

"I deserve this": A Phenomenological Study Toward Online Impulse Buying Behavior of Service Contractors

Kristine N. Somera

Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Sta. Mesa, Manila, Philippines

Author Email: krisome22@gmail.com

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Abstract. With the rising popularity of digital marketplaces, the phenomenon of "impulse buying" online has become increasingly common. This study examined the lived experiences of Filipino service contractors regarding this phenomenon, utilizing the Hedonic Motivation Theory and the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework to explore the driving forces behind their inclination for online impulse buying and their perception of "I deserve this." The researcher used the Impulse Buying Scale developed by Rook and Fisher in 1995 to identify ten service contractors from the province of Aurora who scored high and met the specific criteria. These ten participants were interviewed individually online. The data analysis revealed six categories summarizing the lived experiences of service contractors regarding online impulse buying behavior: a) The emergence of online impulse buying behavior among service contractors, b) The motivations behind service contractors' online impulse buying, c) The positive or therapeutic effects of online impulse buying, d) The negative impacts of online impulse buying, e) The extent to which service contractors engage in online impulse buying, and f) The coping strategies employed by service contractors in response to online impulse buying. This study provides valuable insights for researchers, particularly those in the Philippines, who wish to explore various dimensions of online impulse buying.

Keywords: Online shopping; Impulse buying; Service contractor.

1.0 Introduction

Nowadays people live in a world where almost everyone relied in digital technology. With internet access, one can order food with a click, be picked up in a minute, reserve a house instantly, and of course, purchase things online right away. Indeed, today's market had become fast-paced, and consumer driven. Overtime, e-commerce gained popularity, allowing consumers to shop online and have their ordered things delivered to their door a few days later (Legaspi et. al, 2016). As a result, this increased the frequency of buyers buying online, drawing the researchers' attention on the phenomenon of impulse buying.

Impulse buying is the term used to describe the unplanned, sudden, and strong desire a consumer has to buy goods or services (Anas et al., 2022). Aside from a sudden drive to act, it is also defined by an imbalanced emotional state, a diminished capacity for cognitive evaluation, the occurrence of psychological conflict, and consuming without considering the implications (Aquino et al., 2020). Previous studies revealed that a person's emotional state could trigger impulsivity (Borromeo et al., 2022) and impulse buying could be triggered by negative or down-low moods. Moreover, Lee and Bottger (2017) stated that feelings of consummatory indulgence or the apparent freedom to purchase anything could release those seeking retail therapy from the psychological burden of their negative emotions, particularly in the case of unplanned purchases.

Foreign research studies made on impulse buying have focused more on studying different generations such as generations X, Y, and Z while existing local studies were conducted among college students, millennials, and elementary teachers. Even though impulse buying behavior had previously been the subject of much research, the researcher believed that there was so much to learn about this phenomenon in the context of service contractors as there are no studies focusing on this sector yet. According to Chow and Saskatchewan (2020), the phrase "*I deserve this*" embodied the notion that impulse buying behavior is usually justified by a person's sense of entitlement or reward. This is a topic worth considering psychologically in the context of service contractors in the Philippines. Hence, this phenomenological study delved into the underlying meanings and motivation behind the service contractors' tendency for online impulse buying, considering the setbacks of their employment type, and comprehended their perception of "*I deserve this*" following each impulsive purchase of products on the various online shopping stores. The study provided valuable insights for academic and practical usage.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study examined the lived experiences of the service contractors on their online impulse buying behavior using a qualitative research design to give comprehensive information and deep insights. The researcher utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to describe and interpret the meaning of their lived experiences in order to reveal the meaning that exists within experience and to convey felt understanding in words (Smith & Osborn, 2015). In a 'participant-oriented' research, interpretative phenomenological analysis gives interview subjects or study participants the freedom to tell their own stories about their lived experiences without fear of retaliation or legal repercussions. Since IPA is a qualitative research technique, it gives researchers the best understanding of the most intimate decisions made by research participants during their lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

2.2 Research Locale

The study was carried out in the province of Aurora, Philippines. The researcher distributed the survey online among the service contractors in the eight (8) municipalities of Aurora namely Dipaculao, Baler, Maria Aurora, San Luis, Dinalungan, Dinggalan, Casiguran, and Dilasag, to identify the key participants of the study. Aurora province has predominantly rural population and is situated in the Central Luzon region. Its capital is the municipality of Baler. The province area occupies 3, 133.40 square kilometers (1 209.81 square miles).

2.3 Research Participants

This study selected participants who were representatives of the population of people who engaged in impulsive buying behavior using a purposive sample strategy and competent judgment. Ten (10) key participants were selected from among the one hundred (100) service contractors in the province of Aurora who completed the Impulse Buying Scale formulated by Rook and Fisher in 1995 to determine the level of their tendency for impulsive purchases. The selected participants scored high in the Impulsive Buying Scale, getting at least 31 points. In addition to this criteria, the selected participants were also at the age range of 20 to 30 who have online shopping stores such as Shopee or Lazada installed in their cellular phones and were service contractors for at least one year.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher carried out two (2) procedures to capture the research's objectives. The first one was the survey for potential participants using the Impulse Buying Scale instrument, proposed by Rook and Fisher in 1995 to identify individuals with high tendency of impulse buying. It has been demonstrated by researchers like Akalain and Godelek (2018) that this scale, which measures impulsive buying, is valid and reliable.

