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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL PAYMENTS ON SPENDING BEHAVIOR AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects of digital payments on spending behavior and personal financial management among young people in Vietnam through a comparative synthesis of secondary evidence. Sources include payment statistics, Global Findex data, consumer surveys, and empirical studies from Vietnam and other countries. The findings indicate that the expansion of electronic transactions is accompanied by changes in payment patterns and greater traceability of spending. However, payment growth does not directly measure increased consumption or improved financial management. Existing research identifies a small positive cashless effect on spending and an association with impulse buying. In financial management, transaction tracking does not automatically translate into budgeting, saving, or resilience to income shocks. The article recommends integrating financial education with budgeting practice, improving the transparency of buy-now-pay-later obligations, and designing tools that support spending control and transaction security.

Keyword: Digital payments; young people in Vietnam; spending behavior; personal financial management; financial literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital payments are becoming increasingly embedded in young people's lives, from online shopping to tuition payments, dining, and money transfers. Fast, remote transactions and stored payment histories can reduce processing time while changing how individuals perceive and allocate their funds. The research issue therefore concerns both spending decisions at the point of purchase and the ability to maintain financial balance after a transaction.

According to State Bank of Vietnam figures published in the Banking Review, 86.97% of people aged 15 and above held a bank account by the end of 2024, while non-cash payments accounted for 66.8% of e-commerce payments [1]. This level of access provides a foundation for digital payments but does not establish whether users spend within their income, meet their obligations, or build financial reserves. A conveniently processed transaction may cover an essential need, an unplanned purchase, or a transfer between accounts belonging to the same individual. These cases have different implications for household finances.

For young people, the transition from education to employment places financial service use in the context of income, family support, and emerging obligations. The ability to adopt technology needs to be distinguished from the ability to evaluate costs and regulate behavior. This article examines changes in payment methods, their relationship with purchasing behavior, and the conditions under which transaction data can support financial management, thereby identifying implications for financial education and the protection of young consumers.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

The article uses documentary research combined with descriptive statistics, comparison, and evidence synthesis. Data were selected from publications accessible as of November 2, 2026, with a focus on Vietnamese statistics for 2021–2025 and relevant studies published during 2022–2026. The main statistical sources comprise the World Bank's Global Findex, NAPAS publications, the National Statistics Office, and State Bank of Vietnam figures cited in the Banking Review. Visa and PwC surveys and academic articles provide additional behavioral evidence. This is a selective

synthesis of the literature, rather than a primary survey or a systematic review based on a comprehensive screening protocol.

Evidence was included when the publishing organization, observation period, target population or statistical coverage, and indicator definition could be identified. Reports published by the survey organization or system operator were preferred to secondary accounts. Where a journal article had been formally published, the journal version was used rather than treating its prepublication manuscript as an independent study. Additional calculations are explicitly identified as the authors' calculations; direct comparisons are made only where indicators share the same coverage, reference period, and units.

The analysis operates at three levels: payment systems, individual behavior, and financial management outcomes. The term digital payments refers to transactions conducted electronically; statistics on "non-cash payments" retain the coverage specified by the reporting source. Studies of young people use different age ranges, including samples aged 18–35 and youth statistics for ages 15–24. The article retains each source's population boundaries and uses population-wide data as context rather than as estimates specifically for young people. Associations from cross-sectional surveys are interpreted as statistical relationships rather than causal conclusions.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Expansion of Digital Payments and Changes in Transaction Composition

NAPAS data show a clear shift between electronic transactions and cash withdrawals. Table 1 presents increases and decreases within the same system and reference period, helping distinguish growth in transaction volume from growth in transaction value.

Table 1. Changes in transactions through the NAPAS system in 2025 compared with 2024

Indicator	Transaction volume	Transaction value
Entire NAPAS system	Up 24%	Up 8%
NAPAS247 instant transfers	Up 27%	Up 8%
Online payments	Up more than 25%	
ATM cash withdrawals	Down 29%	Down 26%

Source: NAPAS (2026)

Using the two system-wide growth rates, the ratio of average nominal transaction value in 2025 to that in 2024 is 1.08/1.24, equivalent to a decline of approximately 12.9%. The result indicates that transaction volume increased faster than total value, consistent with the possibility that electronic payments were used more frequently for smaller amounts. However, changes in the composition of transaction types can also reduce the average value; these data do not identify average spending per user.

Transaction-level analysis needs to distinguish three possibilities: a purchase previously paid for in cash shifts to a digital method; an expenditure is divided into several payments; or an additional purchase occurs. Only the last case represents an expansion of consumption, other things being equal. Using transaction volume growth as a measure of spending growth would therefore conflate changes in payment methods with changes in consumption levels. Even an increase in total value requires adjustment for price effects and transfers unrelated to purchases before it can be used to assess spending behavior.

