

Which purchase do I deserve? Understanding self-gift and purchase dimensions

Qual compra eu mereço? Compreendendo o autopresentear e as dimensões da compra

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To cite this paper: Victor, C., Gerhard, F., Peñaloza, V., Mota, M. O., & Freitas, A. A. F. (2024). Which purchase do I deserve? Understanding self-gift and purchase dimensions. *Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 25(3), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1678-6971/eRAMG240136>

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Abstract

Purpose: This study sought to compare the behavior of self-gifting among the purchase dimensions. Specifically, we sought to identify which type of purchase is preferable in this phenomenon and how the predecessor moment can regulate and boost the donation of appropriate gifts for themselves.

Originality/value: This study differs from previous research by simultaneously comparing the purchase dimensions (material-experiential and ordinary-extraordinary) and the moments preceding the purchase in the act of self-gifting. The findings indicate that donating ordinary possessions is essential for realizing the symbolic self-communication of the consumer who gives himself.

Design/methodology/approach: Two sequential experimental design studies between subjects were carried out, with a non-probabilistic sample of 414 respondents. Data were analyzed using analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA).

Findings: The results showed that ordinary material purchases led to a greater attitude towards self-gift, even though the literature suggested that extraordinary experiential purchases were preferable. In sequence, the concept of proportionality indicates that individuals seek to give themselves a gift regardless of the moment before the purchase. Consumers regulate their self-gifting based on the previously lived moment. In ordinary predecessor events, individuals seek to reward themselves with ordinary purchases, while in landmark predecessor events, individuals seek to reward themselves with extraordinary purchases.

Keywords: self-gift, experiential purchase, material purchase, purchase dimension, rewards

Resumo

Objetivo: Este estudo buscou comparar o comportamento de se autopresentear entre as dimensões de compra. Especificamente, buscou-se identificar que tipo de compra é preferível nesse fenômeno e como o momento antecessor pode regular e impulsionar a doação de presentes apropriados para si.

Originalidade/valor: Este estudo se diferencia de pesquisas anteriores ao comparar, simultaneamente, as dimensões de compra (material-experiencial e ordinária-extraordinária) e os momentos antecessores à compra no ato de se autopresentear. Os achados apontam que a doação de possessões ordinárias é essencial para a realização da autocomunicação simbólica do consumidor que se autopresenteia.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: Foram realizados dois estudos sequenciais de desenho experimental *between-subject*, com uma amostra não probabilística de 414 respondentes ao todo. Os dados foram analisados através da análise de variância (ANOVA *one-way*).

Resultados: Os resultados evidenciaram que as compras materiais ordinárias conduziram uma maior atitude de autopresentear, apesar de a literatura indicar que as compras experienciais extraordinárias seriam preferíveis. Em sequência, o conceito de proporcionalidade indicou que, independentemente do momento antecessor à compra, os indivíduos buscam se autopresentear. Os consumidores regulam seu autopresentear com base no momento anterior vivido. Em eventos ordinários antecessores, os indivíduos buscam se recompensar com compras ordinárias, enquanto em eventos marcantes antecessores, os indivíduos buscam se recompensar com compras extraordinárias.

Palavras-chave: autopresentear, compra experiencial, compra material, dimensão da compra, recompensas

INTRODUCTION

Giving someone a gift can be considered a very pleasant and satisfying rite. However, this moment may be more complex than you imagine. It is necessary to think carefully to ensure that you will buy the ideal gift and that it will make the receiver happy. On the other hand, when you decide to give this gift to yourself, the chances of getting the ideal gift will be greater (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). However, what would that ideal gift look like?

Although the phenomenon of interpersonal gift-giving has a long tradition in consumer research (e.g., Sherry, 1983; McGrath, 1989), self-gift-giving has received comparatively less academic attention. However, it did not go unnoticed by researchers. Sociology studies have briefly discussed personal rewards and incentives (Schwartz, 1967) and consumer behavior research (Mick, 1986), such as merit, consolation prizes, therapies, and holiday situations. Only from the investigation of Mick and DeMoss (1990) was it possible to portray in detail the experiences of self-donation, impelling even more of the discussion about this phenomenon.

This phenomenon needs to be deepened, which can raise important managerial contributions (Lawry, 2022). Battaly (2010) points out that self-indulgence is structured in three essential aspects: occasion, object, and degree. In the theory of self-gift-giving, the occasion refers to the context in which the purchase or consumption is inserted, the object is the type of purchase or consumption, and the degree refers to the frequency. However, investigations into self-gift-giving have focused heavily on their situational and motivational contexts (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021), ignoring the types and frequency of purchases.

Heath et al. (2015) show that the decision to practice self-gift-giving is premeditated; however, the specific choice of a gift is not. Studies are scarce on which purchase dimensions are preferable for self-directed consumers. The consumer interacts with themselves to seek communication, reward, or consolation (Shahid & Paul, 2021). This interaction can justify individual and specific self-gift-giving choices or preferences (Rippé et al., 2022). This research aims to innovate by simultaneously comparing buying dimensions in self-gift-giving.

Thus, to understand the type of purchase chosen by individuals in self-gift-giving, the dimensions of material and experiential purchase (van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and the dimensions of ordinary and extraordinary purchase (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) were used. Based on these

dimensions, we intend to identify what kind of material-experiential (*i.e.*, an object to be kept as a possession or an experience that one lives) or ordinary-extraordinary acquisition (*i.e.*, something ordinary and present in everyday life or something extraordinary and never experienced) is preferable among consumers to encourage self-gift-giving.

In line with this, there is an intrinsic nuance to this phenomenon, called proportionality, which has not yet been explored. Proportionality differentiates the types of moments preceding the purchase and assigns that, regardless of whether the moment is impactful or not, the individual intends to present themselves proportionally. Previous research has shown that self-gift-giving is a phenomenon that occurs after a significant, impactful, or time-consuming event, such as personal accomplishments, disappointments, or depression (Mick & DeMoss, 1990, 1992; McGrath, 1989), whereas recent investigations have explored that indulgence is pleasant, regardless of the absence of a good justification for consuming (Lawry, 2022; D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021; Mortimer et al., 2015; Xu & Schwarz, 2009).

