial Management Behavior among University Students: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Management Behavior
among University

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the interaction between financial literacy, attitudes, self-control, and social factors in shaping the financial behavior of students in Indonesia, incorporating the roles of fintech and social media. A qualitative grounded theory approach was employed, using in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected participants. Findings reveal that although students have access to various financial information sources, their literacy and application levels remain limited. Their financial behavior is heavily influenced by social pressure, the fear of missing out phenomenon, and social media, often leading to impulsive spending. Families play a crucial role in forming early financial habits, while self-control is key to managing spending temptations. Students developed adaptive strategies like saving, reducing expenses, and using financial apps to overcome challenges. The study concludes that a holistic approach, enhancing financial literacy, strengthening self-control, and educating on the social-digital environment, is essential to improve student financial behavior. These implications provide a basis for developing more effective and contextual financial education programs in higher education.

Keywords: Financial Behavior, Financial Literacy, Grounded Theory, Self-Control, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the financial management behavior of university students has grown quickly in recent years because it plays an important role in their short-term and long-term financial well-being (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Xiao et al., 2022). Students who can make smart financial decisions tend to handle debt better, save more regularly, and feel more satisfied with their finances (Tahir et al., 2022; Danahy et al., 2024). In today's world, the financial environment has changed a lot with digital services, fintech apps, and social media driving consumer trends. This makes financial choices more complicated, especially in developing countries like Indonesia, where financial literacy and inclusion programs are still being built (Farida et al., 2021; Pal et al., 2021; Dorfleitner & Nguyen, 2024). Bibliometric studies also show growing interest in how fintech connects with

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sustainability goals, such as green finance and digital banking, but there are still gaps in global coverage and research methods (Azis & Karunia, 2025).

Indonesia still faces a serious challenge with financial literacy. According to the latest National Survey on Financial Literacy and Inclusion (*Survei Nasional Literasi dan Inklusi Keuangan/SNLIK*) 2024, the financial literacy index for the population stands at 65.43%, while the financial inclusion index is 75.02%. This is an improvement from earlier years, but the situation remains worrying for university students. Many students experience financial stress, which affects their studies and mental health. Recent studies in Indonesia show that financial stress is common among students, often linked to limited income, rising living costs, and easy access to digital loans (Gunawan et al., 2023). For example, some students fall into debt from pay-later services or online shopping trends, which can lead to poor academic performance or even dropout (Wan, 2021). Economically, high graduate unemployment remains a problem, with Indonesia's youth unemployment rate among the highest in ASEAN at around 12.5% in recent World Bank data. This creates extra pressure on students to manage money wisely during their studies.

The literature points to three main groups of factors that shape students' financial behavior. First, financial literacy shows a positive link with good habits like saving and managing debt (Chuah et al., 2020). In Indonesia, recent studies confirm that both basic and advanced financial knowledge affect financial management, with advanced knowledge having a stronger effect (Navilla, 2025; Suci & Santoso, 2025). Second, psychological factors such as financial attitudes and self-control strongly predict financial discipline (Strömbäck et al., 2017; Baptista, 2021). Third, financial socialization from family, peers, and education programs helps build responsible behavior (Zulfaris et al., 2020). However, there is a common issue: having knowledge does not always lead to better actions, because attitudes and self-control act as important bridges (Gunawan et al., 2023).

Despite these findings, several key gaps still exist in the research. First, most studies come from Western countries, with fewer deep explorations in developing contexts like Indonesia (Bamforth et al., 2017; Sachitra et al., 2019). Second, while some Indonesian studies use surveys to measure financial literacy and behavior, they often miss the dynamic interactions between literacy, attitudes, self-control, and social factors in real student life (Goyal et al., 2022; Syaliha et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2023). Third, the growing role of fintech and social media in shaping financial decisions is still underexplored, even though platforms like TikTok and pay-later apps strongly influence impulsive spending among young people (Farida et al., 2021). Most research relies on quantitative methods, which do not fully capture the personal experiences and coping strategies of students facing financial challenges.