For QR-based transfers, NAPAS recorded 3.6 billion VietQR money transfers worth VND 9.2 quadrillion in the first ten months of 2025, an increase of more than 52% in volume and 85% in value over the same period a year earlier [4]. The faster growth in value than volume differs from the full-year system-wide pattern. This difference shows that conclusions about average transaction value depend on the payment channel and observation period. QR-based transfers include transactions other than payments for goods; VietQR data therefore cannot directly establish the scale of young people's purchases.

Demand-side survey data provide additional insight into actual use. Global Findex 2025 reports

indicators for Vietnam for 2024 and 2021, as shown in Table 2. All percentages in the table refer to the population aged 15 and above, rather than to the number of accounts or bank users alone.

Table 2. Selected indicators of access to and use of financial services in Vietnam

Indicator	2021 (%)	2024 (%)	Change (percentage points)
Account ownership	56.3	70.6	+14.3
Made or received digital payments during the year	46.0	62.4	+16.4
Made a digital merchant payment during the year	24.3	51.1	+26.8
Saved formally using an account during the year	20.7	44.5	+23.8

(Source: World Bank, 2025)

The increase in digital merchant payment use indicates that services have become more deeply integrated into purchasing activity, extending beyond account ownership alone. This indicator is more closely related to consumer behavior than the number of system-wide transfers. Nevertheless, the proportion making at least one transaction during the year does not capture transaction frequency, amounts, or the share of digital payments in personal budgets. Both prevalence and intensity of use need to be examined to assess the change fully.

The Global Findex account ownership estimate and the State Bank of Vietnam figure cited earlier differ in their sources and collection methods [1], [2]. They should not be combined into a single time series or substituted for one another to calculate growth. For this study, Findex data support comparisons across survey rounds within the same statistical framework, while domestic publications provide context on service development. Comparing multiple sources broadens coverage but does not remove the need to retain each indicator's definition.

Visa's survey, conducted in October–November 2023 among 1,000 employed Vietnamese consumers aged 18–65, found that 56% carried less cash than a year earlier; at least 89% of respondents in the Gen Z and Gen Y groups had successfully adopted non-cash methods [5]. These findings indicate the role of younger groups in changing payment habits while also reflecting the coverage of a survey of employed consumers. People who are unemployed or entirely dependent on family support may face different conditions of use. The prevalence of a payment method therefore needs to be considered alongside each group's income structure and financial support.

3.2 Digital Payments and Mechanisms Underlying Changes in Spending Behavior

International evidence indicates an association between payment methods and spending outcomes, although the average effect is relatively small. Schomburgk, Belli, and Hoffmann (2024) synthesized 392 effect sizes from 71 studies and reported Hedges' g = 0.135, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.068, 0.203] and between-study heterogeneity of I^2 = 86.20% [6]. The coefficient g represents a standardized difference, not a 13.5% increase in spending. High heterogeneity indicates that effects depend substantially on the setting; the synthesis does not provide a uniform spending growth rate for young people in Vietnam.

In terms of mechanisms, digital payments shorten the interval between the decision to buy and transaction completion. When payment details are stored or a QR code only needs to be scanned, checking cash and receiving change are replaced by electronic confirmation. Fewer steps can facilitate well-considered transactions while also reducing deliberation time for unplanned

decisions. This is a possible explanation of the mechanism; its prevalence among young people in Vietnam needs to be tested using specific behavioral data. Rapid transactions are not necessarily impulsive, and increased expenditure does not necessarily reduce well-being.

An additional purchase may meet a need previously deferred because payment was inconvenient. Decision quality should be assessed in terms of its alignment with goals and affordability rather than solely by the invoice amount. More meaningful indicators include the share of unplanned purchases, the extent of budget overruns, and whether essential spending has to be reduced to offset an earlier purchase. This approach helps distinguish the benefits of improved market access from the risk of budget imbalance.

In Vietnam, Doan, Rahman, and Vo (2025) surveyed 498 e-commerce shoppers and found a positive relationship between cashless payments and impulse buying ($\beta = 0.23$); mindfulness was negatively associated with this tendency ($\beta = -0.55$) and also played a moderating role [7]. The model coefficients do not represent percentage increases or decreases in actual expenditure. The results suggest a role for self-regulation, but the sample does not support estimating the prevalence of impulse buying among all young people in Vietnam.

Spending behavior is also influenced by the marketing environment. PwC's 2024 survey of 515 respondents in Vietnam found that 67% frequently shopped online by mobile phone, 71% had purchased products directly through social media, and 58% had been persuaded by influencers to buy a product or service [8]. The three indicators describe behaviors that may coexist within the same individual rather than mutually exclusive groups. They also refer to a consumer sample rather than specifically to young people.