Previous investigations have not explored the proportionality of the moment before the purchase. This relationship can be found by relating the situational context to the desired purchase of the consumer. That is, the context can influence self-gift-giving's effectiveness since giving gifts at the appropriate time can increase the value of the gift (Heath et al., 2015; Xu & Schwarz, 2009). Therefore, the type of purchase carried out in this process should reflect what is intended to be achieved, considering the previous context. This process highlights proportionality as a regulatory and behavioral adjustment mechanism that properly drives the practice of self-gift-giving.

Therefore, this investigation proposes to describe the relationship between the dimensions of purchase and self-gift-giving. Moreover, this study reports which types of purchases are preferable and how the preceding context can regulate and stimulate self-gift-giving. To this end, we conducted experiments on the purchase phase within the consumption process (purchase, use, and disposal). This study advances the literature by examining what type of gift is preferred among material-experiential and ordinary-extraordinary goods or services and whether the type of preceding moment can impact this choice. Based on experimental studies to establish cause-and-effect relationships, we sought to explore this field empirically to bring managerial and theoretical implications to the behavior of self-directed consumers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Self-gift-giving

Consumers are increasingly self-oriented in their buying behaviors. Consequently, self-gift-giving has been recognized as an archetype of this phenomenon (Mick & DeMoss, 1992). The idea of self-gift-giving is not new, although it has received limited conceptual support and little empirical attention (Mortimer et al., 2015). Self-gift-giving, commonly called personal gifts or self-directed consumption, is a contemporary term that refers to the theory of self-indulgence. However, there is an asymmetry of nomenclatures and definitions between self-indulgence and self-gift-giving. Based on the philosophical episteme, self-indulgence has its ontological construction around the excessive pursuit of pleasure without necessarily having a purchase-and-consumption relationship (Battaly, 2010). On the other hand, self-gift-giving is structured in contemporary personal consumption relationships, covering both purchase and consumption (Mouakhar-Klouz et al., 2016).

Although studies related to this theme have been developed in the 1980s (e.g., Mick, 1986; Sherry, 1983; McGrath, 1989), from the 1990s onwards, a sparse but growing interest in studying the phenomenon of self-gift-giving has been observed (Rippé et al., 2022). Self-gift-giving is defined as a symbolic self-communication through premeditated indulgences linked to a remarkable context (Mortimer et al., 2015). More recent investigations have refined the phenomenon as a tendency to quickly reward oneself to escape the stress and pressure one experiences daily (Pizzetti et al., 2019).

In contrast to consumption by necessity, self-gift-giving expresses a hedonistic character and intends to satisfy the desires of the individual who practices it, allowing wishes for self-gratification (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). Xu and Schwarz (2009) propose that the essential motivators of self-gift-giving are reward and consolation after a personal achievement or dissatisfaction. In this way, the circumstances in which the individual finds themselves tend to influence or strengthen this type of consumption. The attributions and meanings of self-gift-giving need to be linked to the context of personal accomplishments, sadness, disappointment, holidays, or commemorative dates (Park, 2018; D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021).

Self-gift-giving is (1) symbolic self-communication through (2) special indulgences that are (3) premeditated and (4) highly context-based (Park, 2018). It often involves “self-dialogue” (Gupta et al., 2020), communicating,

for example, gratification or consolation (Rippé et al., 2019). The context, object, and frequency associated with self-gift-giving are central to understanding this phenomenon, although most empirical studies have only focused on its motivations. This investigation intends to highlight the type and frequency of purchases based on self-gift-giving. The choice of the ideal good and its frequency is as important as the context – even if it is impossible to completely isolate them from their context. Identifying which type of acquisition is appropriate to stimulate self-gift-giving behavior may be the core of this phenomenon.

Buying dimensions

Self-gift-giving can be practiced by purchasing any good or experience as long as it constitutes a form of indulgence (Mortimer et al., 2015). The divergence between goods and experiences goes beyond the mere physical characteristics of consumption. Studies have shown this dichotomy in the context of happiness, personal satisfaction, and self-definition (Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Capriarello & Reis, 2013). The literature elucidates that experiential shopping can provide consumers with greater fulfillment, happiness, and social connections. Such experiences include trips, restaurants, concerts etc. (Chan & Mogilner, 2017). In contrast, material purchases are made to obtain ownership and possession. They are commonly carried out by acquiring physical objects, such as cars, clothes, houses, cell phones etc. (Chan & Mogilner, 2017).

The literature establishes the consumption of experiences as triggering the highest levels of satisfaction and happiness (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). This is because experiential purchases carry more self-defining aspects than material purchases. As a result, they can show positive aspects of the individual's identity to others (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

The possibilities of material and experiential purchases in the market are almost unlimited, making differentiation between both categories a complex task. Therefore, to deepen the knowledge about the types of purchases, the dimension proposed by Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) was used to verify the frequency of self-gift-giving: ordinary and extraordinary purchases. Ordinary purchases are habitual, frequent, and included in everyday life. On the other hand, extraordinary purchases are exceptional, infrequent, and go beyond the domain of everyday life (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

Ordinary and extraordinary purchases are differentiated by frequency and not by consumers' value judgments or involvement with the purchase. If a product is perceived as inferior or superior to another, this judgment is subjective to each consumer. Thus, extraordinary purchases are defined as less frequent and ordinary purchases as more frequent acquisitions (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Another essential distinction that can be inferred is that ordinary purchases can be carried out faster than extraordinary ones, requiring little time and money.

Extraordinary purchases can give consumers greater life satisfaction, well-being, and happiness (Chan & Mogilner, 2017). Additionally, they provide important consequences for self-definition (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). Mick and DeMoss (1990), seminal authors of the self-gift-giving literature, explain that self-directed purchases are less likely to be a routine and low-involvement consumption, expressing that ordinary purchases are not common to self-gifting. This finding is corroborated by Lawry (2022), who states that self-gift-giving can stimulate the search for experiences aimed at luxury consumption and achieving status.

However, despite the literature identifying that experiential and extraordinary purchases are preferable to material and ordinary purchases, it is necessary to highlight some important aspects. Conventional consumers seek self-defining or extending aspects of themselves through purchase (Belk, 2013), performing symbolic communication with other individuals, groups, or communities. In this context, experiential and extraordinary purchases seem more satisfying. However, self-directed consumers practice symbolic self-communication by communicating to themselves, for example, an ideal (disciplined) self that congratulates a real (lazy) self for perseverance or effort (Mak et al., 2009; Xu & Schwarz, 2009; Rippé et al., 2022). In this context, material and ordinary purchases – characterized by being quick and practical – can more accurately and quickly fulfill the demand of the consumer who intends to console or reward himself.

