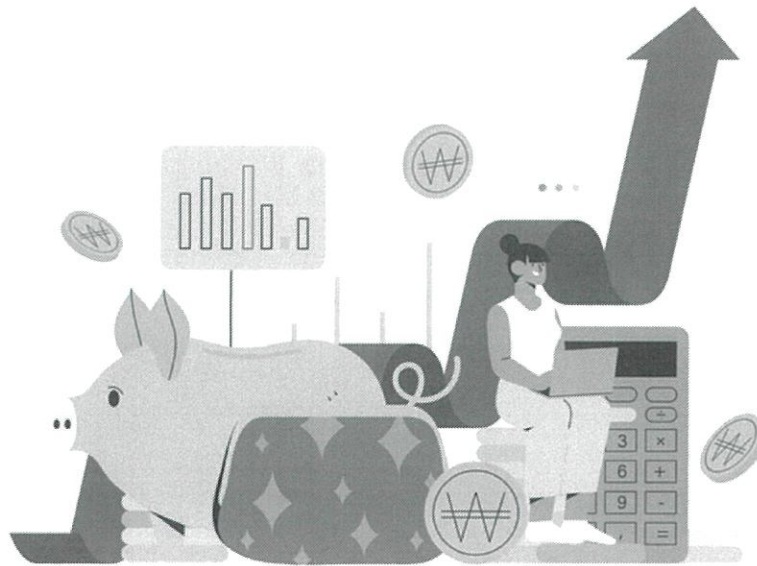


Young Koreans ditch the YOLO lifestyle to pinch their pennies



Even in today's age of ultra-low interest rates and skyrocketing housing prices, some young people still believe in the power of penny-pinching. [SHUTTERSTOCK]

One Korean proverb says, "specks of dust can form a large mountain." It is supposed to encourage people to save their pennies. However, in today's age of ultra-low interest rates and skyrocketing housing prices, many young Koreans scoff that specks of dust simply remain specks. They are skeptical about frugality and enjoy the "You Only Live Once (YOLO)" lifestyle, opting to splurge instead of saving up for the future. Statistics show a steady rise in luxury shoppers in their 20s and 30s.

But some still believe in the power of penny-pinching, and have found healthy ways to balance frugality and quality of life.

Twenty-eight year old Kim Ji-eun, better known as YouTuber Kim Jjanboo who shares money-saving tips on her channel, said she was a former "YOLO girl."



Twenty-eight year old Kim Ji-eun, better known as YouTuber Kim Jjanboo, shares money-saving tips on her channel. [SCREEN CAPTURE]

"I used to spend pretty much all of my income on shopping and nights out," she told the Korea JoongAng Daily.

"Two years ago, I realized I had next to nothing in my savings account even after six years of working. An epiphany hit me: Am I really happy when I buy all those clothes? Do I really have fun drinking on a night out? Then I realized I don't need to spend to feel worthy."

After that, Kim started asking herself three crucial questions before buying anything: "Is this a necessity? Will this improve my quality of life? Will I get bored with it?" Soon, she was saving up to 88 percent of her salary.

Chun, a 22-year-old medical student, used to splurge on eating and drinking out when he got his first part-time job.

"It was my first time making money, so I didn't know how to control my spending," he said. "I eventually learned how to, and formed money-saving habits."

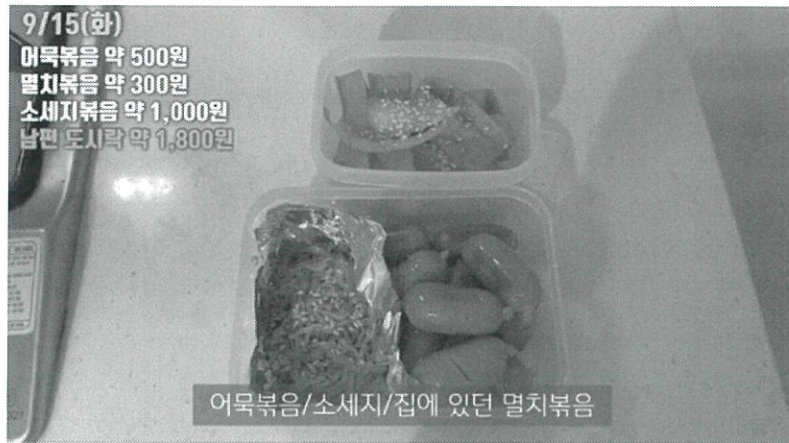
Those habits are proving useful now that Chun quit his part-time job to focus on his studies and has to live off his savings.

"At the beginning of a week, I put 150 thousand won (\$130) in a debit card account and only use that card to limit my weekly spending," Chun said. "A week is easier to plan than a month, so I can make sure I don't go over budget. I have separate bank accounts for fixed expenses such as rent and transportation or emergency expenses like hospital bills."

"It's true that more young people are splurging on luxury goods and such, but the opposite of the spectrum exists as well," said Sung Tae-yoon, a professor of economics at Yonsei University.

"There are young people who are well aware of how difficult the current economy is, and how unstable the job market is. Especially if they can't or don't want to rely on their parents, they strive to live frugally. Although people are free to splurge, it's a healthy decision to spend within their means and prepare for the future."

In order to save the majority of her income, Kim came up with many strategies along the way. She first stopped what she calls "leaking" expenses, such as buying snacks at convenience stores every day. The cost may seem low at first but quickly stacks up. When the temptation to shop was strong, she simply took a detour to avoid the street with stores that she used to frequent. She then put an end to her habit of buying take-out coffee, which was once a part of her morning routine. When she really missed it, she bought coffee shop vouchers at lower prices on secondhand marketplace apps.



