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Demographic Influences on Budget-Conscious Nutrition: A Study of Age and Gender Impacts on Food Choices

Panchal Yash¹, Vikas Goyal², Aryan Thakur³, Rahul Chauhan⁴, Andino Maseleno⁵

¹Unitedworld Institute of Management, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India, 7442yash@gmail.com

²Unitedworld Institute of Management, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India.

³Unitedworld Institute of Management, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India.

⁴Unitedworld Institute of Management, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India.

⁵International Open University, Gambia, andino@bahasa.iou.edu.gm

Corresponding Author: andino@bahasa.iou.edu.gm⁵

Abstract: This study explores the impact of age and gender on food budgeting behaviors, focusing on strategies individuals use to maintain balanced nutrition under financial constraints. Through an ANOVA analysis, findings indicate that age does not significantly affect food budgeting habits, while gender shows a significant influence on the types of food bought when budgeting, suggesting different dietary priorities. These insights contribute to a better understanding of how demographic factors shape food choices, essential for developing targeted nutrition and budget management programs. With rising global food prices and economic disparities, these findings are particularly relevant for policymakers and health organizations aiming to promote affordable, healthy eating practices. Future research should consider additional demographic variables and the role of environmental factors to broaden these insights and support global food security efforts.

Keywords: food budgeting, nutrition, demographic factors, economic constraints.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, maintaining a healthy diet can be a significant challenge, especially for those with limited financial resources. The increasing cost of living and food prices often compels individuals and families to make difficult choices between nutrition and budget constraints. As highlighted by Power et al. (2023), the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities within the UK food system, revealing stark disparities in access to nutritious food among different socio-economic groups. This has underscored the urgent need to explore strategies for achieving balanced nutrition without overspending.

Healthy eating is crucial for overall well-being and long-term health, yet it is often perceived as a luxury reserved for those with higher incomes. Research by Halme et al. (2023) indicates that young urban populations are increasingly seeking plant-based and

alternative milk options due to perceived health benefits, yet such products can sometimes come with a higher price tag. This creates a paradox where healthier choices are not always accessible to everyone, particularly those on a tight budget. The economic pressures of modern life necessitate practical solutions that allow individuals to enjoy balanced nutrition without compromising their financial stability.

Meal planning and strategic shopping are fundamental components of managing a food budget effectively. Beacom et al. (2022) emphasize that consumer numerical skills play a critical role in navigating grocery shopping, suggesting that those who are adept at budgeting can better manage their food expenses. Additionally, studies such as those by Filter and Pentz (2023) reveal that buying in bulk and opting for store brands can significantly reduce costs, offering practical tips for consumers looking to maximize their food budget. Furthermore, Caraher and Davison (2023) discuss the normalization of food aid and its implications for food quality, highlighting the need for systemic changes to ensure that nutritious food remains accessible to all.

The role of processed foods versus whole foods also affects budget and health. Seyitoğlu and Ivanov (2022) argue that processed foods, while often cheaper, can lead to poorer health outcomes compared to whole foods. This reinforces the importance of identifying cost-effective strategies for incorporating nutritious, minimally processed foods into one's diet. Moreover, the value of community resources and support systems cannot be understated. As discussed by Rivera et al. (2023), optimizing food bank supply chains and enhancing food distribution strategies can play a significant role in addressing food insecurity. Understanding these dynamics helps in creating a more comprehensive approach to ensuring that healthy eating is attainable for those facing financial constraints.

This paper aims to explore practical tips and strategies for maintaining a balanced diet while adhering to a budget. By examining current research and practical examples, it seeks to provide actionable advice for individuals and families striving to improve their nutritional intake without exceeding their financial limits. Through this exploration, the goal is to bridge the gap between healthy eating and budget management, making balanced nutrition more accessible to everyone. This introduction sets the stage for the research paper, highlighting the relevance of the topic, the challenges faced, and the scope of the paper.