The self-directed consumer has a greater tendency to prioritize material and ordinary purchases when practicing self-gift-giving, indicating that this phenomenon differs in terms of purchase dimensions. Based on this discussion and considering that the purchase dimensions were not previously associated with the self-gift-giving construct, the first hypothesis of this investigation is formed by the combination of the two dimensions under study, material-experiential purchase, and ordinary-extraordinary purchase, which results in:

- H1: Self-gift-giving differs significantly in terms of purchase dimensions.
- H1a: Self-gift-giving is significantly higher in ordinary material purchases when compared to other purchase dimensions.
- H1b: Self-gift-giving is significantly higher in material purchases than experiential purchases.
- H1c: Self-gift-giving is significantly higher in ordinary purchases than in extraordinary purchases.

The self-gift-giving literature does not address the different contexts that precede purchases. Previous research has shown that self-gift-giving is a phenomenon that occurs through a significant, impactful, or time-consuming event, such as holidays, personal achievements, disappointments, or depression (Mick & DeMoss, 1990, 1992; Mak et al., 2009; Rippé et al., 2019, 2022). On the other hand, more recent research clarifies that self-gift-giving can occur without necessarily having an impactful event (D’Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021; Xu & Schwarz, 2009). In general, investigations on self-gift neglect the condition of proportionality regarding the moment before the purchase.

Guided by the distinction of Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014), the contexts preceding the purchase were divided into ordinary (high frequency and low impact) and extraordinary (low frequency and very impactful). Less significant events can also impact self-gift-giving in the same way as significant events. This occurs because the individual is always seeking for pleasure or gratifying him/herself regardless of the moment (Battaly, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that self-gift-giving does not require an extraordinary or impactful moment. Based on this inference, the second research hypothesis clarifies the following:

- H2: Self-gift-giving does not differ between extraordinary and ordinary contexts preceding the purchase.

Considering that any context can incur equally in important gifts, we intend to identify which type of purchase is preferable in each context. Instead of looking at the kinds of purchases in isolation, analyzing self-gift-giving from the previous context to the purchase moment is necessary. This is because individuals are in constant micro-processes that demand cognitive efforts – habitual everyday pressures – and seek their rewards without necessarily going through impacting events. The self-gratification process is

subjective (Xu & Schwarz, 2009), and only the individual knows the value of their effort or the merit of their achievements (Shahid & Paul, 2021; D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021).

Proportionality relates to a “fair reward” that should be chosen to reflect past personal efforts. Remarkable moments can lead the individual to make a greater sacrifice to give themselves a gift, thus committing themselves to buy something new (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). The reciprocal of this statement can be admitted when the previous moment is not very remarkable, endorsing the statement that “self-indulgence requires choice” and purchases must be “peculiar to individuals and their context” (Battaly, 2010, p. 219). Based on this inference, the third research hypothesis argues that:

- H3: The moment before the purchase impacts the type of purchase.
- H3a: Self-gift-giving is greater in ordinary purchases when the preceding moment is ordinary.
- H3b: Self-gift-giving is greater in extraordinary purchases when the preceding moment is extraordinary.
- H3c: Self-gift-giving is greater in material purchases when the previous moment is ordinary.
- H3d: Self-gift-giving is greater in experiential purchases when the preceding moment is extraordinary.

This investigation is based on the inference that purchase dimensions may be relevant to the study of self-directed consumer behavior. To shed light on the complexity of this theory, we intend to analyze how the context before the purchase influences the practice of self-gift-giving. It should be noted that the research hypotheses disagree with what has been inferred about consumer behavior in conventional circumstances. This is because the scope of self-directed buying is specific and individual.

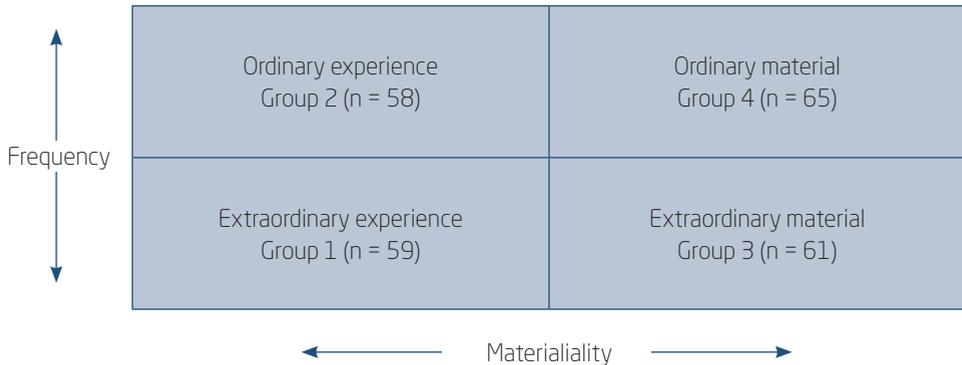
EXPERIMENT 1

Design and procedure

The design of the first experiment had an arrangement of 2 (experiential-material purchase) x 2 (extraordinary-ordinary purchase) (between-subject design). The sample, consisting of 243 university students (47.73% male and 52.26% female), was non-probabilistic (Hair et al., 2009).

Respondents were randomly¹ exposed to an experiment with four scenarios (Figure 1). Using GPower for sample calculation, the results showed an observed power of 95% at a significance level of 5% ($p = 0.004$). One-way ANOVA and the Tukey post-hoc test (HSD) were used for data analysis.

Figure 1
Experimental design



For the construction of the scenarios, a questionnaire was administered to 25 respondents in a pre-experimental phase, in which they were asked which purchase they would make for themselves. Everyone was assigned a specific purchase dimension (*e.g.*, material-ordinary purchase) and was asked to name at least five types of purchases. The researchers chose the most cited purchases to compose the scenarios of the respective dimensions. Furthermore, the independent variables of the first experiment were structured according to the material-experiential and ordinary-extraordinary purchase dimensions (van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

The experiment was carried out virtually during September and October 2021. Respondents received the scenarios at the end of the virtual classes to provoke a feeling of recent effort (post-class), producing greater sensitivity to the experiment. All participants read the scenario to answer the questionnaire.

¹ The respondent was asked, at the beginning of the questionnaire, to choose a number from 1 to 4. When selecting option 1, he/she was directed to the extraordinary experience scenario; when answering 2, to the ordinary experience scenario; when answering 3, to the extraordinary material scenario; and when answering 4, to the ordinary material scenario.

