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The relationship between attachment dimensions and impulsive buying behaviour in Generation Y and Z women in romantic relationships: A field study

Romantik ilişkisi olan Y ve Z kuşağı kadınlarda bağlanma boyutları ile dürtüsel satın alma davranışı arasındaki ilişki: Bir saha araştırması

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between attachment dimensions in romantic relationships and consumer behaviour. Specifically, it explored the impact of adult attachment dimensions—attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance—on the impulsive buying tendencies of Generation Y and Z women currently in romantic relationships. An online survey was administered, and data were collected from a convenience sample of 385 women from Generations Y and Z living in Türkiye. The hierarchical regression analysis was conducted by controlling for participants' age and duration of their current romantic relationship. The results showed that attachment anxiety, but not avoidance, significantly affects participants' impulsive buying behaviour. The findings suggest that individuals with high attachment anxiety may use impulsive buying behaviour as a compensatory mechanism to manage their relational stress or to bolster their self-worth. These findings suggest that marketers should consider attachment security when addressing compulsive or impulsive consumer behaviours among younger adults.

Keywords: Romantic Relationship, Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, Impulsive Buying Behaviour, Generation Y and Z

Jel Codes: M30, M31

Öz

Bu çalışma, romantik ilişkilerde bağlanma boyutlarının tüketici davranışları üzerindeki etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Özellikle, romantik ilişki içinde bulunan Y ve Z kuşağı kadınlarının dürtüsel satın alma eğilimleri üzerinde yetişkin bağlanma boyutlarının (bağlanma kaygısı ve bağlanma kaçınması) etkisi araştırılmıştır. Araştırmada çevrim içi anket yöntemi kullanılmış ve Türkiye'de yaşayan Y ve Z kuşağına mensup 385 kadından kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle veri toplanmıştır. Analizlerde katılımcıların yaşı ve mevcut romantik ilişkilerinin süresi kontrol değişkeni olarak ele alınarak hiyerarşik regresyon analizi uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, bağlanma kaygısının katılımcıların dürtüsel satın alma davranışını anlamlı biçimde etkilediğini, ancak bağlanma kaçınmasının bu davranış üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin bulunmadığını göstermektedir. Sonuçlar, yüksek düzeyde bağlanma kaygısına sahip bireylerin ilişkisel stresle başa çıkmak veya öz değerlerini güçlendirmek amacıyla dürtüsel satın alma davranışına başvurabileceklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bulgular, pazarlamacıların özellikle genç yetişkinlerde görülen kompulsif veya dürtüsel tüketici davranışlarını ele alırken bağlanma güvenliğinin rolünü dikkate almaları gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Romantik İlişki, Bağlanma Kaygısı, Bağlanma Kaçınması, Dürtüsel Satın Alma Davranışı, Y ve Z Kuşağı

JEL Kodları: M30, M31

Introduction

A romantic relationship is defined as a mutual, ongoing, and voluntary interaction between two partners characterised by certain expressions of love and intimacy (Finkel et al., 2017; Overall & McNulty, 2017). It plays an important role in meeting individuals' social, emotional and psychological needs (Joel et al., 2020). Researchers often examine adult attachment styles in romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Overall et al., 2022). It is suggested that adult attachment can be assessed through two basic dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Fraley & Roisman, 2019).

Attachment anxiety is characterised by an individual's intense concern that they will not receive enough love or attention from their partner and their constant need for approval (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Overall et al., 2022). This anxiety can cause the individual to experience excessive dependence, lack of trust, and fear of abandonment in the relationship (Arriaga et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2020). Attachment avoidance refers to an individual's tendency to avoid emotional closeness (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Individuals in this dimension may find emotional dependence on others threatening and may avoid establishing closeness (Overall et al., 2022). These two dimensions play a critical role in understanding how basic elements such as commitment, trust, sharing of feelings, and closeness are shaped in romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Overall et al., 2022).

It is known that today's consumption habits have a complex structure that affects individuals' lifestyles and the dynamics of human relationships (Hamilton et al., 2019; Solomon, 2020). Romantic relationships, in particular, are an important factor in individuals' identity formation and self-expression (Schmitt et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). In this context, focusing on the possible relationship between attachment dimensions in women's romantic relationships and their purchasing behaviours can offer new perspectives in consumer psychology and behavioural economics. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Pandelaere & Shrum, 2020).