This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how financial literacy, financial attitudes, self-control, and social factors interact to shape the financial management behavior of university students in Indonesia. It uses a grounded theory approach to build new insights directly from students' own experiences. The study also examines the influence of fintech and social media on students' financial habits, as well as the strategies they use to cope with financial stress, including debt and saving challenges. This research explores how financial literacy, financial attitudes, and self-control interact in shaping students' financial management behavior. It also analyzes the role of social factors, such as family support and peer influence, in students' financial decision-making processes. Furthermore, the study investigates how students manage financial difficulties related to debt and savings within their social and economic contexts. By addressing these issues, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding and practical insights to enhance financial literacy and financial well-being among Indonesian students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Financial Literacy in Student Financial Behavior

Financial literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions, such as budgeting, saving, and managing debt. Many studies show that higher

financial literacy leads to better financial practices among university students. For example, students with good literacy tend to save more regularly and handle credit wisely (Chuah et al., 2020; Zulfaris et al., 2020; Amri et al., 2022). In Indonesia, research confirms that both basic and advanced financial knowledge have a positive effect on financial management, with advanced knowledge showing a stronger impact (Ehsan, 2023; Navilla, 2025; Suci & Santoso, 2025). According to Syaliha et al. (2022), financial literacy acts as a key driver for students to plan their money better and avoid poor habits like overspending.

However, having knowledge alone does not always change behavior. Some students know about financial concepts from seminars, books, or online sources, but they still struggle to apply them in daily life. This gap often appears because other factors, like attitudes or external pressures, interfere (Sukma et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2023). Recent studies in Indonesia by Bapat (2020) also highlight that financial literacy can improve when combined with practical tools, such as digital apps, but many students still lack a deep understanding. Kang and Park (2024) found that enhanced financial literacy helps students make better plans and decisions, yet the direct link to actual behavior is sometimes weak without support from other elements. Financial literacy is important, but it works best when it connects with real-life applications and other influences. This suggests a need for more contextual studies, especially in developing countries where access to quality education varies.

Psychological Factors: Attitudes, Self-Control, and Self-Efficacy

Psychological factors play a big role in how students manage their money. Financial attitudes, self-control, and self-efficacy often predict whether students act responsibly with finances. Positive attitudes toward money, such as seeing saving as valuable, lead to better discipline (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Rohmah et al., 2021; Baptista, 2021). According to Elliott and Lewis (2015) and Strömbäck et al. (2017), self-control is one of the strongest predictors of healthy financial behavior, including avoiding debt and maintaining savings. Students with high self-control feel less anxious about money and make fewer impulsive choices.

Self-efficacy, or belief in one's ability to handle finances, also matters a lot. When students feel confident, they are more likely to track expenses or plan ahead (Callahan, 2014; Mutlu & Özer, 2022; Surwanti et al., 2024). However, many face challenges like financial anxiety, which can override knowledge and lead to poor decisions (Grable et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023). In Indonesian contexts, studies show that self-control helps students resist temptations, but low self-efficacy often results in uncertainty about investments or budgeting (Goyal et al., 2022). Baptista (2021) emphasized that the internal locus of control, linked to self-efficacy, strongly influences financial management among working-age groups, and similar patterns appear in student samples. These psychological elements act as mediators, knowledge alone is not enough if attitudes are negative or self-control is weak. This highlights why interventions should include training in emotional regulation and building confidence, not just teaching facts.

Social and Digital Influences: Family, Peers, Fintech, and Social Media

Social factors shape financial behavior from an early age and continue to affect students in university. Family plays a key role through financial socialization, where parents teach saving habits, frugality, and money management (Zulfaris et al., 2020; White et al., 2021; Chetioui et al., 2024). Students who learn these values at home often manage allowances better and show more discipline (Gudmunson & Danes, 2011; Cho et al., 2012; Ramli et al., 2022). Peers, however, can push toward consumerist lifestyles, especially through group spending or following trends.