Regarding the effectiveness of the manipulation, three questions were asked: 1. “Could I imagine myself in the situation described above?”; 2. “Did this scenario make me imagine in a real situation of buying an experience (a good)?”; and 3. “Are (not) the products mentioned in this scenario frequent in my daily life?”. Then, the individuals responded to the following 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree): attitude towards the advertised product/service (Lepkowska-White et al., 2003), coping strategy (avoidance) (Duhachek, 2005), and self-gift-giving (Mortimer et al., 2015). The randomization process made it possible to estimate the homogeneity of the sample (Hernandez et al., 2014). Furthermore, we found no difference between the scenarios, attesting to the homogeneity among the experimental groups from the control variables attitude towards the advertised product/service and avoidance.

Data analysis

Initially, we performed normality and homogeneity tests. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed the normality of the variables in the different study scenarios ($p > 0.05$) (Hair et al., 2009). Levene’s test sought to verify whether the groups come from populations with homogeneous variance. The results of the material-experiential purchase dimension (*Levene* (1.241) = 2.547; $p = 0.112$) and the ordinary-extraordinary purchase dimension (*Levene* (1.241) = 0.066, $p = 0.798$) were satisfactory at a significance level above 0.05. Therefore, the results demonstrate that the sample was drawn from the same population.

Regarding the scale adjustment proposed by Mortimer et al. (2015), we sought to assess adequacy through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The adapted scale with seven items was grouped into a single factor, presenting a high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index (0.857) and significance below 0.05 ($p = 0.000$). As for reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was used, yielding satisfactory results (0.890). Based on these results, the scale showed satisfactory indices.

As for the effectiveness of manipulation, the first verification obtained an average of 4.20 ($\sigma = 0.63$). The average of the second verification was 4.34 ($\sigma = 0.67$). As for the third manipulation check, the average was 4.23 ($\sigma = 0.58$). Therefore, with high averages and satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.801$), it was assumed that the respondents understood the manipulation of the scenarios and dimensions of the proposed purchases. Finally, as expected, there was no difference in attitude toward the advertised product/

service ($F(3,239) = 1.989, p = 0.116$) and avoidance ($F(3,239) = 0.960, p = 0.412$) between the scenarios, evidencing sample homogeneity and experimental control.

Results

The one-way ANOVA test indicated a significant mean difference between the groups ($F(3,239) = 135.920, p = 0.000$). In this manipulation, the ordinary material purchase scenario showed the greatest attitude towards self-gift-giving compared to the other scenarios. A summary of the four scenarios is displayed in Table 1.

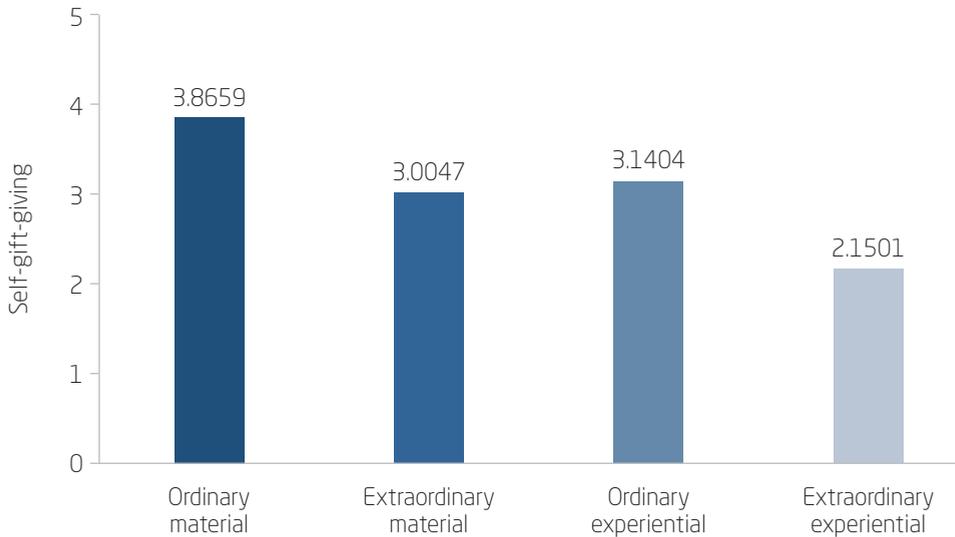
Table 1
Multiple comparisons test (Tukey HSD)

	Material purchase		Experiential purchase	
	Ordinary	Extraordinary	Ordinary	Extraordinary
	3.8659 (σ 0.6246)	3.0047 (σ 0.5483)	3.1404 (σ 0.3080)	2.1501 (σ 0.3017)
	n = 65	n = 61	n = 58	n = 59
Ordinary material purchase	-	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
Extraordinary material purchase	0.000***	-	0.403	0.000***
Ordinary experiential purchase	0.000***	0.403	-	0.000***
Extraordinary experiential purchase	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	-

*** Significant at 0.01.

The Tukey HSD identified which scenarios presented mean differences. The Tukey HSD efficiently compares all pairs of means with similar sampling (Douglas & Kennedy, 2020). The ordinary material purchase scenario ($M = 3.86$) showed a significant difference from the other scenarios ($p = 0.000$). The scenarios with extraordinary material purchases ($M = 3.00$) and ordinary experiential purchases ($M = 3.14$) showed no significant difference between the attitudes towards self-gift-giving ($p = 0.403$). Finally, the extraordinary experiential purchase scenario showed a significant mean difference from all other scenarios ($p = 0.000$). Figure 2, below, graphically organizes the distribution of self-gift-giving among the scenarios.