Many studies in the literature indicate that emotional involvement can affect individuals' consumption habits (Zhao et al., 2015; Soodan & Pandey, 2016). However, the relationship between attachment dimensions in romantic relationships and women's purchasing behaviours has been examined only to a limited extent. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Pandelaere & Shrum, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to investigate how attachment dimensions in romantic relationships, particularly attachment anxiety and avoidance, are reflected in women's purchasing behaviours (Mende et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2020). It specifically examines the relationship between attachment dimensions and impulsive buying behaviour among women in the Y and Z generations who are in romantic relationships (Priporas et al., 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Accordingly, the study might contribute to the extant literature by providing empirical evidence on how attachment anxiety and avoidance influence the purchasing behaviours of women in Generation Y and Generation Z. This topic has received limited attention in consumer behaviour research. It might contribute to understanding marketing strategies and consumer relationships by shedding light on how the attachment dimension of romantic relationships affects purchasing behaviour (Hamilton et al., 2019; Pandelaere & Shrum, 2020). It might also provide marketers and researchers with a better understanding of the potential impact of consumers' emotional ties on product preferences and purchasing decisions by filling in the gaps in this area (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Thomson et al., 2020).

Literature review

The concept of attachment and adult attachment dimensions

The emotional bond between an infant and their caregiver is defined as attachment (Bowlby, 1969). This bond begins to develop in infancy through interactions with the primary caregiver, continues into adulthood, and influences individuals' relationships throughout their lives (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). In early life stages, children internalise their experiences with caregivers and form internal working models through which they evaluate themselves as worthy of love (self-model) and others as trustworthy and available (other-model) (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Accordingly, individuals develop either secure or insecure attachment styles, with insecure attachment typically categorised as avoidant or anxious/ambivalent (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019).

By linking attachment theory to adult attachment, Hazan and Shaver (1987) argued that relationship patterns among adults are similar to those established in earlier years and accordingly proposed three distinct attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious. In their model, they proposed that securely attached individuals trust in their partners. Secure attachment develops when caregivers are consistent, sensitive, and available in childhood. These individuals become reliable, stable, and happy individuals

in their romantic relationships in adulthood (Overall et al., 2022). People with avoidant attachment are often seen as distant and independent in their close relationships. Their expectations for relationships are limited, and they avoid others. People with anxious attachment are emotionally dependent and anxious towards others. They experience fear of abandonment and rejection. They develop dependency on the caregiver due to their inadequacy and inconsistency. They behave in the same anxious and dependent manner in their relationships as adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Later, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a four-category model of adult attachment (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful) based on two dimensions representing positive versus negative images of self and others. Secure attachment style is characterised by positive models of the self and others; preoccupied attachment style is characterised by a negative model of self and a positive model of others; dismissing attachment style is characterised by a positive model of self and a negative model of others; and lastly, fearful attachment style is characterised by negative models of self and others (Fraley & Roisman, 2019).

In later years, researchers adopted a dimensional approach, measuring attachment along two independent dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). According to this approach, an individual's position on the anxiety dimension indicates the degree of concern about abandonment. In contrast, their position on the avoidance dimension reflects the degree of discomfort with closeness. Research in general has shown detrimental relationships between insecure attachment (higher levels of anxiety and/or avoidance) and individual well-being, and demonstrated links between insecure attachment, emotional problems, and maladjustment (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2019).

Anxiety is considered a more common attachment pattern in collectivistic cultures, whereas avoidance emerges as more prevalent in individualistic cultures (Sakman & Sümer, 2024). In line with Friedman and colleagues' (2010) culture-fit hypothesis, in relational cultures where people value interdependence, in other words, in cultures where attachment anxiety is more common, attachment avoidance might pose a risk for relational outcomes (Keller, 2021; Sakman & Sümer, 2024). For instance, prior research conducted in Türkiye, a relatively more relational and collectivistic culture, has shown that attachment avoidance (but not anxiety) is negatively associated with satisfaction among married couples (Harma & Sümer, 2016).

These attachment-related differences in emotional regulation and interpersonal expectations may also influence individuals' consumption tendencies and decision-making processes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). In particular, prior research suggests that individuals experiencing higher attachment anxiety may engage in impulsive purchasing to cope with negative emotions or seek psychological reassurance (Dittmar, 2005; Otero-López & Villardefrancos, 2014), indicating a potential link between attachment dimensions and impulsive buying behaviour.