Another research instrument used was the semi-structured interview guide which allowed the researcher and the participant to engage in an open dialogue. The participants were first asked about their demographic data using the Personal Data Sheet guide, asking about their feelings at the particular moment, and was followed up by the general question, "How has been your living situation as a contract of service worker?" followed by the interview guide questions. The researcher had this interview guide questions validated by psychologists to ensure that the guide questions will capture the lived experiences of the service contractors toward online impulse buying. The

script was also written in Filipino to make it easier to understand as the interview guide covers questions relating to their personal experiences.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher ensured that the study was carried out within the specified parameters and conditions. Initially, to purposely select the key participants for the study, a survey questionnaire—Impulse Buying Scale—was sent online through Google Form among one hundred (100) service contractors in the province of Aurora. The researcher sent the informed consent forms to the selected ten (10) key participants and shared them a file that discusses the nature and ethics of the interview. The researcher requested the participant's consent to record the entire interview, which was conducted electronically through the use of the Google Meet program. A list of guide questions that the researcher had developed was used as a framework for the interview. Follow-up questions were also asked based on the participant's responses.

Following the one-on-one interview sessions, the next step followed Alase's (2017) list of steps for data coding, analysis, and interpretation. These steps include reading through the interview responses to find common themes, going back and reviewing each transcript or listening to any recording devices for clarity, and capturing and representing the "core essence" of the research participants' "lived experiences". Thematic analysis, as employed in this phenomenological study of service contractors' online impulse buying behavior, proves to be a valuable tool for extracting recurring patterns and themes from their rich narratives and experiences in the digital marketplace (Carter et al., 2014). To establish rigor in the present study, the researcher employed reflexivity. The researcher conducted member-checking (Mc-Kim, 2023) to establish validity of the description of the lived experiences of the service contractors towards online impulse buying behavior.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles are of paramount importance to the researcher and the following were implemented throughout the research period.

Informed consent. To facilitate the research study, it is crucial to consider that the key participants must freely and voluntarily give their informed consent with their affixed signature, signifying their agreement to participate in the study to the researcher after the discussion of the purpose of the study.

Autonomy, confidentiality, and anonymity. The researcher conducted the interview in a one-on-one (researcher-participant) setting to make sure that the respondents were not influenced by other participants. Furthermore, the researcher assured confidentiality of the participants' personal information, responses, audio and video recordings, and transcriptions of the interview sessions conducted. Moreover, the researcher employed code names to the key participants to protect their real identity (Arifin, 2018).

Non-maleficence. An ethical guideline on the participant's world emphasizes that the researcher must include methods that ensure that participants are not coerced and that their treatment is not influenced by their decision to participate or not participate. The researcher puts the participant before the research without feeling pressured to finish the study in a way that prevented them from doing so and from taking the participant's effects into account (Arifin, 2018).

Debriefing. In case study participants experience excessive emotional stress, the researcher has devised protocols for providing them with follow-up care.

Incentives. The researcher gave the participants token of appreciation for their time and participation for the completion of the present study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The analysis of data revealed six (6) categories that summarized the lived experiences of service contractors toward online impulse buying behavior. The categories generated consist of the following: (1) the emergence of online impulse buying behavior of service contractors, (2) the motivations of the service contractors toward online impulse buying, (3) the positive or the therapeutic effects of online impulse buying, (4) the negative impacts of online impulse buying, (5) the extent to which the service contractors will seek online impulse buying and (6) the coping strategies of the service contractors toward online impulse buying. The categories and themes are illustrated below in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes on the lived experiences of service contractors toward online impulse buying behavior

Themes	Sub-themes
The emergence of online impulse buying behavior of service contractors	• Coping mechanism • Self-concept and identity
The motivations of the service contractors toward online impulse buying behavior	• desire to escape from negative feelings and emotions • desire for immediate gratification
The positive impacts or the therapeutic effects of online impulse buying	• sense of achievement • stress alleviation • mood regulation
The negative impacts of online impulse buying	• financial stress • feelings of guilt and regret
The extent to which service contractors would seek online impulse buying	• desire for rewards • desire to heal the 'inner child'
The coping strategies of the service contractors toward online impulse buying	• mindful spending • self-control

Theme 1: The Emergence of Online Impulse Buying Behavior of Service Contractors

Participants have shared that they have already been engaging in online impulse buying behavior even before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the restrictions that were imposed during this time, especially with the social distancing, and the fear that they will be infected with the COVID-19 virus, their impulse buying behavior online have intensified.

Coping Mechanism

Most of the participants revealed that engaging in online impulse buying behavior has become a coping mechanism, especially during the pandemic. Interestingly, seven (7) out of ten (10) participants thought that they have been engaging in impulse buying prior the pandemic but the restrictions of not being able to go outside during the pandemic has intensified their impulse buying online, hence, making them engage in online impulse buying for at least five (5) years already. For instance, Joward, whom according to him has been engaging in impulse buying for five years already, shared how he was isolated and got quarantined for twenty-eight (28) days and how impulse buying has helped him cope with the loneliness he was feeling at the time. He said,

"...when I was quarantined for twenty-eight days, we had our own room. So every after day of work, when I feel sad, I will search the orange app and browse so when I see something and I want it, I buy it."