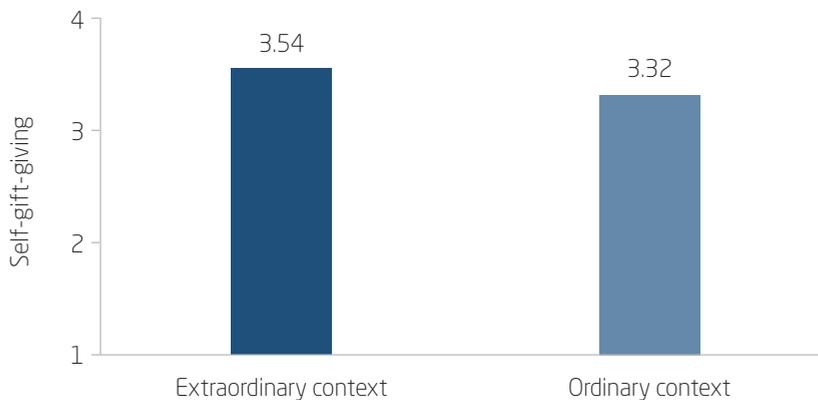
Figure 2
Multiple comparisons means



An additional robust test of equality of means was performed namely the Welch and Brown-Forsythe test. Both tests showed significant results. The results show that the attitude of self-gift-giving is significantly higher in an ordinary material purchase ($M_{\text{ordinary material}} (3.86) > M_{\text{extraordinary material}} (3.00) = M_{\text{ordinary experiential}} (3.14) > M_{\text{extraordinary experiential}} (2.15)$; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H1a was accepted.

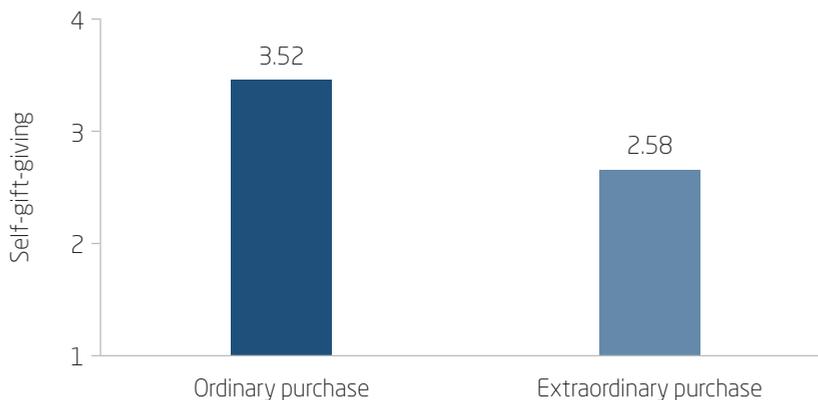
Additional one-way ANOVA tests were performed to investigate the effects of the dimensions separately. First, we sought to determine whether there was a difference in the attitude towards self-gift-giving between the material purchase and the experiential purchase scenarios. The tests indicated that the means showed significant differences ($F(1,241) = 90.272$, $p = 0.000$). Welch and Brown-Forsythe's robust tests of equality also showed significant results.

Of 243 respondents, 126 were included in the material purchase scenarios and obtained a significantly higher average than the 117 respondents in the experiential purchase scenarios ($M_{\text{material}} = 3.44 > M_{\text{experiential}} = 2.64$; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, the attitude towards self-gift-giving was significantly higher in material purchases, corroborating H1b. Figure 3 shows the predisposition of individuals towards material purchases.

Figure 3**Material versus experiential purchase dimension**

Next, a one-way ANOVA was performed to verify the manipulated main effect in ordinary and extraordinary purchase scenarios. The tests indicated a significant difference in the attitude towards self-gift-giving ($F(1,241) = 140.776, p = 0.000$). Robust Brown-Forsythe and Welch tests of equality of means showed significant results.

Of the 243 respondents, 123 were included in the ordinary purchase scenarios and obtained a significantly higher average than the 120 respondents in the extraordinary purchase scenarios ($M_{\text{ordinary}} = 3.52 > M_{\text{extraordinary}} = 2.58, p = 0.000$). Therefore, individuals showed a greater predisposition to make ordinary purchases, corroborating H1c. Figure 4 synthesizes the results.

Figure 4**Ordinary versus extraordinary purchase dimension**

H1 (self-gift-giving differs significantly in purchase dimensions) was accepted because of the confirmation of H1a, H1b, and H1c. Therefore, the type of purchase can be considered a predecessor variable of individuals' self-gift-giving.

EXPERIMENT 2

The literature states that self-gift-giving has a hedonistic character and, thus, can be motivated by specific contexts (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). However, previous studies have not sought to determine which purchases are preferable at certain pre-purchase moments. Pre-purchase circumstances tend to influence or strengthen specific types of self-gift-giving (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). Therefore, the moment before the purchase was established as the independent variable in this experiment. Adapting to the dimensions of Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014), the preceding context was defined as ordinary or extraordinary. In addition, it was possible to identify which type of purchase was preferable in specific pre-purchase contexts.

Design and procedure

Consisting of 171 university students (45.6% male and 54.4% female) and collected through a non-probabilistic procedure (Hair et al., 2009), the sample was randomly² exposed to an experiment with two scenarios (between-subject design 2×1 – ordinary moment *versus* extraordinary moment). The randomization process allowed us to achieve sample homogeneity (Hernandez et al., 2014). Using GPower for sample calculation, the results showed an observed power of 95% at the 5% significance level ($p = 0.046$). One-way ANOVA was used for the data analysis.

For the construction of the experimental scenarios through a pre-experimental phase, a questionnaire was applied to 20 respondents, in which individuals were asked to elucidate examples of moments that they considered ordinary or extraordinary. Then, the researchers chose the most cited moment to compose each scenario (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

² The respondent was asked, at the beginning of the questionnaire, to choose between numbers 1 and 2. When selecting option 1, he/she was directed to the “ordinary context” scenario and when selecting option 2, to the “extraordinary context” scenario.

The experiment was carried out virtually during September and October 2021. The respondents received the scenarios at the end of the virtual classes to provoke greater sensitivity to the experiment. The experiment consisted of a hypothetical scenario and a questionnaire. All participants should read the scenario and answer the questionnaire. According to the manipulated context in the respective scenario, the respondents were asked what kind of purchase they had imagined and what they would like to buy as a self-gift. The mentioned purchases were categorized according to the ordinary-extraordinary and material-experiential dimensions to identify whether the concept of proportionality operated in self-gift-giving.

Two questions were asked to test the effectiveness of the manipulation: 1. "I could imagine myself in the situation described above"; and 2. "The news mentioned in this scenario is (not) relatively frequent in my daily life." The manipulation assessed whether the respondents' previous moments were ordinary or extraordinary. Finally, individuals responded to the following constructs: attitude towards the advertised product/service (Lepkowska-White et al., 2003), coping strategy (avoidance) (Duhachek, 2005), and self-gift-giving (Mortimer et al., 2015). We used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Again, a mean difference between the scenarios was not found, attesting to the homogeneity among the experimental groups.