Impulsive buying behaviour

Impulsive buying behaviour refers to how customers decide and behave when purchasing a product or service. This behaviour means that customers or consumers evaluate alternatives, determine their needs, make a decision, and complete their purchase. Personal, cultural, social, and psychological factors affect this behaviour (Solomon, 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Impulsive buying is a sudden, strong urge to purchase that consumers experience, is difficult to control, and usually causes emotional conflict and leads to consumption (Rook, 1987). In such situations, consumers may feel an immediate urge to purchase a product without prior planning. For example, encountering a limited-time online discount or noticing an attractive product near the checkout area may prompt consumers to buy immediately, even though the product was not originally planned. Although impulsive buying behaviour occurs unexpectedly, it cannot be considered completely independent of rational thought. Consumers may still make quick evaluations of the product's usefulness or affordability before completing the purchase (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Recent studies also emphasise that impulsive purchasing is influenced by situational factors such as promotional stimuli and consumers' emotional states (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Gong et al., 2024).

In recent years, impulsive buying behaviour has attracted increasing attention in consumer behaviour research, as emotional and psychological factors are recognised as important determinants of consumers' purchase decisions (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2019; Xiao & Nicholson, 2023). In this context, examining the psychological factors underlying impulsive purchasing can provide a better understanding of how individuals' emotional states and interpersonal experiences shape their consumption behaviours.

The concept of generations and the purpose of this study

The concept of generation is defined by the Turkish Language Association (TDK) as a group of people born in the same years, raised in the same conditions, and sharing the same destinies and problems (Turkish Language Association, 2024). When the literature is examined, it is seen that the generations are named as follows: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Dimock, 2019). It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between generations, and this can vary by country. For instance, in Türkiye, the Silent Generation includes those born in the years 1925-1945; Baby Boomers in the years 1946-1964; Generation X in the years 1965-1979; Generation Y (Millennials) in the years 1980-1999; and Generation Z after the year 2000 (Arslan & Staub, 2015). However, generational classifications may vary across studies and may differ depending on social and cultural contexts (Dimock, 2019). Moreover, examining generational differences is important in consumer behaviour research because individuals across generations may exhibit distinct attitudes, values, and purchasing tendencies.

There are some distinct characteristics regarding Generation Y and Generation Z. Generation Y people grew up intertwined with technology, see technology as a vital component, and follow innovations. They are people who are fond of their freedom, addicted to technology, impatient, and able to do more than one job at a time. In addition, they are a self-centred generation, enterprising, do not believe without questioning, ambitious, and open to change (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Dimock, 2019). Generation Y can change jobs quickly. They work for their careers, not for the institution. They enjoy listening to their ideas and do not avoid taking responsibility. They do not like control because they trust their self-control (Lyons et al., 2020). Generation Y is a generation that is mostly strangers to each other in the same house, has high social sensitivity, respects authority, and is content. This generation grew up with a belief such as "I suffered, my child should not suffer" (Sungur et al., 2017).

On the other hand, Generation Z, also called "Digital Natives", "gaming generation", "cyber children", etc., is a new generation that has transformed the internet, virtual games, and mobile communication technologies into a digital language (Şahin, 2009). This generation also uses technology better than other generations. Since Generation Z is the children of the digital age, wearable and portable technologies have become an important part of their daily lives (Williams, 2010). Members of this generation use online environments such as social media, blogs, and forums throughout their lives. The biggest difference between this generation and previous generations is that computers are in classrooms, at home, and everywhere (Alan, 2011). Since this generation's lifestyle is integrated with technology, they prefer much faster environments. Generation Z begins to live in a digital world from the moment they are born (Kupperschmidt, 2001).

These characteristics are also reflected in their consumption patterns, as individuals who grow up in digital environments tend to make faster and more technology-driven purchasing decisions (Priporas et al., 2020; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). In this context, while purchasing behaviour involves a planned decision-making process, impulsive buying behaviour involves spontaneous, unplanned purchases that occur suddenly, and examining such tendencies is particularly relevant for Generation Z consumers (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2019; Xiao & Nicholson, 2023).