In addition, Krisel, have shared that when Shopee and Lazada trended as online shopping stores, she has been buying online already, however, pandemic has increased her impulse buying behavior online. When asked about her perceived length of impulse buying, her answer was

"...maybe it's been five (5) years since Shopee and Lazada became trendy, but at that time, it wasn't much. It was just so recent when I became like this...impulsive...especially when...stressed."

On the other hand, Joy shared that her intense impulse buying started during the pandemic although she has been engaging in impulse buying when she buys things in physical stores. As she shared,

"...I always buy my cravings...especially when I am feeling stressed in my work...or when I feel being alone."

When asked if she was satisfied with the outcome of her behavior, she replied,

"Yes, I am very satisfied. I can sleep well. I feel like my problems disappear but come the next day, the cycle repeats...60% food, 40% stuff."

Similar to Joward's, Krisel's, and Joy's narratives, are the same stories of coping experienced by Anjannette, Jayvie, and Issa. They have been engaging in buying online when the online shopping stores such as Shopee and Lazada became popular but their impulse buying behavior online escalated during the pandemic. When they experience negative feelings and emotions such as being stressed, sad, or uneasiness, they will browse on the online shopping stores, add to their cart, and eventually checkout the products.

Many research on impulse buying behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic have showed that people used online impulse buying to deal with the stress of the coronavirus pandemic, as people make impulse purchases to recover control in the face of uncertainty. Indeed, the majority of research investigations indicate that online impulsive buying has increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Thakur et al., 2020). Individuals are experiencing higher levels of stress, despair, and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. Wang et al. (2021) stated that impulse buying can provide customers with psychological and physiological comfort, purposefully diverting their focus away from unfavorable emotions.

Self-concept and Identity

Several participants have shared that another reason why their impulse buying tendency is high is because the things that they buy add up to their value as a person and thus forming their self-concept and identity. The products that they buy out of online impulse buying help them feel better about themselves.

Three (3) participants shared how they are encouraged to buy impulsively because of the popular influencers they watch and follow online. When they see these influencers using certain items or wearing a particular brand, they tend to buy the same product impulsively because they believe it will raise their self-value and thus form a positive self-concept. Reymart shared,

"...through the influence of other people that you see on the internet, through their reviews, and then through the image that you see. It's really affecting because you'll compare like, oh, I'll choose this one because I think it suits me because you've seen the photos and then the information is complete..."

He added,

"It's good because you feel like you have something you can flex... that you have that thing... I feel like a star...that I can buy something that they do not have."

Similarly, Seffy claimed,

"Maybe what Sir Joshua said is also one of the factors, like for instance, you invest in yourself...like I buy things for myself to look good, to be presentable. You know, it's actually for myself so I think I deserve it. I want to be presentable in the eyes of other people because I am a teacher and most of the time, as teachers we face a lot of students and workmates so maybe that is another benefit. In return of engaging in impulsive buying, it doesn't just go to nothing, it helps us with something, as for me with those clothes...material things that I buy, it can add value to me personally and all the stuff."

In addition, some participants also shared how buying expensive items impulsively online makes them feel high value as well. They incorporate this behavior into their self-concept and identity.

As mentioned above, impulsive buying is used as a coping method to avoid the negative emotions associated with low self-esteem and to enhance one's status through products related to one's identity (Minor et al., 2017). When people notice a discrepancy between their projected self-images and their aspirations, they may get tempted to compensatory objects and spend impulsively to acquire them for self-presentational goals. Qualitative research has shown that people can make impulsive purchases based on perceived self-discrepancies, motivating them to acquire self-related things (Minor et al., 2017). In addition, in the literature study of Marisa Toth (2014) on consumer behavior, it was suggested the consumer purchase products to maintain status, boost self-esteem, and to enhance self-concept.

Theme 2: The Motivations of Service Contractors Toward Online Impulse Buying Behavior

The majority of the service contractors expressed their living situations as challenging. They mentioned that scrolling through various online shopping stores after a long tiring day of work helps them escape their reality. In addition, they find the experience of purchasing products online, even if they plan not to buy in the first place, is rewarding and satisfying.

Desire to Escape From Negative Feelings and Emotions

Online impulse buying can temporarily escape and/ or distract from the stress and challenges associated with the participants' financial situation. All of the participants have shared that being a service contractor is not easy. Dave, a contract-of-service (COS) instructor for five (5) years, provides a share of his income to his family bills monthly. He has repeatedly mentioned the word mahirap to describe his current job position. He stated:

"As a COS worker, it's a bit difficult because the salary is meager and considering that there are so many expenses and things are expensive to buy, it's quite difficult to be a COS especially in today's high inflation era..."

However, mentioning that although even the basic needs are already very pricy, being able to buy online gives him a sense of happiness thus makes him temporarily forget about the tiring day he has spent doing his job. He shared,

"when you're tired all day and then you look online, it's like a good feeling because then you see something, you'll be able to say 'oh, that's beautiful' and then I'll be able to say 'ah I need it, I'll go ahead and purchase it'...that fast."