Data analysis

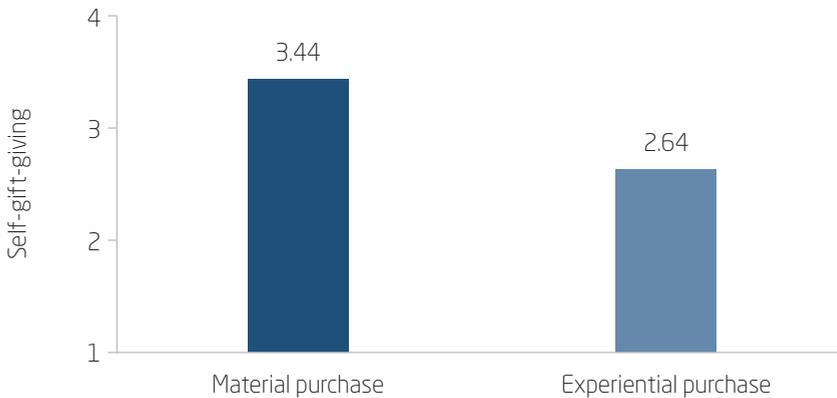
The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed the normality of the variables, with statistical significance above 0.05 (Hair et al., 2009). Levene's test results were also satisfactory at a significance level above 0.05 (Levene (1.169) = 0.000, $p = 0.984$), demonstrating that the sample was drawn from the same population.

The first verification averaged 4.20 ($\sigma = 0.93$), confirming the effectiveness of the manipulation. The average of the second check was 3.97 ($\sigma = 0.87$). Therefore, with high means and satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.870$), it was assumed that the individuals followed the proposed predecessor moments. Finally, with no difference in attitude toward the advertised product/service ($F(1,169) = 0.128$, $p = 0.721$) and avoidance ($F(1,169) = 3.842$, $p = 0.052$) between the scenarios, the sample presented homogeneity, and the experiment was efficiently performed.

Results

One-way ANOVA indicated that the ordinary context ($n = 94$; $M = 3.32$) did not differ from the extraordinary context ($n = 77$; $M = 3.54$) at a significant level ($F(1,169) = 2.678$, $p = 0.104$). Thus, H2 – “Self-gift-giving does not differ between extraordinary and ordinary contexts preceding the purchase” – was accepted. The results can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Ordinary versus extraordinary context



In order to operationalize the proportionality of self-gift-giving, we asked what type of purchase individuals intended to acquire in their respective scenarios. Table 2 summarizes the relationship between the chosen purchase and the context before self-gift-giving. When included in an ordinary context, individuals who chose ordinary purchases achieved a significantly greater self-gift-giving attitude than those who chose extraordinary purchases ($F(1,91) = 61.561$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H3a was accepted. In contrast, in the extraordinary context, individuals who chose extraordinary purchases achieved significantly greater self-gift-giving than those who chose ordinary purchases ($F(1,76) = 4.629$, $p = 0.035$). Therefore, H3b was accepted.

Table 2
Summary of types of purchases

	Ordinary context (n = 93)			Extraordinary context (n = 78)		
Ordinary purchase	n = 54	3.8016	0.000***	n = 36	3.3254	0.035**
Extraordinary purchase	n = 39	2.6593		n = 42	3.7245	
Material purchase	n = 50	3.5486	0.008***	n = 42	3.4864	0.542
Experiential purchase	n = 43	3.0598		n = 36	3.6032	

*** Significant at 0.01; ** significant at 0.05.

Regarding the material experiential dimension, in ordinary preceding contexts, individuals showed significantly greater self-gift-giving for material purchases ($F(1,91) = 7.424, p = 0.008$) compared to experiential purchases, corroborating H3c. However, when inserted in an extraordinary scenario, individuals did not show a significantly greater attitude towards self-gift-giving for experiential purchases ($F(1,76) = 0.375, p = 0.542$) compared to material ones. Therefore, H3d was not accepted.

H3 (the context before the purchase impacts on the type of purchase) was accepted due to the confirmation of H3a, H3b, and H3c, despite the rejection of H3d. When confronting the previous contexts with the purchase types, self-gift-giving reveals a particular proportionality carried out by the consumer before the purchase.

DISCUSSION

Although the literature demonstrates a consumption preference for experiential and extraordinary purchases, as they bring greater levels of satisfaction and happiness (Chan & Mogilner, 2017), high levels of self-gift-giving are more associated with material and ordinary purchases. A possible reason for this result may be the celerity of gratification. Individuals seek to forgive themselves with quick rewards to escape the stress and pressure they experience in their daily lives (Mak et al., 2009; Rippé et al., 2019). For a consumer who wants to practice self-gift-giving and seeks immediate gratification, practicality, and celerity contribute to the preference for material and ordinary purchases.

In contrast to the concept that extraordinary experiential purchases are more self-defining (Caprariello & Reis, 2013), self-gift-giving operates through individual and immediate communication. In this context, consumers opt for

intrinsic self-communication, and their choices generally carry practical satisfaction (Mak et al., 2009), reducing self-defining consequences. Desirability and feasibility are also important to self-gift-giving. This conception reinforces the idea that the intentions related to self-gift-giving are based on the perspective of an ideal “I” that gives gifts to the real “I” for some effort or achievement.