In addition to generational characteristics, interpersonal and emotional factors may also shape impulsive buying tendencies. Attachment theory suggests that individuals with insecure attachment patterns, particularly anxiety and avoidance dimensions, may engage in maladaptive coping strategies to regulate negative emotions and interpersonal stress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). In this context, impulsive buying behaviour may function as a temporary emotional regulation mechanism for individuals experiencing attachment-related insecurity (Dittmar, 2005). Therefore, examining attachment dimensions alongside impulsive buying behaviour may contribute to a better understanding of the emotional and relational motivations underlying purchasing behaviours.

This study specifically focuses on the impulsive buying behaviour of Generation Y and Generation Z. As stated previously, Generation Y grew up with digital technology and spent their youth in an era when the internet was widespread. Millennials and Generation Z show distinct but related consumption patterns (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Millennials; they use digital technologies intensively for researching, comparing, and purchasing products online. They value brand values and personalised experiences, yet their brand loyalty is relatively low, and they may switch brands easily. They are also sensitive to issues such as sustainability, ethical production, and social responsibility (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Generation Z; they grew up with digital technology and naturally use digital platforms for shopping and sharing opinions. They are highly informed consumers who quickly access information, compare prices, and expect brand transparency. They also prefer multi-channel shopping, combining online purchasing with physical store experiences (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Drawing on the characteristics of Generations Y and Z, this study focuses on the impulsive buying behaviours of these individuals. Women in romantic relationships were specifically selected because attachment dimensions become more visible and meaningful within close interpersonal relationships. Romantic relationships constitute one of the primary contexts in which attachment anxiety and avoidance are experienced and reflected behaviourally (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Furthermore, women are reported in previous consumer behaviour studies to display greater emotional involvement in purchasing processes and a greater susceptibility to impulsive buying in some consumption contexts (Silvera et al., 2008). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) and impulsive buying behaviour in women of the Y and Z generations who are in a romantic relationship. Although previous studies have examined impulsive buying behaviour and attachment dimensions separately, research on the relationship between these variables among women from Generations Y and Z in the context of romantic relationships remains limited (Xiao & Nicholson, 2023). Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap in the literature by focusing on the relational and emotional aspects of impulsive buying behaviour.

The following hypotheses were sought within the scope of the study.

Hypothesis 1: Anxiety levels of the participants relate positively to impulsive buying behaviours

Hypothesis 2: Avoidance levels of the participants relate positively to impulsive buying behaviours

Method

Participants and procedure

In this study, the relational screening model, a quantitative research method, was used to examine the relationship between attachment dimensions and impulsive buying behaviour among women in romantic relationships. The study population consisted of women aged 18 to 42 from the Y and Z generations living in Türkiye. According to 2022 TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute) data, 15,947,838 individuals met these criteria. Based on this population size, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 385 participants at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Convenience sampling was used, and 402 individuals participated in the study. After data screening, 386 women who met the inclusion criteria were retained for the analyses ($M = 28.9$, $SD = 5.83$). Thus, all descriptive statistics and analyses reported in the study are based on the final sample of 386 participants. Both married and unmarried participants were included, as all were considered to be in a romantic relationship.

As shown in Table 1, 42.4% of participants held a Bachelor's degree, 12.9% had a high school diploma or lower, and 6.2% had a Master's or Doctorate. Additionally, 10.7% of the participants were undergraduate students, and 7.2% were graduate students. Most participants worked in the private sector (46.1%) and reported being in a dating relationship (47.7%), followed by married participants (25.9%). Regarding relationship duration, 14% of participants reported being in a relationship for 1 year or less, 29.2% for 1–2 years, 11.9% for 3–4 years, 15.2% for 5–10 years, 4.7% for 11–15 years, and 3.3% for 16–20 years. To avoid inconsistencies, all percentages presented in the manuscript and tables were recalculated based on the valid sample size ($N = 386$).

The online survey form was administered via Google Forms, and the link was shared with participants via social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram) and WhatsApp groups, as well as via email. Ethical approval was obtained from the University's Ethics Committee. Before starting the survey, participants were asked to complete an informed consent form, in which they approved their voluntary participation.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Characteristics of the Participants

	Percentage	Frequency	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Age			28.94	5.83	18	42
Anxiety			3.81	1.05	1	6.54
Avoidance			3.52	.96	1	5.86
Impulsive buying			2.85	1.07	1	5
Level of Education						
High school graduate or less	%12.9	63				
Undergraduate students	%10.7	52				
Bachelor's degree	%42.4	206				
Master's or Doctorate student	%7.2	35				
Master's or Doctorate	%6.2	30				
Relationship Duration						
Less than a year	%14	68				
1-2 years	%29.2	142				
3-4 years	%11.9	58				
5-10 years	%15.2	74				
11-15 years	%4.7	23				
16-20 years	%3.3	16				
More than 21 years	%1	5				
Relationship type						
Married	%25.9	126				
Flirtatious	%47.7	232				
Engaged	%5.8	28				