Dave's narrative is the same as Marc, a service contractor for three (3) years, who also describes his experience as COS worker as 'quite difficult' because he needs to budget his money in order to save while buying the things he wants. Since the phenomenon of online buying is more convenient than buying in the physical stores, Marc mentioned that his tendency to impulsively buy increases. Whenever he sees something that he likes, he does not think twice but checkout the product right away, especially when he is feeling sad. He said,

"It's a satisfying feeling when you get what you want. You know, the happiness you get when checking out seems to be different. But what I noticed about myself is that, most often when I checkout suddenly or randomly, those are the times when I feel sad. You know, it's like you're looking for something to get entertained, so I ended up being engaged in impulse buying."

Hence, he resorts to online shopping to fill up the void that he is feeling:

"Checking shopping markets every night becomes a habit for me", said Marc.

Another participant, Anjannette, also shared that whenever she is feeling negative emotions, what she does is to shop online, add to cart, and then checkout to ease the burden she is feeling. As she explained,

"...when I check out, I feel better when I do that. Sometimes my problems or thoughts disappear for a while when I turn my attention to online shopping..."

She added,

"when you're bored sometimes, you browse through online shops so you can also checkout the ones that have been added to your cart."

Another participant, Joward, who has experienced being isolated during the pandemic, also shared how engaging in impulse buying has helped him in the situation. Since it made him anxious and stressed, he used this as an escape. Later on, whenever he feels stressed, he turns to online shopping. He stated,

"When I feel more stressed, I buy more impulsively; it is a way to escape my responsibilities".

An earlier study by Pacheco et al. (2021) proposed that those who react strongly to stress engage in impulsive buying to lessen the intensity or frequency of their unpleasant emotional experiences. Consequently, these people's pleasant emotions and moods are temporarily elevated by the satisfaction they get from impulsive purchases. Supported by other studies, Febrilia and Warokka (2021) revealed in their study on online impulse buying among women that they access the internet and specific e-commerce platforms just for fun and then accidentally decide to buy a product. According to Chan, Cheung, and Lee (2016), customers engage in online impulse buying when they feel pleasurable and aroused, among other positive affective reactions. Arousal is thought to trigger the process of impulsive purchase, while pleasure drives the behavior.

Desire for Immediate Gratification

Another significant finding in the study is that the desire for immediate gratification or the belief that buying certain items will alleviate stress can also drive impulsive purchases. Eight (8) out of ten (10) participants revealed that after the long day of work, they scroll in social media and go to online shopping applications such as Shoppee and Lazada for retail therapy. The convenience and accessibility given by digital marketplaces also encourage impulse buying. For instance, Dave shared

"nowadays, it is very accessible. Everything is instant. For example, I have seen something of my interest in social media... I know that I want to have it so I proceed with checking it out. There is an instant gratification you get in online stores that there is in physical stores."

Marc also said that whenever he sees something beautiful in the online markets, he is most likely to buy it impulsively. He shared that even though he does not need the item right away such as clothes or shoes, the mere fact of imagining wearing it is already satisfying for him. He said,

"When I feel sad, I do not care if I will spend the money budgeted for other things, as long as buying the item even though out of an impulse, will ease the burden I am feeling."

Krisel, Joy, and Jayvie also shared that they achieve immediate gratification upon checking out even without considering the price of the item. They shared:

"Even if the purchased items are expensive or cheap, they really bring something that fulfills the feeling. It's very fulfilling so you're happy." (Krisel)

"I'm always at food panda or grab food. I always buy my cravings. I feel like the reason is the stress from work. The feeling of being alone. That you are not with your family. You don't know how to cook. So, it's like my stress reliever when I buy the things I want." (Joy)

"I'm also lazy so I prefer to receive the products directly and it's also good because what you see is what you get...it's hard to resist because it's hard to fall asleep because you want to buy. You will always think of the product you want to buy. It's like someone is whispering that I deserve it, so I'll buy it." (Jayvie)

Interestingly, Issa and Reymart shared that having extra money or upon receiving their salary prompts them to engage in online shopping to checkout products. As he described it,

"...when I feel like it, like I super like it, as long as I have money".

The same is true for Joward, whenever sees a product of his liking in an online shop, checks out the product right away even though it is not on his list. He said,

"... as an individual, there comes a point where we need to gratify ourselves on the things that we didn't have before, like shoes and clothes. So every day after work, when I feel sad, I will search on the orange app and when I see something that I think I can buy and that I want, I really buy it."

Generally, impulse buying behavior gives the participants an instant or immediate gratification. The convenience and accessibility of online shops drive impulse buying from the service contractors that give them an immediate sense of satisfaction upon checking out products without deep thinking. According to Rani (2023), tech-savvy millennials are constantly on the lookout for the best deals whenever possible. They desire rapid gratification in all aspects of life, including knowledge, shopping, eating, and entertainment.

Theme 3: The Positive Impacts of Online Impulse Buying

The study revealed that service contractors believe that online shops have more benefits than the traditional physical stores, one of which is the therapeutic effects that the participants experienced. This category highlights

the different aspects of how online shopping serves as a means of coping with emotions and achieving therapeutic effects.

Sense of Achievement

Participants' narratives resonate with the sense of achievement as they express the joy and satisfaction of receiving a purchased item, emphasizing the positive emotional impact of online impulse buying. Most participants describe the sense of enjoyment they get from impulse buying in terms of processing the ordered item, from the waiting game up to receiving the item. Seffy shared,

"When you buy the parcel, it is fun, it's a good feeling when you have that thing that you bought... that you have paid for... that came from your pocket... that came from your salary. That's the idea."