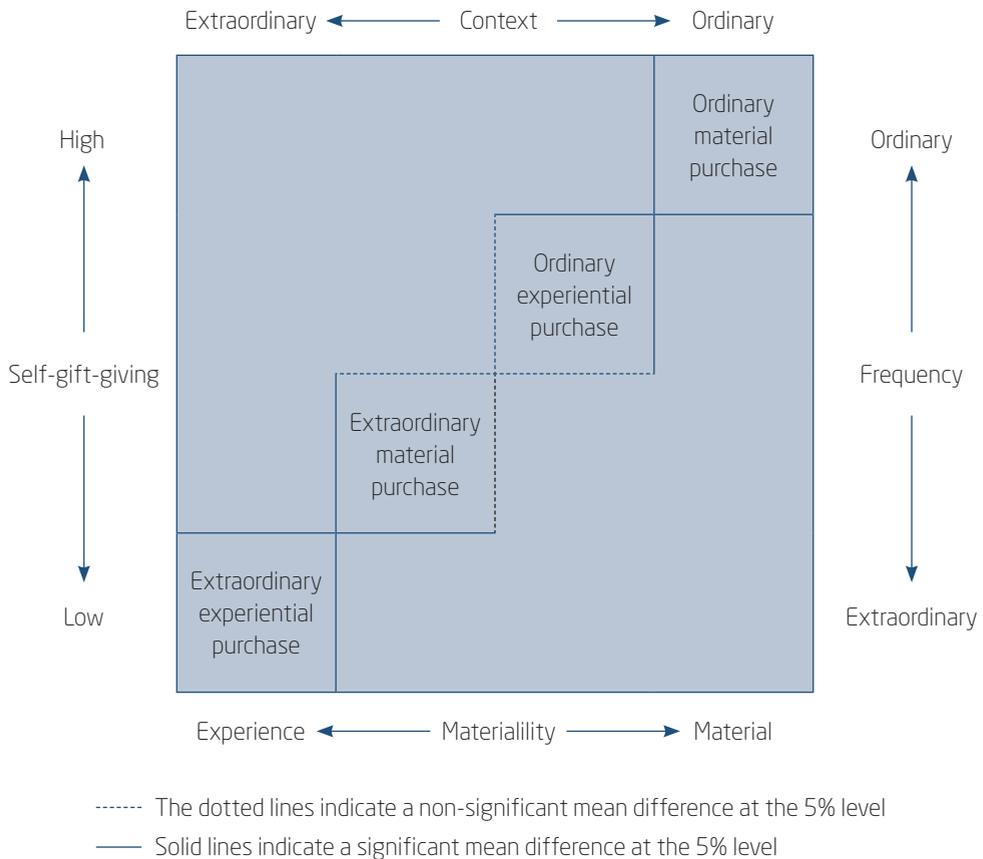
Contrary to the literature, the findings converge to a conceptual perspective that self-gift-giving is a less conspicuous and more authentic communication (cf. Lawry, 2022). Studies report that extraordinary experiential purchases are more self-defining and improve individuals’ social status (Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Chan & Mogilner, 2017). Such a purchase category would be ideal for those who want to show off their achievements in order to gain social status. On the other hand, material and ordinary purchases would be linked to a more reserved and genuine consumption practice, such as self-gift-giving.

Based on the idea that an ideal “I” gives gifts to the real “I” for some effort or conquest, it is reasonable to assume that individuals who practice self-gift-giving are proud of themselves. In this way, they expend efforts towards self-indulgence. Researchers have shown that pride is the motivating force by which individuals engage in costly efforts (Panchal & Gill, 2020). There are two types of pride: authentic, which is related to a genuine sense of achievement of goals, and hubristic, which is related to self-aggrandizement and the pursuit of social status (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Pride categories may be relevant to explaining self-gift-giving since this phenomenon has an authentic character. This discussion may explain why there was a greater preference for ordinary material purchases in Experiment 1.

People who have made an experiential and extraordinary purchase may aim to achieve something that differentiates them from others, increasing their motivation to show uniqueness. Some traits can resemble self-aggrandization. In contrast, individuals who experience material and ordinary purchases may be more concerned with momentary demands, such as necessities or consolations. Therefore, people who practice self-gift-giving are expected to focus only on themselves when shopping (Park, 2018; Rippé et al., 2019; Gupta et al., 2020; D’Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021), resulting in low concern with status issues or aspects related to their social ties.

A theoretical model was proposed based on the study dimensions (see Figure 6) to synthesize the research findings. These dimensions must be recognized for their theoretical increment and managerial utility for the consumer’s self-gift-giving behavior.

Figure 6
Intention to self-gift-giving model



Synthesizing the findings and applying these dimensions in a graphic model enables a better understanding of the experimental results. Each of the four-dimensional features represents a continuum. The results express a complete divergence from the traditional theory of purchase dimensions. Figure 6 shows that the extraordinary experiential purchase dimension induces the lowest intention of self-gift-giving and is the opposite of ordinary material purchases. This implies that the purchase dimensions may change preferences when empirically related to other acquisition contexts, such as self-gift-giving. In addition, this disharmony between the experiment results in the traditional theory of purchase dimensions, indicating that different daily products have their utility when inserted in specific circumstances.

Regarding the context before the purchase, the results of the second experiment indicated that individuals, regardless of the preceding context, intend to practice self-gift-giving with similar intensities. However, both scenarios showed high average attitudes toward self-gift-giving without significant differences. This perspective brings to light the theoretical ambiguity developed by researchers in this area. New findings have reinforced the lack of justification for self-gift-giving (D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021; Shahid & Paul, 2021). The results indicated that fewer impactful moments are also rewarded. The existence or absence of an apparent reason does not differentiate individuals' indulgence behavior, revealing that self-gift-giving is not necessarily related to a previous impactful event.

Similarly, it was shown how the cause-effect relationship occurs between the previous context and the purchase types, denominated in this investigation as the proportionality of self-gift-giving. In a deductive process, it was accepted that the more extraordinary the preceding context was, the more extraordinary the purchase should be. The results indicated that consumers seek a fair reward that reflects their previous personal effort or achieved gratification. Regarding the material *vs.* experiential dimension, material purchases were prioritized in an ordinary predecessor context. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the preference for material or experiential purchases in the extraordinary predecessor moment.

Proportionality adds and reassesses the structure of self-gift-giving set out in the literature since introductory research has associated the phenomenon with an impactful or stressful effort before the purchase (Mick & DeMoss, 1990). On the other hand, current research associates self-gift-giving with little effort and low or no motivation for self-gift-giving (Xu & Schwarz, 2009; Mortimer et al., 2015; D'Astous & Mouakhar-Klouz, 2021). In this context, the notion of proportionality adds to this discussion by inferring that achievements or efforts are proportionately and adequately rewarded based on the previous context. Proportionality is practiced when choosing the type of purchase. In short, when a major achievement or effort is made, there is a greater predisposition to practice self-gift-giving with an extraordinary purchase. In contrast, when a minor achievement or effort is made, there is a greater predisposition to practice self-gift-giving with an ordinary purchase.

Despite gift-giving behavior expressing a strong hedonic characteristic (Heath et al., 2015), respondents showed concern about the type of purchase. When considering the practicality and celerity of ordinary material purchases and the proportionality of choice in purchase acts, it can be

attributed, or at least suspected, that these consumers have a rational principle of purchase decision. The proportionality of these consumers is analogous to the rationality of the internal consistency of choice (Sen, 1999), in which a rational choice requires a relationship between what one tries to obtain and how one seeks to obtain it. Although self-gift-giving expresses a hedonistic character, the consumer's interaction with the purchase involves well-defined and specific choices for each situation and context.