Digital influences have grown stronger with fintech and social media. Platforms like TikTok expose students to shopping trends and promotions, often leading to impulsive buying via pay-later services (Farida et al., 2021; Gunawan et al., 2023). According to Chen et al. (2012), social media and fintech apps influence students' confidence and

behavior, sometimes increasing debt due to easy access. Fintech offers tools for tracking expenses, but it can also encourage spending if not used wisely (Dorfleitner & Nguyen, 2024; Sukma et al., 2024). The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) from social media adds pressure, making students spend to fit in (Syaliha et al., 2022). Positive sides include sharing costs with friends or learning tips online. Baptista (2021), as referenced in recent reviews, noted that social media impacts financial behavior through peer relations and influencers. These influences create a dual effect: support from family versus temptations from digital and social environments. This area needs more exploration in Indonesia, where digital growth is rapid, but literacy lags.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a grounded theory approach to explore students' perceptions and experiences in financial management (Teppo, 2014; Belgrave & Seide, 2019). The qualitative method allowed for an in-depth understanding of how financial literacy, attitudes, self-control, and social factors interact in shaping behavior, while also considering the roles of fintech and social media. Data collection involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected participants from Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember. Purposive sampling ensured the selection of students who could provide rich insights based on their varying experiences with income sources, spending habits, savings, debt, and digital financial tools.

Interviews focused on key topics such as daily expenses, sources of income, saving practices, debt management, influences from family and peers, and the impact of social media or fintech applications. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage open sharing. All participants provided written informed consent, and their participation was voluntary with full approval from the university. To build a grounded theory, the process followed iterative coding: open coding to identify initial concepts from transcripts, axial coding to connect categories and explore relationships, and selective coding to integrate findings around a central theme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data analysis began after the first few interviews, allowing constant comparison and refinement of emerging categories as new data came in.

The study applied several strategies to ensure trustworthiness and rigor. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing interview responses with demographic details and cross-checking themes across participants. Member checking involved sharing preliminary summaries with some interviewees to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing occurred through regular discussions among researchers to reach consensus on codes and categories. Data saturation was reached when no new concepts or variations emerged after the later interviews, confirming the sample was sufficient for depth rather than breadth (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Wutich et al., 2024). Respondent identities remained confidential, and minor grammatical adjustments were made to quotes for clarity without changing meaning. Through this systematic process, the goal was to develop a contextual theory of students' financial management behavior that could inform better financial literacy programs in higher education.

RESULTS

The findings from this grounded theory study are organized around the three research questions. Descriptive statistical analysis of participants is presented in Table 1. Details indicate that participants in this study are between 19 and 22 years old, with the majority being 21 years old, suggesting they are in their third or fourth year of study. In terms of gender, there are more female participants (13) than male participants (7). Respondents come from two major study programs, Management and Biology Education, with most of them enrolled in the Management program from the 2021 and 2023 academic years.

Most students live in boarding houses, while some still live with their parents, which potentially influences their spending patterns and financial management. In terms of income, nearly all students rely on their parents as their primary source of financial

support, with only one respondent having a part-time job. The level of debt among respondents is relatively low, although some rely on loans from family members. The campus environment has a varying influence on students' financial habits, particularly regarding lifestyle and financial management.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Details (Names Anonymized)