Materials

Adult attachment

Participants' adult attachment orientations were measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) Questionnaire developed by Brennan et al. (1998). In this study, the Turkish-adapted version of the scale was used (Sümer, 2006). It consists of two 18-item subscales that measure attachment anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being rejected or abandoned") and avoidance (e.g., "I prefer not to show others how I feel deep down"). Participants rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 7 = Totally agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of anxiety or avoidance. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Sümer (2006). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .85 for the anxiety subscale and .83 for the avoidance subscale.

Impulse buying behaviour

The participants rated 12 items assessing impulsive buying behaviour, which were adapted from the Impulse Buying Behaviour scale developed by Rook and Fisher (1995) and the Impulse Buying Tendency scale developed by Weun, Jones, and Beatty (1997). Participants rated all items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Totally agree). The use of a 5-point Likert scale for this measure follows the original scaling format of the adapted instruments and was

preferred to maintain consistency with prior studies. Higher scores indicate a higher tendency for impulsive buying. Internal reliability consistencies for these items were .93 in the present study.

Demographic questions

Participants' demographic information, such as age, level of education, occupation, and questions about romantic relationships, was collected at the beginning of the survey.

Analysis of data

The data were analysed using SPSS and Jamovi software. To evaluate the measurement model, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted for attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and impulsive buying behaviour.

The initial model included all measurement items; however, the fit indices indicated that it did not achieve an adequate level of fit. Such findings are common when multidimensional scales are applied across different samples (Marsh et al., 2004; Reise et al., 2013). Accordingly, a two-step model refinement procedure was adopted: (1) identifying items with low or statistically non-significant factor loadings and (2) reconstructing the model while preserving its theoretical integrity (Byrne, 2016).

Items were removed from the model only if they failed to meet statistical criteria (i.e., low or non-significant factor loadings) and provided that their exclusion did not compromise the conceptual integrity of the underlying construct (Hair et al., 2010). The final measurement model was considered to retain sufficient representation of the constructs of attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and impulsive buying behaviour (DeVellis, 2016).

In addition, a limited number of correlated error terms were specified exclusively between conceptually similar items. These modifications were theoretically justified and are consistent with recommendations in the structural equation modelling literature (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016; MacCallum et al., 1992).

Following these refinements, the model demonstrated improved fit indices (CFI = .85, TLI = .84, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07). Although the CFI and TLI values remained slightly below conventional cutoff criteria, the RMSEA and SRMR values indicated an acceptable level of model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016). Furthermore, all retained items loaded significantly on their respective latent constructs ($p < .001$), and the standardised factor loadings fell within acceptable ranges (Hair et al., 2010).

Results

First, the descriptive statistics were analysed. The participants showed moderate levels of anxiety ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.05$, ranging from 1 to 6.54) and avoidance ($M = 3.52$, $S.D. = .96$, ranging from 1 to 5.86). In addition, they showed moderate levels of impulsive buying behaviour ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.07$, ranging from 1 to 5).

Second, correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among study variables. As shown in Table 2, age was significantly and negatively correlated with anxiety ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$) and avoidance ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$) scores. It indicates that as participants get older, they experience less attachment anxiety and less attachment avoidance. In addition, participants' level of education was negatively correlated with relationship duration ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$), attachment anxiety ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$), and avoidance scores ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$). However, age ($r = -.04$, ns) and level of education ($r = -.04$, ns) were not correlated with participants' impulsive buying behaviour. Besides, anxiety scores were significantly and positively correlated with avoidance ($r = .63$, $p < .01$) and impulsive buying scores ($r = .15$, $p < .05$), indicating that as participants' anxiety scores increase, their impulsive buying behaviours also increase.

On the other hand, relationship duration was negatively correlated with anxiety scores ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$) and avoidance scores ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$). This indicates that as participants have a romantic relationship for a longer time, they show less anxiety and avoidance scores. However, there was no correlation between avoidance and impulsive buying ($r = .09$, ns).