Theoretical implications

As a theoretical contribution, this investigation sought to increase the conceptual understanding and rigor of the self-gift-giving concept. Considering that ordinary material purchases led to a greater attitude towards self-gift-giving, although the literature indicated that extraordinary experiential purchases were preferable, it was possible to extend the existing knowledge about the dimensions of purchase and self-gift-giving. The dissonance of these results with the literature is conducive to advancing research in consumer behavior, especially for understanding contradictory conceptual nuances consolidated in the area.

Structuring the two purchase dimensions from the perspective of self-gift-giving made it possible to increase the existing theory on consumer behavior and purchase preferences. Theoretical insights come from demonstrating how adding a new perspective significantly alters our understanding of the phenomenon, rearranging causes and effects. Not necessarily intending to deconstruct the notion that experiential and extraordinary purchases are preferable in situations of habitual purchase, we conclude that material and ordinary purchases are important in the immediacy of self-gift-giving. In self-gift-giving practices, therefore, ordinary possessions are essential for the consumer to carry out symbolic self-communication.

Subsequently, the proportionality of self-gifting was identified. Although the literature is imprecise about the importance of contexts that precede self-gift-giving, this investigation sheds light on understanding how these contexts impact the type of purchase. Proportionality promotes a harmonious relationship between context, purchase, and frequency. We found that ordinary events provide similar self-gift-giving attitudes to extraordinary events. The literature indicated that predecessor events with little impact did not explain this phenomenon. Although this debate remains imprecise, the concept of proportionality was effectively tested and operationalized.

Managerial implications

As a practical utility, the findings intend to change or at least propose a reflection on how the advertisements of a product are developed since the behavior of the consumers who practice self-gift-giving is closely related to the context before the purchase. For instance, the act of self-gift-giving reminds the consumer that they have made some effort. Therefore, expressing how much the consumer deserves a reward for their daily effort or reminding them of their experience before purchasing can be more efficient.

When the consumer perceives themselves in situations of recent effort, the practice of self-reward can occur proportionally to this perceived effort. It should be noted that consumers are in constant micro-processes of commitment and daily efforts. For this reason, ordinary material products can adequately contemplate these lived efforts. Likewise, when a consumer puts in more effort than usual, they intend to reward themselves extraordinarily.

Deepening the knowledge about the purchase dimension of the self-indulgent consumer brings possibilities for practical applications for consumers. These conclusions may lead to important alternatives for retail stores in attracting consumers with self-directed consumption attitudes. Offering a rewarding product, using the narrative that the individual is worthy of your product, can be attractive.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of investigating the relationship between the purchase dimensions and the behavior of practicing self-gift-giving was achieved. The hypotheses that the self-indulgent consumer intends to make material and ordinary purchases were confirmed. Regarding the moment before the purchase, the averages between the experimental groups did not reach significant differences, indicating that individuals tend to practice self-gift-giving regardless of the context. It was also identified that in ordinary contexts, there is a greater intention to buy ordinary products, and at extraordinary times, there is a greater intention to make extraordinary purchases – confirming the hypotheses of the second experiment.

As a limitation, this investigation presented a very homogeneous sample. Consequently, it was not possible to go deeper into the context of gender and income, although these variables could potentially be moderators of self-gift-giving. However, as an indication for future research, investigations

into how self-gift-giving behaves in different income ranges can be carried out. Another important aspect to be studied may be the consumer's involvement with the product, highlighted by the scenario or flagged by their consumer since this variable has the potential to cross the concept of proportionality.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Hypothetical scenarios

Experiment 1			
Scenario	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Situation
1	Experience	Extraordinary	"Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. You've been studying and working for several days and decide it's time to get rewarded. This way, at the end of class/work, you buy some experience to reward the wear you had in the last week. After thinking a little, you discover that some exceptional experiences seem quite attractive, such as: taking a trip to a beach or mountains, going to a concert by your favorite band, going to a spa, or going to a luau – among other experiences that you I would love to be able to do this to reward myself. Considering your own gratification and considering the experiences available on the market, you are about to decide which one to buy".
2	Experience	Ordinary	"Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. You've been studying and working for several days and decide it's time to get rewarded. This way, at the end of class/work, you buy some experience to reward the wear you had in the last week. After thinking about it for a while, you discover that some affordable experiences seem quite attractive, such as: going to a restaurant, going to a pub, going to the cinema, going to the beauty salon – among other experiences that you would love to do to reward yourself. Considering your own gratification and considering the experiences available on the market, you are about to decide which one to buy".

(continues)

Table 1 (conclusion)*Hypothetical scenarios*

Experiment 1			
Scenario	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Situation
3	Material	Extraordinary	“Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. You’ve been studying and working for several days and decide it’s time to get rewarded. This way, at the end of class/work, you decide to buy some product as a way to reward the wear you had in the last week. After thinking about it for a while, you discover that some exceptional products seem quite attractive, such as: buying a cell phone, buying a computer, buying expensive branded clothing, buying jewelry, or even buying a car – among other products that you would love to buy for yourself. reward yourself. Considering your own gratification and considering the products available on the market, you are about to decide which one to buy”.
4	Material	Ordinary	“Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. You’ve been studying and working for several days and decide it’s time to get rewarded. This way, at the end of class/work, you decide to buy some product as a way to reward the wear you had in the last week. After thinking a little, you discover that some affordable products look quite attractive, such as: eating at a fast food or ifood, buying new clothes, buying a book, and having ice cream – among other products that you would love to buy to reward yourself. Considering your own gratification and considering the products available on the market, you are about to decide which one to buy”.

Table 2
Hypothetical scenarios

Experiment 2		
Scenario	Dimension	Situation
1	Ordinary context	"Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. You've been studying and working for several days and decide it's time to get rewarded. This way, at the end of the day you decide to buy something as a reward for the great news received. After some thought, you are now imagining something interesting that you would like to buy (good or experience) after receiving this news".
2	Extraordinary context	"Imagine that, on any given day, you start thinking about what you would like to do for yourself. Soon after, you receive the news that you have been selected for a job vacancy in a large company in your area of expertise, and then you decide that it is time to be rewarded. This way, at the end of the day you decide to buy something as a reward for the great news received. After some thought, you are now imagining something interesting that you would like to buy (good or experience) after receiving this news".

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