| No | Participant | Age | Gender | Study Program | Academic Year | Residence | Main Source of Income | Debt |
|----|-------------|-----|--------|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| 1 | P01 | 22 | Male | Management | 2020 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 2 | P02 | 21 | Male | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | Yes |
| 3 | P03 | 21 | Male | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 4 | P04 | 21 | Female | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 5 | P05 | 21 | Male | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 6 | P06 | 21 | Male | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 7 | P07 | 20 | Female | Management | 2023 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 8 | P08 | 20 | Female | Biology Education | 2023 | Living with parents | Parents | No |
| 9 | P09 | 21 | Female | Biology Education | 2021 | Not specified | Parents | No |
| 10 | P10 | 21 | Female | Biology Education | 2021 | Not specified | Parents | No |
| 11 | P11 | 20 | Female | Biology | 2023 | Not specified | Parents | No |
| 12 | P12 | 19 | Female | Management | 2023 | Boarding House | Parents | Yes |
| 13 | P13 | 19 | Female | Management | 2023 | Living with parents | Parents | Yes |
| 14 | P14 | 21 | Female | Biology Education | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 15 | P15 | 21 | Female | Biology Education | 2021 | Boarding House | Part-time Job | No |
| 16 | P16 | 20 | Female | Management | 2023 | Not specified | Parents | Yes |
| 17 | P17 | 21 | Female | Management | 2021 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 18 | P18 | 21 | Female | Biology Education | 2020 | Boarding House | Parents | Unknown |
| 19 | P19 | 20 | Male | Management | 2023 | Boarding House | Parents | No |
| 20 | P20 | 21 | Male | Management | 2023 | Living with parents | Parents | No |

Financial Literacy, Attitudes, and Self-Control in Students' Financial Behavior

Students showed access to various financial information sources, including seminars, the internet, social media like TikTok, and academic courses, but their literacy and practical application remained limited. Many expressed basic knowledge about concepts such as budgeting and the importance of saving, yet they often faced challenges in implementing these ideas due to distractions or a lack of depth in the sources. This aligns with research indicating that financial literacy positively correlates with healthy practices like saving and debt management, though knowledge alone does not guarantee behavior change (Joo & Grable, 2004; Chuah et al., 2020; Zulfaris et al., 2020). Empirical findings

from Indonesia further support that advanced financial literacy has a stronger influence on management behaviors compared to basic levels (Navilla, 2025; Suci & Santoso, 2025).

Financial attitudes significantly shaped how students approached their money, often leading to a mix of positive intentions and impulsive actions. Participants generally recognized the value of wise spending and long-term planning, but many admitted that attitudes toward immediate gratification frequently overrode these ideals, especially in the face of discounts or trends. This reflects the paradox where attitudes act as mediators between knowledge and behavior, as highlighted in studies showing that positive financial attitudes enhance discipline (Syalih et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2023; Kamalbatcha et al., 2024). Some students described uncertainty in starting investments despite knowing their importance, which tied into broader psychological barriers affecting decision-making (Strömbäck et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2023).

Self-control emerged as a key factor in determining whether literacy and attitudes translated into effective financial management. Students with better self-control used strategies like dividing money into categories for daily needs, savings, and emergencies, or employing apps to track expenses, which helped them resist temptations. In contrast, those with weaker control often withdrew savings for non-essential items or made unplanned purchases during sales, leading to cycles of regret and adjustment. Research confirms that self-control is pivotal in financial decision-making, reducing anxiety and promoting better habits (Grable et al., 2020; Goyal et al., 2022; Kapadia & Patil, 2023). The use of technology, such as financial apps, was seen as a supportive tool for building control, aligning with recommendations for gamification in education to boost motivation (Lučić & Uzelac, 2024).

The interaction among literacy, attitudes, and self-control created varied behavioral patterns, where limited literacy combined with negative attitudes amplified control challenges. For example, social media's accessible but shallow information sometimes reinforces impulsive attitudes, making self-control harder to maintain amid promotions or trends. This dynamic is consistent with findings that psychological predispositions like self-efficacy influence how knowledge is applied (Rohmah et al., 2021; Baptista, 2021). Students who developed adaptive habits, such as manual recording or app usage, showed how strengthening one element could positively affect the others, suggesting a need for holistic interventions.