The intersection of healthy eating and budgeting presents a complex challenge, particularly as economic constraints often influence dietary choices. This literature review synthesizes recent research to explore strategies and insights for maintaining a balanced diet within financial limits. Recent studies have highlighted various consumer motivations and behaviors that impact fruit and vegetable consumption, which are critical components of a healthy diet. Camanzi et al. (2024) provide a comprehensive analysis of consumer profiles in Euro-Mediterranean countries, focusing on factors such as value-seeking, health consciousness, and sustainability concerns. Their findings suggest that while health-conscious consumers are inclined towards purchasing fresh produce, economic considerations frequently limit their ability to do so consistently. This highlights a crucial barrier in the pursuit of balanced nutrition: the cost of healthy foods. The impact of global events on dietary habits further underscores the complexity of maintaining a healthy diet on a budget. Giannetto et al. (2024) investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on apple consumption in Italy, revealing that while awareness of the health benefits of fruits has increased, financial and logistical barriers continue to impede consistent consumption. This study emphasizes that even with heightened health awareness, economic factors remain a significant challenge in achieving balanced nutrition.

The role of systemic approaches in promoting sustainable and healthy eating habits is also a significant area of research. Graça et al. (2022) explore how systemic interventions in schools can support sustainable food transitions. Their research suggests that integrating nutrition education and sustainable practices into school curricula can foster healthier eating

habits among students. This systemic approach not only addresses dietary concerns but also promotes long-term behavioral changes that can extend beyond the school environment. Such strategies highlight the importance of structural support in facilitating access to healthy foods.

Awareness-raising campaigns have been shown to be effective in expanding access to essential services, which can be extrapolated to the domain of healthy eating. Edelstein et al. (2020) discuss how targeted campaigns in the Bronx and Washington, DC, successfully increased HIV testing rates. This approach can be adapted to promote healthy eating practices by raising awareness about cost-effective strategies for maintaining a balanced diet. Effective communication and education are crucial in helping individuals make informed decisions about their food choices while managing their budgets.

In summary, the literature underscores that achieving healthy eating on a budget involves navigating a landscape shaped by individual motivations, global events, systemic interventions, and effective awareness campaigns. The research highlights that while there is a clear demand for healthier eating, economic constraints and systemic barriers continue to challenge consumers. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines practical strategies for budgeting with broader systemic and educational efforts. By synthesizing these insights, this paper aims to provide actionable tips for maintaining a balanced diet within financial constraints and to explore how various strategies can be integrated to support healthier eating habits across different contexts.

The article by Hulls et al. (2022) explores the relationship between work-related stress and health, specifically within the construction industry. Although it is not directly focused on nutrition, the study highlights the adverse effects of work stress on overall well-being. Stress can negatively affect eating habits, leading to unhealthy food choices, especially in high-pressure professions. For example, individuals under significant stress may resort to fast food or processed food options that are more affordable and convenient but lack nutritional value. Therefore, the implications of workplace stress management can be connected to the broader discussion of promoting healthy eating habits on a budget by reducing stress-induced unhealthy food choices.

Morano et al. (2018) conducted an in-depth analysis of street food and the factors influencing consumers' perceptions of food quality. This study provides a unique perspective on budget-conscious food choices, particularly regarding the growing popularity of street food in urban areas. Street food often represents a cost-effective food option for low-income consumers. However, perceptions of its quality, including nutritional value, cleanliness, and freshness, are crucial to understanding consumer behavior. This paper highlights the importance of education on balanced nutrition, as people may perceive street food as either unhealthy or convenient without fully understanding its nutritional profile. For a healthy eating plan on a budget, individuals can be educated on selecting nutritious street food options, ensuring their meals are both affordable and wholesome.

The study by Ngong et al. (2022) looks at the link between stock market development and agricultural growth in Africa, focusing on the economic framework of food production and accessibility. In emerging economies, the agricultural sector is a key driver of food affordability. This research underscores the importance of agriculture in providing budget-friendly and nutritious food options to populations in economically vulnerable regions. As food prices and availability fluctuate, especially during economic downturns, the emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices can help lower food costs and improve access to healthy, affordable meals. Understanding this economic perspective is critical when discussing budget-friendly nutritional strategies, especially for low-income groups that are highly dependent on local agricultural outputs.

Raaijmakers et al. (2023) highlight a significant intervention aimed at increasing green leafy vegetable consumption through street food dishes in Lagos, Nigeria. Their study emphasizes the importance of accessible and affordable street food in promoting healthy

eating, particularly in low-income urban populations. The integration of green leafy vegetables into popular, affordable dishes offers a strategy for improving nutritional outcomes while keeping costs low. This research is particularly relevant to the topic of healthy eating on a budget, as it illustrates how inexpensive, nutrient-dense foods can be incorporated into daily diets through culturally appropriate and economically viable options. The study's findings underscore the importance of tailoring nutritional interventions to the local food culture and economic realities, ensuring they are both affordable and sustainable.