An interaction can be identified between purchase stimuli and the ability to complete a payment. Marketing content attracts attention, promotions alter perceived benefits, and payment methods change the effort required to transact. Rapid order completion results from several factors operating together. To identify the specific effect of payment methods, research needs to control for advertising exposure, product characteristics, income, and preexisting shopping tendencies. Otherwise, the observed association may reflect the fact that frequent online shoppers also use digital payments more often.

Payment incentives also need to be assessed against total expenditure after the transaction. Cashback or discounts provide benefits when applied to purchases already included in the budget; conversely, minimum order thresholds may encourage the addition of unnecessary products. From a budgeting perspective, actual savings need to be assessed against the total amount spent and the products' use value. The discount rate displayed on an interface is insufficient to establish improved money management. This analytical framework helps avoid equating promotional benefits with improved personal finances.

Buy-now-pay-later services require separate consideration because they create future payment obligations. In a survey of 1,147 Vietnamese students, Nguyen and Pham (2024) found that greater financial risk knowledge was associated with a tendency to avoid risky buy-now-pay-later behavior; favorable attitudes toward risky consumer credit and an external locus of control were associated with a greater tendency to accept such behavior [9].

When a purchase is divided into installments, the amount immediately due may be much smaller than the total commitment. Affordability needs to be assessed against all obligations and existing purchases, including borrowing through other platforms. Having enough money for the first installment does not necessarily mean that income will be sufficient for later installments. Risk management indicators therefore need to reflect total monthly payments due, reliance on uncertain income, and repayment capacity after essential expenses. Risk arises from a mismatch between the payment schedule and actual cash flow.

The employment context clarifies the importance of this requirement. The National Statistics Office reported an unemployment rate of 8.64% among people aged 15–24 in 2025, an increase of 0.72 percentage points; in the fourth quarter of 2025, approximately 1.4 million young people were neither employed nor in education or training, representing 10.2% of all young people [10]. These two rates have different denominators and reference periods. The figures do not establish

that digital payments cause financial hardship, but they show why income conditions need to be considered when analyzing young people's ability to meet obligations. Recommendations to use credit based solely on convenience lack an adequate basis unless repayment cash flows are assessed.

3.3 Financial Management Capabilities and the Conditions for Realizing Technological Benefits

The financial management benefits of digital payments begin with transaction traceability, but the ultimate outcomes depend on how individuals use that information. Recording expenses, categorizing them and comparing them with a budget, and then adjusting future decisions are distinct activities. Payment histories accomplish the first step; users still need to set budget limits and prioritize resources. An application containing complete data but not used to adjust behavior improves visibility without ensuring efficient allocation of funds.

A study by Nguyen Tuan Anh, Vu Mai Chi, and Duong Toan Thang (2026), involving 300 people aged 18–35, found that perceived usefulness was positively related to spending tracking in a structural model ($\beta = 0.208$; $p < 0.001$), while its relationship with planning was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.087$; $p = 0.130$). However, two initial groups of scales had Cronbach's alpha values of 0.469 and −0.065, respectively, and were subsequently reworked by the authors [11]. These measurement limitations mean that the findings should be treated only as suggestive evidence of the distinction between tracking and planning.

Spending tracking identifies where money has already been spent, whereas budgeting determines how remaining funds will be allocated. The two activities are related but differ in their temporal orientation. If an overrun is recognized only after all available funds have been spent, the scope for adjustment within that period is already limited. Management features become more useful when they connect transaction histories with remaining limits and upcoming obligations, providing information before a purchase decision. This is a design condition requiring empirical evaluation, rather than an established benefit of every application.

Another difficulty is that data are dispersed across bank accounts, e-wallets, cash, and credit services. Topping up a wallet and then making a payment can be counted twice if software records both flows as expenditure. Transfers between personal accounts likewise do not generate consumption. Assessments of financial management capabilities therefore need to aggregate cash flows after excluding internal transfers, refunds, and duplicate entries. Improving data accuracy is necessary for budgeting tools to reflect the resources actually available for use.

Formal saving increased alongside digital payments, but this co-movement does not establish causality. Individuals with higher incomes or better access to banking may both make more electronic payments and save more. Moreover, an indicator of whether a person saved during the year does not measure accumulated amounts or the ability to maintain an emergency fund. Assessments of management benefits need to include outcomes after use, such as reserve balances, budget adherence, and timely fulfillment of obligations.

According to the same Findex source, in 2024, 49.8% of people aged 15 and above in Vietnam reported being able to cover more than two months of expenses if they lost their income; account ownership among adults in the poorest 40% of households was 48.1% [2]. These indicators place service use in the context of resources and the ability to withstand shocks. Expanding access needs to be accompanied by improvements in the quality of use; for young people, the analysis needs to account for family support, employment, and existing obligations rather than assuming similar financial circumstances across all users.