Furthermore, several participants refer to impulse buying online as a fruit of their hardwork. When asked to describe

"I deserve this" in their own definition of the phrase, majority of the participants have the same meaning when they say the common phrase upon checking out items. The following are the descriptions of the majority:

"...this is the fruit of my hardwork so this means I am giving myself that time or that source to enjoy because we have so many bills to pay that is why we are putting or setting aside money or some denomination for us to use for entertainment purposes and I am entertained by buying online...even at times out of an impulse" (Dave)

"...when I know that I have done or what I am doing is beyond what is required or what I have worked for the month... or what I have done is not just the required output to be done." (Joward)

"...because that is where you poured your hard work. So it is like when you say I deserve it, you think of the hard work that you have done so you can say you deserve it." (Seffy)

"...I deserve this because it will be my reward for myself...because I have accomplished something, and I am satisfied with my work. So when I feel a little tired, that is when I think I need to reward myself ..." (Anjannette)

Overall, for the participants, they feel a sense of achievement as they feel a satisfying experience whenever they buy impulsively online because they deserve to buy things out of their hardwork at their respective jobs. The narratives of the participants are consistent with the previous researches that studied the relationship between impulse buying and customer satisfaction. The study of Widagdo and Roz (2021) stated that impulse buying has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. Maqsood and Javed (2019 as cited in Widagdo & Roz, 2021) further claimed that unplanned purchases indeed provide satisfaction for buyers. Moreover, perceived enjoyment from digital markets also affects customer's impulsive buying behavior. More impulsive purchases are made when the individual further enjoy surfing in online shopping sites (Moreno, Fabre, & Pasco, 2022).

Stress Alleviation

It was revealed in this study that the majority of the service contractors resort to online impulse buying to lessen the stress they get from work. Six (6) of the participants used the term "therapeutic" to describe the feeling they experience when doing online shopping wherein impulse buying increases when they are stressed. For Anjannette, she browses online shopping stores whenever she is stressed and sad as this phenomenon serves as her coping mechanism. In addition, Joward shared that his everyday experience at work is unhealthy such that his workmates are toxic and the load given to him is too much for him, online impulse buying helps him to lessen the stress, which was at its peak during the pandemic. Moreover, for Krisel, her impulse buying behavior is higher when she is stressed.

"...my stress seems to be lessened because as COS, my mental health is so bad that we can't go home and even if it's a pandemic, your working environment isn't that healthy, it's toxic... in a way, the stress, sadness that I get from work, seems to lessen when I do online shopping and I do not mind if I buy something impulsively." (Joward)

Joy is also among the other participants who mentioned how impulse buying has helped her cope with the stress in her work.

"...especially when I'm alone. I'm always at food panda/ grab food. I always buy my cravings whenever I'm feeling stressed at work."

Further, Seffy shared,

"...of course you're stressed, you've had problems, so you're suffering...you're tired... so that's what I'm going to tell myself, that yes, I deserve this."

For Marc and Issa, they described the phenomenon as:

"...I can say that its impact is good on my emotional and psychological health. I use it to cope when I'm stressed or sad."

"...it is my coping mechanism when I'm stressed, or sad or feeling something, that's what I do, I shop online, add to cart, and then checkout...it makes me feel better when I do it."

Previous studies also revealed link between stress and impulse buying. For example, the majority of people purchase things on impulse in an attempt to temporarily relieve the bad emotional states brought on by stress (Sullivan, 2023). A study found out that persons who feel stress at work tend to lose control and end up engaging in impulsive buying behavior as a coping technique (Shams et al., 2021). According to predictions made by clinical and applied psychology, stress makes people more hyperaroused and impulsive (Balducci et al., 2011; Dell'Osso et al., 2006; Weiss et al., 2012 as cited in Shams et al., 2021). People with higher emotional intelligence experience less of this loss of control than those with lower emotional intelligence.

Mood Regulation

Several studies reveal how engaging in online impulse buying plays a role in regulating the participants' emotions. A participant described how receiving and using new purchases brings her happiness, fulfilling her emotional needs and even influencing her mood positively. She associates this act of buying with anticipation and excitement, which contributes to her emotional well-being.

"It's what makes me happy. It's like it fulfills my happiness. For example, when the parcel arrives I am very happy and then I always wear it until it is soft. It really changes the mood. And I am always excited because I am looking forward to something." (Joy)

On the other hand, Joward's account highlights how online impulse buying became a coping mechanism during quarantine-induced isolation. When feeling sad or lonely, he turns to shopping apps as a means of seeking emotional relief.

"During the pandemic, especially when I was quarantined, it was 28 days, 28 days isolated in each room. So every after day of work (work from home), when I feel sad, I will search the orange app and when I see something I can buy and I want it, I buy it." (Joward)

Two (2) other participants use the phrase "we get high" to describe the feelings of happiness they get when engaging in online impulse buying. Since the act makes them happy, it in turn lessens the stress they are feeling at the moment. Krisel and Joy, on the other hand, resort to online impulse buying to seek comfort, especially from foods. On explaining the phrase "I deserve this", Jayvie includes mood regulation in her description

"...don't hesitate to checkout or buy no matter how expensive it is because you are working hard so you need to treat yourself a reward. It helps to boost your mood... your thoughts to calm you down. No matter how expensive it is..."