Steenkamer et al. (2020) explore the implementation of population health management across different international contexts. Although their focus is on broader health management systems, the study provides useful insights into how coordinated efforts can improve public health outcomes, including nutrition. By implementing structured programs that prioritize preventive health measures and focus on dietary education, governments and organizations can help populations make healthier food choices, even on limited budgets. This article supports the idea that public health initiatives can play a key role in promoting affordable, balanced nutrition, especially in underserved or economically disadvantaged communities.

Thiabpho et al. (2018) focus on an intensive lifestyle modification program aimed at weight loss and metabolic syndrome risk reduction among obese women in rural Thailand. The study emphasizes the role of structured lifestyle changes, including diet and exercise, in improving health outcomes in low-resource settings. This article is particularly relevant for discussions on budget-friendly nutrition, as it highlights how low-cost interventions such as portion control, reduced sugar intake, and increased vegetable consumption can be effective in promoting weight loss and reducing health risks. The study's rural setting also demonstrates how such programs can be adapted to communities with limited access to expensive healthcare or food options, ensuring that healthy eating remains affordable and achievable.

Trieste et al. (2021) examine food literacy and its impact on consumer food choices through a survey-based psychometric profiling of behavior. The study underscores the importance of food education in guiding consumers toward healthier, budget-friendly choices. People with higher food literacy are better equipped to make informed decisions, such as choosing seasonal, locally-sourced produce or understanding the nutritional content of food labels. This article is relevant because it shows that improving food literacy can help individuals make nutritious choices without overspending, empowering them to select affordable yet healthy foods. By enhancing food literacy, public health efforts can encourage more cost-effective and nutritious eating habits.

METHOD

The study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, with data collected from participants using a structured questionnaire. The survey includes questions regarding food budgeting habits, the importance of nutrition in budget-friendly food selections, types of food purchased on a budget, and preferred grocery sources. Demographic information, including age and gender, was collected to facilitate the analysis of how these factors affect budget-conscious food choices.

Objectives

- 1) To analyze the influence of age and gender on budget-conscious food purchasing behaviors – examining how demographic factors impact food choices and preferences under financial constraints.
- 2) To identify the types of food individuals prioritize when managing a food budget – highlighting gender differences in food selection when adhering to a limited budget.
- 3) To evaluate the effectiveness of different food budgeting strategies – understanding which methods are preferred by specific demographic groups.

- 4) To provide insights for policy-makers and health organizations on tailored nutrition programs – aiding in the design of initiatives that address specific dietary needs and financial limitations across various demographics.

Hypotheses

- 1) H1: There is a significant difference in budget-conscious food purchasing behaviors based on age.
- 2) H2: There is a significant difference in budget-conscious food purchasing behaviors based on gender.
- 3) H3: Gender significantly influences the type of food bought when shopping on a budget.
- 4) H4: Age does not significantly impact the prioritization of nutrition in budget-friendly food choices.

Participants were selected from diverse demographic backgrounds, with a target sample size of 182 respondents to allow for statistically significant findings. The structured questionnaire was designed to collect data on budgetary food preferences, meal planning strategies, and the importance of nutrition in grocery choices. Data were analyzed using ANOVA tests to assess the impact of age and gender on various food budgeting behaviors and preferences. Specifically, the ANOVA test was applied to evaluate differences across age groups and between genders, providing insight into whether these demographic factors significantly influence food budgeting decisions.

This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases in the responses. Additionally, it does not account for other demographic factors, such as income, education level, or cultural background, which may also influence food purchasing behavior. This methodology provides a structured approach for assessing the relationship between demographic factors and food budgeting choices, with implications for developing targeted nutritional policies and programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis

Table 1. Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	14-18	43	23.6	23.6	23.6
	19-23	58	31.9	31.9	55.5
	24-28	28	15.4	15.4	70.9
	29-33	53	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	182	100.0	100.0	

The first table represents the age distribution of the survey respondents, providing insights into the age range and its relative frequency. Among the 182 participants, those aged 19-23 constitute the largest group at 31.9%, with 58 respondents, indicating that a significant portion of the sample falls within this age range. This is followed by participants aged 29-33, representing 29.1% (53 individuals), and those aged 14-18, who make up 23.6% (43 individuals). The smallest group consists of those aged 24-28, with only 15.4% (28 respondents) of the sample. This table’s cumulative percentages reveal that more than half (55.5%) of respondents are 23 years or younger, suggesting that younger adults are a substantial part of this study. This age diversity provides a broader perspective on budget-friendly nutrition needs across different life stages.