Minimalist lifestyle YouTuber Jun You-kyung, better known as Minimal Hoho, suggests weekly meal planning to save money. In one video, she shares how she made her husband's lunchbox for 1,800 won (\$1.50). [SCREEN CAPTURE]

Jun You-kyung, better known as her YouTube personality Minimal Hoho, also specializes in budgeting and saving tips. The YouTuber who is in her 30s and advocates a minimalist lifestyle shared one of her tips: weekly meal planning.

"My husband and I plan seven meals for dinner for each week and then we cook the meal that we feel like eating that day," Jun said. "That prevents us from impulsively eating out or ordering food; even better if we use ingredients that are already in the fridge."

Both YouTubers stressed the importance of keeping an account book, especially since there are many mobile app versions to choose from.

"Keeping track of your spending in categories such as food, leisure, utilities and so on is crucial to identifying what parts you can save more on," said Kim. "But that's only if you budget in advance. If you simply write down what you spent that day without a budget in mind, that's a diary, not an account book."



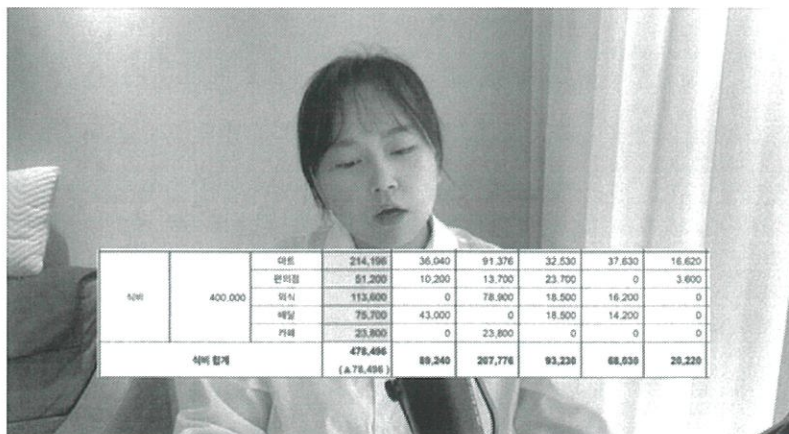
Bank Salad is an example of a mobile account book app. [JEONG YONG-HWAN]

Saving money does not always have to be stressful either.

"I know my weekly budget is tight, but I don't pressure myself further to save more within that budget," Chun said. "If I happen to spend less one week, I just enjoy the following week being financially laxer."

"Saving money to the point of it being painful is not a healthy form of frugality," said Jun. "If you feel like your budget is too tight, I advise adjusting it to a realistic level. Protecting your mental health is just as important as saving. To do that, finding the right amount of spending for you is key.

"Once you've decided your budget, spend without feeling guilty! If you have a vacation planned, simply set your budget reasonably higher than other months. Then you don't have to stress about money during the vacation and can fully enjoy yourself. That month's spending may be more than usual, but you won't feel remorse since you planned in advance."



Jun shares how she writes an account book to keep track of her spending in a video. [SCREEN CAPTURE]

Jun emphasized that being frugal does not mean stopping spending altogether.

"It's about spending on things that actually make us happy," she said.

"I tell people to clean out their closets because then they realize how many clothes they own that they don't even like. We spend so much money on unsatisfying things, and then also feel anxious because there's no money left to save. We must make time to think about what items really give us satisfaction and are practical. For instance, instead of buying dozens of clothing items you won't wear, splurge on a dishwasher."

Of course, even YouTubers specializing in frugality sometimes question the lifestyle they chose.

"There were moments when I worried that my penny-pinching wouldn't make a difference, and that specks of dust would just remain specks," Kim said. In the early stage of changing her lifestyle, avoiding social media helped Kim to a degree.

"On Instagram, it seems like everyone owns luxury handbags," she said. "But social media is often exaggerated illusions. Not everyone has or needs luxury items. I recommend taking a break from it if it makes you compare yourself to others."



In a video, Kim demonstrates how to keep an account book with various spending categories. [SCREEN CAPTURE]

"I felt lonely when I first started living a frugal lifestyle," Jun said. "I saw people around me splurge on luxury items, which made me feel like I was missing out.

"But once I embraced the minimalist lifestyle, I changed my approach. It's not that I can't buy them because I must save money; I'm choosing not to buy because I know they won't really make me happy and only take up space. After realizing that, spending or saving no longer affects my self-worth."

Although advocates of a frugal lifestyle still respect that people are entitled to spend their money however they like, some express concerns on the pervasiveness of YOLO culture today. Kwon, who owns a small business, shared his views.

"I believe if you don't save up enough for the future, you might have to beg other people for financial help in your later years," he said. "YOLO has its fun aspects, but everyone needs a future plan. I think changing your views on money will make a big difference in the quality of your life 10 years later."

"In this age of ultra-low interest rates and high housing prices, I understand that motivation to save is low," Jun said. "But instead of just giving up because reality is difficult, envision the future you really want. The money you spend on a luxury bag could become seed money for investing, a car or even a house. We all work hard to earn money, so let's learn how to love and value it properly."

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skyrocket, skeptical, opt, splurge, crucial, strive, routine, advocate, impulsive, remorse, pervasive, envision

Are you Yolo, a penny-pincher or neither?

What do you like to splurge on?

Have you ever suffered from buyers remorse?

I spend most of my money on

What crucial question have you asked yourself recently?

What money-saving habit have you formed?

Do you plan by the week, a fortnight or the month?

Is your budget tight?

I strive to

What is a “leaking” expense for you?

What is the last purchase you made that made you happy?

Describe a routine Monday morning.

What purchase has improved the quality of your life?

After someone graduates from university, is it wrong for them to rely on their parents financially?

After reading this article, are you going to change your spending habits?