The service contractors' narratives underscore the role of online impulse buying as a strategy for managing emotions and providing a sense of comfort and happiness, especially in times of emotional distress and isolation. Literature reveals that the consumer's mood, whether positive or negative, is linked to impulse buying. That is,

the state of mind of the consumers influences consumers to buy impulsively (Sun & Wu, 2011 as cited in Pinto, 2021).

Theme 4: The Negative Impacts of Online Impulse Buying

The current study revealed the same results to prior studies that online impulse buying has also negative impacts on the individual, particularly on their financial well-being and emotional state. There are two (2) participants who have shared that initially, they see online impulse buying as a self-reward system but eventually become a source of financial stress. Several participants share the same sentiment with these two participants saying that due to mounting bills and expenses, their financial troubles exacerbated. In addition, the service contractors reveal a complex emotional burden, involving feelings of guilt associated with increased financial obligations from impulsive purchases and the internal conflict between justifying indulgence and experiencing regret.

Financial Stress

This category explains how participants like Joward and Reymart initially feel that impulsive online shopping may have a positive impact, serving as a self-reward system; however, over time, it evolves into a source of financial stress, particularly as the bills accumulate and contribute to mounting stress. The ability to resist impulsive buying is tied to their financial well-being. Joward highlights how impulsive buying can be helpful when there is a genuine need, like acquiring a mini PC or a monitor when no nearby physical stores are available. On the other hand, Reymart stresses that the lack of savings and limited budget due to impulsive purchases adds to the multitude of problems, intensifying financial stress. Financial stress underscores the intricate relationship between impulsive online shopping and the emotional burden it imposes on the financial well-being of the service contractors.

"Maybe at first, the impact was positive because it's like a reward system for yourself, but as time goes on, it becomes a case of problems, especially as the bill grows, it adds to my stress, especially with Shoppepay. So as long as I can control myself from buying, I don't do it, but to be fair, online markets helped me, for example when I needed a mini PC with a monitor, I guess it's the convenience that you've experienced, especially when we don't have anything nearby to buy from." (Joward)

"As mentioned, there is always nothing left, no savings. It seems like you have a lot of problems and you don't know how to handle expenses because the budget is limited so it will really cause stress." (Reymart)

Few of the participants also mentioned that they experience financial stress upon the delivery process of the item checked out from the online shopping store. For instance, for Anjannette,

"...you're clearly excited at the same time stressed because of the budget... you're not sure if the budget or the money is enough, especially when your parcel is about to arrive."

This indicates that even though the product is not on the list of the to-buys of the participant, they engage in impulse buying even without having the budget at the time the product was purchased online out of an impulse. This later leads to a problem in their financial well-being. Likewise, Jayvie shared the same experience with Anjannette's. She shared that the delay of salary causes her to worry if she can pay the parcel that is coming,

"...sometimes the salary is delayed among COS so there are times when I have checked out and then it turns out that the salary will not be paid that time so I am worried...so I have no choice but to borrow from my friends so there are many times like that."

Another problem that causes financial stress to the service contractors mentioned is the experience of having to use the other budget allocated for other things. Issa said,

"...I get to the point of overdoing online shopping to the point that I use the money budgeted for other expenses. So the money reserved for others goes to shopping when checking out."

This finding can be compared to previous studies (Lugay et al., 2023) which states that unnecessary purchases can lead to debt, as a response to mandatory payments being delayed. The stress caused by accumulating debts from

impulsive purchase behavior would significantly weaken a person's cognitive aspect. This increases anxiety levels and present bias, which leads to psychological and decision-making impairments.

Feelings of Guilt and Regret

Guilt and regret reflect a complex emotional experience among the majority of the participants like how they describe feelings of guilt arising from the anticipation of increased financial obligations when they make impulsive purchases during sales events or opt for installment payments. Six (6) out of ten (10) participants shared their experience in feeling guilty and regret after engaging in online impulse buying. Joy's narrative highlights the internal conflict between justifying such purchases as a well-deserved indulgence and the subsequent guilt that arises, emphasizing the dynamic nature of her emotions.

"I deserve it because I don't do it every day. I just tell myself that the money I will be spending is really not that much. But then the next day, I will feel guilty as thoughts of saving the money instead pops out in my mind." (Joy)

"Maybe the feeling of guilt is when I know when I didn't buy it on sale day... because of it will be installment, I know that in the next months, what I have to pay will increase." (Joward)

Furthermore, Krisel's account reveals the post-purchase disappointment and regret stemming from the realization that her impulsive acquisitions may not have fulfilled her initial desires, leading to a sense of wasted resources and frustration.

"But when the parcel came, I was very sad because it was already broken. It's really sad because I already spent money on it. It really is disappointing." (Krisel)

Dave feels guilty after engaging in online impulse buying because of the mismanagement of his money. He admits that there were times that he tends to buy things even if he does not need it at the moment. He said that it makes him happy emotionally but eventually feels guilty because of the occurring mismanagement of money. In addition, buying online impulsively makes him discontented on the things he possesses that he tends to increase the behavior of buying impulsively.

In addition, Marc, Anjannette, and Jayvie expressed that they feel guilt and regret because they have to limit their expenses after checking out online out of an impulse. Marc said,

"The challenges that I encounter is that I feel guilty when I checkout the product and I know that I have to save to have enough money left so that I can survive until the next salary. That's my coping, I need to sacrifice my other expenses in exchange for what I spent on being an impulsive buyer."