To assess the potential risk of multicollinearity, correlation coefficients were examined and found to be below the critical threshold ($r < .80$), indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. In addition, although all variables were collected via self-report measures, procedural remedies, such as ensuring anonymity and reducing evaluation apprehension, were implemented to minimise common method bias. Furthermore, the relatively low correlation coefficients suggest that the observed relationships are modest, consistent with the complex, multifactorial nature of impulsive buying behaviour.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations Among the Study Variables

	Age	Duration	Anxiety	Avoidance	Impulsive Buying
Age	1	0.59**	-0.28**	-0.26**	-0.04
Level of Education		-0.15**	-0.22**	-0.20**	-0.04
Relationship Duration		1	-0.12**	-0.14**	-0.09
Anxiety			1	0.63**	0.15**
Avoidance				1	0.09
Impulsive buying					1

Note: ***, ** p<.01, *: p<.05.

Testing of study hypotheses

The study's hypotheses were examined using hierarchical regression analysis. The regression results examining the predictive relationships among variables are presented separately in Table 3. In the first step, age and relationship duration were controlled. In the second step, attachment dimensions were added to the regression analysis. The results showed a significant model [$F(4, 380) = 3.11, p < .05, R^2 = .03$]. Although the model's explanatory power appears low, this is not unexpected given the multifactorial nature of impulsive buying behaviour, which is influenced by psychological, situational, and contextual factors.

The findings showed that avoidance level ($\beta = -.02, t = -.37, ns$) was not significantly related to impulsive buying behaviour. In contrast, participants' anxiety levels ($\beta = .17, t = 2.57, p < .05$) were positively related to impulsive buying behaviour. That is, supporting Hypothesis 1, women experiencing higher levels of attachment anxiety were found to show greater levels of impulse buying behaviour. It indicates that experiencing greater attachment anxiety is associated with more impulsive buying behaviours among women. This finding can be interpreted within the framework of emotion regulation, suggesting that individuals with higher attachment anxiety may engage in impulsive consumption as a strategy to cope with negative affect and relational insecurity.

However, the findings did not support Hypothesis 2, which proposed positive associations between attachment avoidance and impulsive buying behaviours, as women's avoidance scores did not predict their impulsive buying scores. This result may indicate that avoidantly attached individuals tend to suppress emotional needs rather than express them through consumption-related behaviours.

In addition, as the data were collected via self-report measures, the possibility of common-method bias cannot be entirely ruled out; however, procedural remedies, such as ensuring anonymity and reducing evaluation apprehension, were implemented during data collection. Future studies may benefit from employing multi-method or longitudinal designs to strengthen causal interpretations and reduce potential method-related biases.

Table 3: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Variable	B	Coefficients Std. Error	β	t-value	p-value
Step 1					
Age	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.87	0.38
Duration	-0.10	0.05	-0.12	-1.90	0.05
Step 2					
Age	0.02	0.01	0.10	1.57	0.12
Duration	-0.10	0.05	-0.13	-2.09	0.04
Anxiety	0.17	0.07	0.17	2.57	0.01
Avoidance	-0.03	0.07	-0.02	-0.37	0.71

Note: Dependent Variable: Impulsive buying behaviour

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how internal working models of relationships manifest in consumer behaviour. Specifically, it examined the effects of adult attachment dimensions, namely anxiety and avoidance, on impulsive buying behaviours of Generation Y and Z women in romantic relationships.

The main empirical finding of the study is that attachment anxiety was positively associated with impulsive buying behaviour, whereas attachment avoidance was not. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported, while Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

After controlling for age and relationship duration, the regression results showed that attachment anxiety significantly affects participants' impulsive buying behaviour, supporting Hypothesis 1. These findings suggest that psychological and relational factors may play a role in shaping consumer decision-making processes, though their influence appears relatively modest. In particular, the regression model's explanatory power was low, indicating that attachment dimensions account for only a limited proportion of the variance in impulsive buying behaviour, and that additional psychological, social, and contextual factors may also contribute to this behaviour. The results indicate that the act of purchasing may serve as a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy among women who experience higher levels of anxiety. In this sense, impulsive buying behaviour may serve to soothe distress and alleviate negative affect associated with emotional insecurity in romantic relationships.