Impulsive spending temptations, often triggered by discounts or online recommendations, highlighted the vulnerability in this interplay. Many students acknowledged wanting to budget but struggled with consistency, leading to inconsistent application of their knowledge. This supports the idea that attitudes and control function as critical predictors, sometimes outweighing literacy (Mutlu & Özer, 2022; Surwanti et al., 2024). These elements formed a complex web where literacy provided the base, attitudes directed motivation, and self-control ensured execution, with gaps in any area leading to suboptimal financial management. Delayed gratification concepts were evident, as students who could postpone desires exhibited stronger control and better alignment between attitudes and actions. External factors like aggressive marketing further test this balance, underscoring why psychological factors dominate in behavior formation (Rani & Goyal, 2024). The findings reveal that enhancing self-control through practical tools could bridge literacy-attitude gaps, offering insights for targeted education programs.

The Role of Social Factors in Students' Financial Decision-Making

Family played a crucial foundational role in forming students' financial habits, often instilling values of saving, frugality, and simple living from an early age. Participants described how parental reminders to set aside money or adjust lifestyles to income levels helped them manage allowances effectively during university. This early socialization created lasting patterns, such as periodic allowance management that taught planning until the next month. Studies affirm that family-based financial education significantly

influences behavior, with attitudes and locus of control as key elements (Syaliha et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2023). Parents also acted as a safety net, providing advice or extra funds when needed, which reinforced responsible decision-making.

Peer influence introduced contrasting pressures, encouraging consumerist behaviors through conversations about new purchases or social activities. Students often felt compelled to follow friends' habits, such as buying unnecessary items to avoid feeling excluded, which complicated their financial choices. Invitations to hang out or shop together were hard to decline, even when funds were low, highlighting the social cost of restraint. Research shows that peer pressure and social media exposure drive consumption, often leading to impulsive decisions (Syaliha et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2023; Nuris et al., 2023). However, positive aspects emerged, like sharing costs with friends for efficiency, demonstrating that social ties could also support wise habits.

Social media and digital environments intensified these influences by promoting trends and easy access to shopping. Participants noted how platforms facilitated impulsive buys through recommendations and promotions, amplifying FOMO and making restraint challenging. The campus setting further shaped behaviors, with lifestyle expectations preserving consumer patterns or encouraging overspending. This aligns with findings on the dual role of social factors, where media can hinder control while also offering learning opportunities (Rohmah et al., 2021; Baptista, 2021). The interplay showed that negative digital pressures often outweighed positive family foundations unless students actively countered them.

The fear of missing out phenomenon was a major driver in decision-making, pushing students to spend on trends to maintain social acceptance. Seeing others engage in activities or purchases online created urgency, leading to choices that prioritized belonging over financial health. Yet, some students leveraged social networks for benefits, such as group buying to save money, indicating adaptive uses of these factors. Literature emphasizes the need for interventions that address social realities, like gamification to build resilience against pressures (Lučić & Uzelac, 2024). This highlights how social factors create non-linear effects, blending support and challenges.

Family's ongoing role as a counterbalance was evident, with students drawing on early teachings to navigate peer and media influences (Arifin, 2018). Those with strong family financial socialization showed better resistance to external temptations, aligning with theories on the importance of an internal locus of control (Chuah et al., 2020; Rohmah et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2023). The findings suggest that social factors interact dynamically, where positive family input can mitigate negative peer and digital effects, but only if reinforced through education. Campus and broader social environments added layers, with limited financial services exacerbating reliance on informal networks (Zhou et al., 2024; Zupančič & Lep, 2025). Participants adapted by balancing social participation with frugality, but trends often tipped the scale toward spending. This supports views on self-control's role in moderating social influences (Goyal et al., 2022; Xin et al., 2023; Rani & Goyal, 2024). Social factors shaped decisions as a web of pressures and supports, calling for contextual approaches in financial training.