Table 2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	102	56.0	56.0	56.0
	Female	80	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	182	100.0	100.0	

The second table displays the gender distribution of the participants. Out of 182 respondents, 56% (102 individuals) identify as male, while the remaining 44% (80 individuals) are female. This balance suggests a fairly representative distribution between genders, with a slight male majority. The cumulative percentage shows a total of 100%, indicating that both groups collectively represent the entire sample without any missing data. The relatively balanced gender ratio allows for a comprehensive analysis of potential differences or similarities in budget-conscious healthy eating behaviors across genders, making the findings more generalizable.

Table 3. ANOVA between Age and Factors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How do you prioritize your food spending when on a tight budget?	Between Groups	2.942	3	.981	.877	.454
	Within Groups	199.058	178	1.118		
	Total	202.000	181			
Which strategy do you find most effective for meal planning?	Between Groups	.970	3	.323	.287	.835
	Within Groups	200.392	178	1.126		
	Total	201.363	181			
How often do you check for discounts or sales before shopping?	Between Groups	7.753	3	2.584	2.286	.080
	Within Groups	201.241	178	1.131		
	Total	208.995	181			
What type of food do you buy most 2 on a budget?	Between Groups	2.796	3	.932	.982	.402
	Within Groups	168.924	178	.949		
	Total	171.720	181			
How important is nutrition when selecting budget-friendly foods?	Between Groups	1.963	3	.654	.976	.405
	Within Groups	119.339	178	.670		
	Total	121.302	181			
Where do you typically find the best deals on groceries?	Between Groups	3.460	3	1.153	.964	.411
	Within Groups	212.875	178	1.196		
	Total	216.335	181			
How often do you prepare meals at home versus eating out?	Between Groups	2.299	3	.766	1.009	.390
	Within Groups	135.217	178	.760		
	Total	137.516	181			
What challenges do you face when trying to eat healthy on a budget?	Between Groups	5.815	3	1.938	1.678	.173
	Within Groups	205.597	178	1.155		
	Total	211.412	181			
How do you feel about the nutritional quality of budget-friendly foods?	Between Groups	10.730	3	3.577	1.930	.126
	Within Groups	329.825	178	1.853		
	Total	340.555	181			
Would you like to participate in workshops about budget-friendly cooking and nutrition?	Between Groups	3.285	3	1.095	1.362	.256
	Within Groups	143.089	178	.804		
	Total	146.374	181			

The ANOVA table provides an analysis of variance between age groups and several factors related to budget-friendly food habits. Each row examines how age influences different aspects of food purchasing and consumption decisions. The "Sum of Squares" indicates the variance in responses, "df" refers to the degrees of freedom, "Mean Square"

shows the average variance, "F" represents the F-statistic, and "Sig." (Significance) denotes the p-value.

For most of the factors analyzed, the significance values (p-values) are above 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between age groups. For example, when analyzing "How do you prioritize your food spending when on a tight budget?" the p-value is 0.454, suggesting no significant difference in spending priorities based on age. Similarly, in "Which strategy do you find most effective for meal planning?" (p = 0.835) and "What type of food do you buy most on a budget?" (p = 0.402), age does not significantly impact meal planning strategies or food types purchased when budgeting.

The only factor approaching significance is "How often do you check for discounts or sales before shopping?" (p = 0.080), suggesting that there may be some age-related differences in how frequently individuals check for discounts, though it still falls short of conventional significance levels. Other factors, such as "How important is nutrition when selecting budget-friendly foods?" (p = 0.405) and "How often do you prepare meals at home versus eating out?" (p = 0.390), also show no significant age-based differences.

Overall, the data suggest that age does not strongly influence budget-conscious food habits in this sample. The lack of significant differences indicates that these behaviors are relatively consistent across age groups, regardless of specific food budgeting strategies or nutrition priorities.