The gap between technological operation and financial capability is also evident in international data. OECD (2023) reported an average digital financial literacy score of 53 out of 100; 29% of adults reached the minimum target score of 70 out of 100. Among people managing financial products and services online, an average of 38% reached this threshold across participating countries and economies [13]. The findings indicate that participation in digital financial environments does not ensure that users have sufficient capabilities to assess products and risks.

In Vietnam, Tran and Schmitt (2024), analyzing 294 respondents using partial least squares structural equation modeling, identified the role of

financial socialization in knowledge, of knowledge in recommended behaviors, and of behavior in financial satisfaction [12]. This evidence provides an additional perspective on learning through families, schools, and social environments. Support for young people's money management needs to provide opportunities to practice decision-making and receive feedback rather than stop at instructions on application functions.

Transaction security is a component of resource preservation. NAPAS reported sending more than 3.4 million alerts about suspicious transactions in 2025 and collaborating to deploy the tool at 47 banks [3]. The number of alerts is not equivalent to the number of losses, victims, or the monetary value of losses prevented. In personal financial management, even a sound budget can be disrupted by transferring money to the wrong recipient. Recipient verification and appropriate responses to alerts therefore need to accompany resource allocation skills, supported by accessible transaction inquiry and dispute-handling procedures when problems arise.

3.4 Implications for Financial Education and the Protection of Young Consumers

The evidence synthesis suggests that interventions should shift from expanding the ability to transact toward improving financial decision quality. Desired outcomes include spending within available resources, meeting obligations on time, and maintaining resilience to shocks. Application opening frequency, transaction counts, and satisfaction with operations capture only part of the user experience. Outcome indicators need to correspond to the benefits that a financial education program or technological feature is intended to deliver.

Financial education has an empirical basis as an intervention. Kaiser et al. (2022) synthesized 76 randomized experiments involving more than 160,000 individuals and found positive average causal effects on financial knowledge and behavior [14]. The evidence supports investment in financial education but does not predetermine the effectiveness of individual programs in Vietnam. Content for young people needs to relate to their income, education, and employment circumstances and include an evaluation of outcomes after implementation.

In educational institutions, exercises should require learners to construct a budget from a hypothetical transaction dataset, exclude internal transfers, and anticipate payments due. For buy-now-pay-later purchases, learners need to calculate total obligations across multiple purchases, schedule payments, and consider options if income falls. Assessment criteria should focus on the ability to remain within spending limits, recognize costs, and make choices consistent with needs. Such activities connect knowledge with decision-making practice while avoiding requirements for learners to disclose personal financial data.

For banks, e-wallet providers, and shopping platforms, financial management information needs to be available at the point of decision. Designs that could be tested include displays of remaining budgets by spending category, total obligations due, and prompts to review purchases that would exceed self-imposed limits. Incentives should be presented alongside the total amount payable, eligibility conditions, and related costs. For deferred payment services, installment amounts need to be accompanied by a clear display of the entire commitment. Design effectiveness must be verified through behavioral changes rather than inferred from feature usage.

Protecting young users requires both reducing information asymmetry and strengthening the ability to resolve problems. Alerts should explain the reason for the risk and provide appropriate guidance; reporting and transaction inquiry functions need to be easy to find. Personalized budgeting tools must be based on consent and limited to the data necessary. For people with unstable incomes, support should prioritize essential needs and repayment capacity, avoiding high expenditure as a default indicator of effective service use.

Intervention evaluations need to track changes across multiple budget periods, include appropriate comparison groups, and record initial income levels. Measurable outcomes could include budget overrun rates, late payments, and reserves relative to essential expenses. Future research needs to include young people outside education, unemployed people, and workers with fluctuating incomes. Longitudinal designs combining surveys with spending diaries used with consent would help distinguish the effects of payment methods from preexisting differences between groups.

4 CONCLUSION

Digital payments expand transaction opportunities and generate data that support cash-flow monitoring. However, growth in transaction volume, value, and adoption rates does not directly establish that young people spend more or manage money better. The evidence synthesis indicates a small average positive cashless effect on spending in international research; studies in Vietnam identify associations with impulse buying and the role of financial risk knowledge in buy-now-pay-later behavior. Management effectiveness depends on the ability to translate transaction information into budget allocation, fulfillment of obligations, and preservation of resources.

The central implication is to link service development with financial decision-making capability. Education needs to be grounded in budgeting practice and payment schedules; digital tools need to support control before purchases and the management of transaction risks. Because the data sources differ in age coverage, methods, and measured outcomes, this article does not estimate a nationwide causal effect specifically for young people.

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