Managing Financial Challenges: Debt, Savings, and Adaptation in Social-Economic

Students exhibited high dependence on parental support for core needs like tuition and allowances, which provided security but constrained independence in handling extra expenses. When funds fell short for leisure or surprises, many requested additional money from parents, avoiding external debt but sometimes feeling burdened by repeated asks. This pattern reflected limited income sources and the economic realities of student life in Indonesia, where part-time work was rare among participants. Research by Wan (2021) and Syaliha et al. (2022) indicates that such dependence can hinder full financial autonomy, though it serves as a buffer against stress.

Strategies for managing savings and debt focused on prevention and adaptation, with students preferring to save rather than borrow due to fears of repayment issues. They allocated funds carefully, recording expenses or setting aside portions for emergencies,

which helped maintain balance despite limited resources. Some postponed wants until extra funds were available, demonstrating emerging discipline in prioritizing needs. These approaches align with findings that self-control aids in avoiding debt and enhancing management (Chuah et al., 2020; Goyal et al., 2022; Nurkholik, 2024). Manual methods or apps were common tools, offering visibility and control over outflows.

Financial stress from challenges like unexpected costs or nearing allowance depletion prompted various coping mechanisms. Participants relieved tension through low-cost recreation, such as hobbies or simple outings, which provided mental breaks without adding expenses. Others used stress as motivation to improve habits, becoming more disciplined after past shortfalls. This emotional regulation is key to better behavior, as studies show it influences how individuals handle anxiety and decisions (Grable et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023; Pakos & Mpogiatzidis, 2025). Social-economic contexts, including campus limitations, amplified these stresses but also fostered resilience.

Overcoming barriers like poor access to financial services involved self-directed efforts, such as learning from peers or online resources. Students adapted by reducing non-essentials, cooking meals, or limiting social spending, which stretched their budgets further (White et al., 2021). When sudden needs arose, they relied on family loans over formal options, viewing them as safer. This mirrors research on adaptive strategies in constrained environments, where tracking and prioritization build skills (Wan, 2021; Fadilah & Purwanto, 2022; Ramli et al., 2022). The process showed gradual growth in managing debt risks and saving consistency.

Budgeting skills varied, with some students limiting unnecessary items and others using apps for structured tracking, which enhanced awareness and reduced overspending. Preferences for manual vs. digital methods depended on familiarity, but both aimed at sustainability. Technology's role in this adaptation supports calls for digital tools in education to improve literacy and control (Palaci et al., 2017; Lučić & Uzelac, 2024; Ruiz-dotras, 2025). In social-economic terms, these skills helped navigate parental dependence and peer pressures, leading to more balanced approaches over time.

Mental health impacts from financial challenges were notable, with stress leading to symptoms like worry or depression, but coping through discipline or relaxation mitigated them. Participants learned from experiences, refining strategies to prevent recurrence, which built long-term habits. This aligns with views that stress can motivate skill enhancement when managed well (Goyal et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023). Adaptation in these contexts involved blending family support, personal tools, and emotional strategies to handle debt and savings effectively. The themes across the three areas revealed interconnected dynamics: internal factors (literacy, attitudes, self-control) interacted with external social pressures, while adaptive strategies emerged as responses to economic realities and limited resources. These patterns formed the basis for an emerging grounded understanding of financial behavior among Indonesian university students.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights that students' financial management behavior stems from a complex interplay of internal and external factors rather than financial literacy alone. Although participants had access to diverse information sources, such as seminars, the internet, TikTok, and university courses, their practical application remained limited. Abundant information did not automatically translate into improved behavior, a pattern consistent with earlier findings that knowledge must be mediated by psychological elements to affect actions (Grable et al., 2020). Financial anxiety often moderated the benefits of literacy, making psychological factors more dominant in daily decisions.

Self-control stood out as the most influential internal driver, frequently tested by social pressures and digital temptations such as discounts, trends, and FOMO. Students who exhibited stronger self-control were better able to resist impulsive spending and implement adaptive strategies like budgeting or using financial apps. This aligns with meta-analytic evidence showing self-control as a primary psychological antecedent of effective personal financial management (Goyal et al., 2022). In contrast, weaker self-control amplified the

effects of hedonistic attitudes and external cues, explaining why many participants struggled despite knowing the value of saving.