This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that individuals with attachment anxiety often experience worry, intolerance of uncertainty, reassurance-seeking tendencies, and fear of rejection, accompanied by a stronger need for validation from others (Clark et al., 2020; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2014; Arriaga et al., 2018). These patterns stem from internal working models characterised by a negative view of the self and a positive view of others (Clark et al., 2020). Within this framework, consumption behaviours may serve as a compensatory mechanism for regulating emotional distress. At the same time, such behaviours may also reinforce low self-esteem over time. Similarly, previous empirical studies have reported that emotionally vulnerable individuals may engage in impulsive or compulsive purchasing behaviours as a way of coping with stress, negative affect, and emotional insecurity (Dittmar, 2005; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001; Rose & Segrist, 2014). The present findings are therefore consistent with prior research emphasising the emotional regulation function of impulsive buying behaviour.

Another important aspect of the findings is that attachment anxiety appears to be more closely associated with purchasing behaviour than attachment avoidance. This result suggests that individuals who experience stronger emotional dependence and fear of abandonment may be more likely to engage in consumption behaviours as a way of seeking reassurance or emotional comfort. These findings also support the argument that consumer behaviour cannot be explained solely by rational decision-making models but should also be interpreted through the lens of emotional and psychological processes. However, given the model's relatively low explanatory power, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.

On the other hand, the findings did not support Hypothesis 2, which posits a positive relationship between attachment avoidance and impulsive buying behaviour. Unlike individuals with high attachment anxiety, individuals with high attachment avoidance tend to use deactivating attachment strategies when coping with distress, which often involves emotional suppression and maintaining psychological distance from others (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2014; Clark et al., 2020). Therefore, they may be less likely to rely on external behaviours, such as purchasing, to regulate their negative emotional states. This tendency may explain the non-significant effect of attachment avoidance on impulsive buying behaviour observed in the present study. This finding is partially consistent with previous attachment research suggesting that avoidantly attached individuals tend to suppress emotional needs rather than seek external emotional reassurance through consumption-related behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Limitations and future directions

The study has some limitations. First, the sample consists of women aged 18 to 42 living in Türkiye, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, this sampling frame was intentionally selected to ensure a theoretically relevant and homogeneous group, allowing a more precise examination of attachment-related dynamics within a specific relational and cultural context. Future studies could provide a broader perspective by including people from diverse backgrounds to examine whether attachment patterns hold across different cultural or gender identities. Second, as the study employs a cross-sectional design, it does not allow for strong causal inferences regarding the

relationships among the variables. This is a common and appropriate approach in behavioural research, where data are collected within limited time frames; however, future research using longitudinal designs could further clarify the temporal dynamics of the relationship between impulsive buying and long-term "soothing" experiences, or between increased relationship stress and anxiety over time. Third, this study focuses on the impact of attachment dimensions on general purchasing behaviour and does not extend to specific consumption categories or underlying mechanisms. Future studies could build on this framework by examining how attachment dimensions relate to different consumption domains, such as luxury consumption, basic needs, or entertainment spending, and by incorporating mediating variables, such as self-esteem or emotion dysregulation, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment insecurity influences consumer behaviour.

Practical implications and conclusion

The findings of this study overall indicate that attachment anxiety, but not avoidance, is a distinct predictor of impulsive buying behaviour in women. People experiencing anxiety in their relationships might use maladaptive regulatory strategies, such as impulse buying, to cope with their internal distress. Although the model's explanatory power was relatively limited, the findings still provide meaningful insights into the emotional and relational factors associated with impulsive buying behaviour. With those findings, this study contributes to the understanding of marketing strategies and consumer relationships by shedding light on the impact of consumers' emotional ties on purchasing behaviour.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that marketing practitioners should consider attachment-related emotional vulnerability when designing communication strategies, as emotionally driven, urgency-based messages may be more effective for anxiously attached consumers. At the same time, this highlights the importance of ethical marketing practices to avoid reinforcing maladaptive consumption patterns. In addition, interventions aimed at reducing impulsive buying may benefit from focusing on emotional regulation rather than solely on financial awareness.

It also highlights the differential impact of attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) on consumer behaviours, such that interventions targeting compulsive behaviours should distinguish among the emotional drivers of different attachment styles. Furthermore, the study contributes to the intersection of consumer behaviour and psychology by positioning attachment theory as a useful framework for understanding real-life consumption patterns. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study design, including the study's cross-sectional design and the model's modest explanatory power. Future studies may benefit from examining additional psychological and contextual variables that could better explain impulsive buying behaviour.

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