Previous studies, such as that conducted by Saleh (2012 as cited in Handayani et al., 2018), which found that impulsive purchases can cause regret in addition to happiness by bringing comfort, satisfaction, and pleasure, also support the finding that such purchases may cause guilt and regret, especially if the root cause of the impulse buying is negative emotions just like what the majority of the service contractors interviewed have shared. Likewise, in a study in the Philippines (Gallagher et al., 2017), they discovered that students experience guilt, anxiety, and shame, also referred to as post-purchase remorse that could lead to depression, after engaging in excessive internet shopping.

Theme 5: The Extent to Which the Service Contractors Will Seek Online Impulse Buying

This category discusses how the phenomenon of impulse buying reinforces the reward system of the service contractors as a form of self-indulgence, self-care, self-enhancement, and most importantly, healing their 'inner child'.

Reward System

Interestingly, all the participants mentioned online impulse buying as a very rewarding behavior aside from getting instant gratification from it. Seven (7) out of ten (10) service contractors stated that it is their reward for their hardwork in their respective jobs, for accomplishing the list of things he/ she should have done for the day, or even doing something that is expected beyond from him/ her. As Seffy puts it,

"My impulse buying doesn't go to nothing, it helps me. I reward myself for my efforts, hardwork, stress, and tiredness all throughout the day."

In addition, a few also mentioned purchasing the things they want immediately regardless of the price because that is from their hard-earned money. Reymart said,

"I deserve it because I worked hard for that thing. I went through a lot before I could attain it, so when I say I deserve it, I really mean it because I put a lot of effort into it."

Surprisingly, he also mentioned flexing the things he wants. For him, it is a satisfying feeling that he can flex something that others do not possess. And for him, he gains friends when he can flex something. He sees this as a rewarding experience for him. His narrative is supported by a recent study by Pacheco et al. (2021), who noted that product innovation influences consumers' lives and leads to impulsive purchases. They found that many buyers would rather purchase unique products that no one else has ever used, which leads to impulsive purchases made online.

In addition, for Joy, she believes that her value rises when she buys something expensive, which is most of the time out of an impulse. She said,

"...I was happy when I had one. I feel my value has increased. I was able to say that I can buy it."

Likewise, the COS workers like Krisel mentioned about how self-care leads her to buy impulsively. As she termed it, buying online becomes her comfort. She buys her favorite food and products she can use for her face and body as long as the advertisements are visually pleasing and the reviews are good, she would check them out without hesitation.

Half of the participants (5 out of 10) also shared the rewarding experience they get from opening the parcels they checked out on an impulse. Some of them described in detail how they achieve happiness from keeping an eye on the delivery process up to receiving the product. Their experience includes tracking the products every other hour, and getting excited when the rider calls their name when the product finally arrives. The excitement they experienced started upon checking out the product.

"... although it took a while for the parcel to arrive, the happiness is different when a parcel arrives, right? You thought someone gave you a gift but in fact, you just bought it. Even though you already know the item, you're still excited", Joy shared.

Few of the service contractors also became defensive on explaining how they see impulse buying as a rewarding behavior. Seffy said,

"...maybe motivation or mindset...why would I deprive myself of the things I want that is one way to reward myself?"

She added,

"...that's okay since you worked hard for it, right?... that's what I'm thinking."

Several participants have the same mindset as Seffy in explaining the phrase "I deserve it". For instance, when asked to explain his meaning of "I deserve this", Marc said,

"I deserve it because I want it (laughs)...I don't want to blame myself because I worked hard for what I bought. So I deserve to give myself what I want."

The experience of the service contractors of experiencing happiness and rewarding feeling were consistent with the study of Li (2011 as cited in Campus Writing Program, 2015) where they found out that many impulse buyers

seek pleasure in their unplanned purchases. Although they feel guilty of losing control when they engage in impulse buying, the pleasure they experience was rewarding for them. They may get enjoyment and an elated mood when they purchase the products of their interests.

Healing the Inner Child

The study revealed that when participants could not afford things in the past, they might buy them impulsively trying to make up for those feelings of not having enough when they were a kid. Joy shared,

"...motivations, it's like you heal your inner child. Im used to not being able to buy everything when I was a kid. I feel that is the source of people who are impulsive buyers. Because there were times when they couldn't buy things they want before... when they didn't have the capacity or the money to buy it, so now that they could buy what they wanted then they would just buy it... they don't think about it anymore."

Moreover, Dave said,

"...it's good when you feel like you're waiting for something to come...you're surprised...it's a different feeling to open it, it's like the kid inside you is happy. Maybe there are certain things we have there... that we were not given gifts when we were children, it's like when you buy and then you are trying to open it, 'hey, it's like there's an inner child being satisfied' that's how I feel."

There are six (6) participants who mentioned the healing effect of buying impulsively online, especially upon receiving the parcels. Further, they shared that the healing effect comes from the thought that they are now able to pay for the things that they wish to possess. Seffy described the feeling as

"I feel very happy. The feeling is good."