The social environment played a dual role, acting both as a source of pressure and as a support mechanism. Peer influence and social media often encouraged consumerist lifestyles through FOMO and visible trends, leading to impulsive purchases that undermined financial discipline. At the same time, family socialization provided a protective foundation by embedding early habits of frugality, saving, and living within means. According to Gunawan et al. (2023), social factors such as peer pressure and media exposure significantly shape consumption behavior among Indonesian students, while family teachings remain a key buffer. This duality underscores the non-linear nature of social influences in the Indonesian context, where rapid digital adoption coexists with traditional family values.

High dependence on parental financial support created a paradox: it offered security against severe debt but restricted full autonomy and delayed independent skill development. Students adapted by developing practical strategies, saving small amounts, reducing non-essential expenses, cooking at home, and leveraging fintech tools for expense tracking. These responses reflect resilience in constrained socio-economic settings. The increasing use of financial applications supports recent observations that digital tools and gamification can enhance motivation and control when integrated thoughtfully (Lučić & Uzelac, 2024). However, preferences for manual methods among some participants remind us that technology should complement, not replace, conceptual understanding and self-discipline.

These findings contribute to a contextual model tailored to Indonesian university students, incorporating parental dependence, digital leaps, and the dynamic interaction of cognitive, psychological, and social elements. Unlike studies that emphasize literacy and locus of control, such as Syaliha et al. (2022) and Gunawan et al. (2023), this research foregrounds emotional regulation, FOMO, and adaptive coping in a developing-country setting. It enriches behavioral finance theory by illustrating how self-control moderates digital temptations and supports financial socialization theory through the enduring role of family (Strömbäck et al., 2017; Chuah et al., 2020). The theory of planned behavior is also extended, as intentions shaped by attitudes and norms were frequently disrupted by perceived control challenges in real-life contexts.

The results call for holistic, personalized financial education programs in higher education. Such programs should go beyond knowledge transmission to include soft-skills training in emotion regulation, resistance to social-digital pressures, and wise use of fintech. Engaging families and institutions in these efforts would strengthen early socialization while addressing current realities like pay-later accessibility and social media influence. By focusing on self-control and contextual adaptation, interventions can better equip students to navigate financial challenges and achieve long-term well-being.

CONCLUSION

This grounded theory study reveals that university students' financial management behavior in Indonesia emerges from a dynamic and interconnected process involving financial literacy, attitudes, self-control, social pressures, and digital influences. Although students have access to various information channels, including seminars, social media, and fintech tools, their ability to apply this knowledge consistently remains limited. Self-control acts as the central mechanism that determines whether positive attitudes and partial literacy lead to responsible habits or give way to impulsive spending driven by FOMO, peer trends, and easy digital access. Family socialization provides an important early foundation of frugality and saving, yet it often competes with stronger consumerist signals from peers and online platforms. Students show resilience by developing adaptive strategies such as budgeting, expense tracking, cost-cutting, and selective use of financial applications, even while remaining heavily dependent on parental support. These patterns highlight that effective financial behavior requires not just knowledge, but also

psychological strength and contextual awareness to navigate the unique challenges of student life in a rapidly digitizing environment.

The findings highlight key implications for enhancing financial education in higher education. Programs should adopt a holistic approach combining financial knowledge with practical training in self-control, emotional regulation, and resistance to social-digital pressures, alongside family involvement and real-life scenarios relevant to Indonesian students. Universities could implement gamified apps, peer-led workshops, and family-oriented modules to make learning engaging and effective. However, this study has limitations: it focuses on a single university with a small purposive sample, relies on self-reported interview data, and lacks longitudinal follow-up to track behavior changes. Future research should include multiple institutions across regions, employ mixed-methods with validated scales, and examine long-term effects of interventions, especially the roles of fintech and social media in shaping financial habits of Generation Z students.

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