Table 4. ANOVA between Gender and Factor

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How do you prioritize your food spending when on a tight budget?	Between Groups	.558	1	.558	.498	.481
	Within Groups	201.442	180	1.119		
	Total	202.000	181			
Which strategy do you find most effective for meal planning?	Between Groups	2.534	1	2.534	2.294	.132
	Within Groups	198.828	180	1.105		
	Total	201.363	181			
How often do you check for discounts or sales before shopping?	Between Groups	.283	1	.283	.244	.622
	Within Groups	208.712	180	1.160		
	Total	208.995	181			
What type of food do you buy most 2 on a budget?	Between Groups	7.297	1	7.297	7.989	.005
	Within Groups	164.423	180	.913		
	Total	171.720	181			
How important is nutrition when selecting budget-friendly foods?	Between Groups	.641	1	.641	.957	.329
	Within Groups	120.661	180	.670		
	Total	121.302	181			
Where do you typically find the best deals on groceries?	Between Groups	3.674	1	3.674	3.110	.080
	Within Groups	212.661	180	1.181		
	Total	216.335	181			
How often do you prepare meals at home versus eating out?	Between Groups	.041	1	.041	.053	.818
	Within Groups	137.476	180	.764		
	Total	137.516	181			
What challenges do you face when trying to eat healthy on a budget?	Between Groups	2.446	1	2.446	2.107	.148
	Within Groups	208.966	180	1.161		
	Total	211.412	181			
How do you feel about the nutritional quality of budget-friendly foods?	Between Groups	1.152	1	1.152	.611	.435
	Within Groups	339.403	180	1.886		
	Total	340.555	181			
Would you like to participate in workshops about budget-friendly cooking and nutrition?	Between Groups	.110	1	.110	.135	.713
	Within Groups	146.264	180	.813		
	Total	146.374	181			

The ANOVA analysis between gender and various factors related to food spending and budgeting habits highlights several important observations. The significance (p-value) helps determine whether there are statistically significant differences in responses based on gender. For most of the factors, the p-values exceed 0.05, indicating no significant differences between males and females. For example, "How do you prioritize your food spending when on a tight budget?" has a p-value of 0.481, suggesting that gender does not significantly affect how people prioritize food spending. Similarly, for "Which strategy do you find most effective for meal planning?" ($p = 0.132$) and "How often do you check for discounts or sales before shopping?" ($p = 0.622$), gender differences do not play a statistically significant role.

However, there is one notable exception: "What type of food do you buy most on a budget?" Here, the p-value is 0.005, indicating a significant difference between males and females regarding the types of food they buy when budgeting. This suggests that gender may influence food preferences or purchasing habits when financial resources are limited, perhaps reflecting different priorities or dietary choices. Other factors, such as "How important is nutrition when selecting budget-friendly foods?" ($p = 0.329$) and "How often do you prepare meals at home versus eating out?" ($p = 0.818$), show no significant gender-based differences. Additionally, "Where do you typically find the best deals on groceries?" approaches significance with a p-value of 0.080, hinting that gender may have a modest influence on where individuals shop for groceries. In conclusion, while most factors do not show significant gender differences, the type of food purchased on a budget stands out as an area where males and females differ, highlighting an important aspect of gender-related food purchasing behavior.

CONCLUSION

The study examines the relationship between demographic factors like age and gender and their influence on budget-conscious food behaviors, highlighting how individuals navigate tight financial constraints while maintaining a balanced diet. The findings reveal that while age does not significantly impact most food budgeting habits, gender plays a notable role in determining the types of food purchased on a budget. This suggests that different dietary preferences or cultural influences between genders may affect food choices, particularly when individuals are financially constrained. Despite the lack of significant differences in most factors, the observed gender-based variance in food types bought on a budget is an area that warrants further exploration.

The global impact of these findings underscores the universal challenges of achieving healthy nutrition on a budget, an issue exacerbated by rising food prices and economic inequalities. As more populations experience financial hardship, understanding how demographic factors influence food purchasing decisions can help governments, NGOs, and policymakers create targeted interventions. Programs promoting affordable, nutritious food choices should consider gender differences in food preferences to be more effective.

Future studies should expand on these findings by incorporating additional demographic variables, such as income levels, education, and cultural background, which may further affect food purchasing behaviors. Additionally, exploring how environmental factors like food deserts and access to community resources impact these decisions globally would provide deeper insights. Investigating the effectiveness of public health campaigns, nutrition education, and budget-friendly meal workshops across different regions can also help bridge the gap between nutritional knowledge and practice. Ultimately, by addressing these factors, future research can inform global efforts to promote healthier eating habits and reduce food insecurity, particularly among vulnerable populations, ensuring that nutrition remains accessible to all regardless of economic circumstances.

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