Likewise, participants added adjectives such as fulfilling, fun, satisfying, and rewarding to describe the healing effect for them. Several of them shared that most of the time, they buy impulsively of things they could not afford to buy as a kid like clothing items. One of them also mentioned about getting the attention of other people, especially gaining friends when he has something new that he believes other people do not possess. For him, it is healing because he loves getting attention he used not to have when he was younger.

The aforementioned results are in line with other research findings. Lo et al. (2016), for example, found that when studying the motivation factors behind online impulse buying, this behavior produces utilitarian or hedonic benefits that raise consumers' feelings of enjoyment and encourage more impulse buying.

Theme 6: The Coping Strategies of the Service Contractors Toward Online Impulse Buying

This category explains the experiences shared by participants about the interplay of cognitive and emotion-focused coping strategies as they gauge the cognitive awareness of financial priorities and the emotional responses tied to their spending choices by mindful spending and self-control.

Mindful Spending

The study reveals that upon being aware of their tendency to impulse buying, the participants came to a point where they have to do something on their behavior. Majority of the service contractors' coping strategies include mindful spending. Krisel's account underscores a cognitive approach, focusing on the alignment of needs before wants. Likewise, Dave's narrative on the negative impact of buying impulsively made him realize the need to remind himself to buy only the important things.

"Well, because we know that when compared to those in regular there are benefits compared to COS and then expenses seem to be difficult to budget if you don't budget properly so you need to align or think about it first. You have to ask yourself first what are your needs before your wants." (Krisel)

"I remind myself that I have to buy only the important things and I have learned it the hard way because there are times when I buy just because it is on sale and I say I will need it soon too. But honestly, the ones I bought online, I also sold them because I didn't need them either." (Dave)

Meanwhile, Joward has formed a tactic in buying online. He will checkout every after the salary is received to ensure that he has money when the parcel arrives.

"I am mindful of the date for example, at my work we were paid 5 and 25, so if I order, it should be after the salary so I know I have money. Mindful when the parcel will arrive."

Three (3) out of the ten (10) service contractors shared that they also control themselves from spending their money. For instance, instead of having more than three (3) meals a day, they have to control themselves from impulsively ordering food or meals.

The mindful spending of the service contractors on their impulse buying behavior can be found similar to previous research findings. Studies have shown that emotions and impulses, when managed and directed in the proper ways, can help prevent binge internet use and impulsive actions (Mascia et al., 2020) just like other research findings that indicate the practice of mindfulness will help alter consumption patterns (Hua, 2022).

Self-control

Half of the participants (5 out of 10) shared that they experience a sense of conscience and the need to restrain themselves during the checkout process. For instance, Joy talked about considering her budget for shopping out of her salary. Like other participants, although she claimed that it is tough for a service contractor to budget and save money, it is indeed needed. She claimed that with the salary she has, the amount of things she can purchase is limited but she has to remind herself that not all her salary should be put on her luxuries or on her impulsive purchases.

"It's hard to save when you're an impulse buyer and your salary is not enough." (Joy)

Meanwhile, Seffy became more aware of her expenses thus making her more capable of controlling herself when scrolling through the digital marketplaces. As she said,

"Now I know that if the money is short, that is the time that I will limit myself in buying the products. I would say to myself, 'oh okay, I will just buy it next month'."

There are also participants who revealed that their way to cope on impulse buying behavior is to address the root cause of the phenomenon which is by having the applications installed in their cellphones deleted. Therefore, to refrain from checking out impulsively, some participants, like Jayvie, have uninstalled and deleted the application for online markets. She describes feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled when spending excessive time scrolling through shopping apps, suggesting that her avoidance of other activities and the emotional consequences of her actions led her to reconsider her behavior. Jayvie shared

"The time came when I have to uninstall apps... my time was running out and I was not satisfied. So the idea that I'm too lazy to scroll through other things. I feel that it is not good anymore."

Interestingly, there have been studies that reveal the link between self-control and impulse buying behavior. Lack of self-control is a characteristic that is found common among impulsive buyers along with the desire for pleasure, and the need to impress others. The self-control is negatively correlated with impulse buying, hence, as self-control increased, impulse buying decreased (Campus Writing Program, 2015). According to the study by Wang et al. (2023), self-control was the only factor that significantly reduced the likelihood of impulsive buying behavior. This suggests that those who struggle with self-control are more likely to make impulsive purchases online. Stated differently, customers with strong self-control are more likely to withstand temptation when they encounter different merchant marketing tactics. Therefore, customers are better able to regulate their impulsive purchase behavior when they have more self-control.

4.0 Conclusion

For service contractors, the phrase 'I deserve this' is an experience of rewarding oneself with the product of their interests, regardless of the price, after doing their duties and responsibilities of their respective job. Their impulse

buying behavior increases when they feel tired, sad, and stressed. In return, they experience happiness and excitement with the anticipation of receiving the item. Moreover, they engage in impulse buying behavior as a way to heal their inner child and experience therapeutic effects. However, these behavior leads to financial stress and feelings of guilt and regret.

Clinical psychologists, or the consumers with high tendency of impulse buying, could use the findings of the present study to create interventions such as behavior modification programs that address impulse buying behavior. The lived experiences of the service contractors could be used as a reference for future studies who wish to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of online impulse buying among Filipino employees. Future researchers may also conduct a study that considers psychological variables such as personality traits, emotional states, and cognitive factors in understanding the online impulse buying of employees.

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