

Decoupling the Self from the Stuff: The Role of Buddhist Non-attachment in Reducing Materialism and Impulsive Buying

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Abstract

In today's high-stress economies, consumption is frequently fueled by a psychological craving for possessions as a source of identity, status, and self-worth. Based on Buddhist psychology, the current study tested whether psychological non-attachment has a direct effect on impulsive buying, or an indirect effect through its influence on materialistic values. Data were collected from a survey of 200 adult consumers (64.0% male and 36.0% female) and analyzed using multiple regression and mediation analysis. Non-attachment (measured by the 7-item Non-Attachment Scale) was a significant negative predictor of impulsive buying ($B = -0.149$, $p = .035$) and materialistic values (measured by the Material Values Scale) was a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.236$, $p < .001$). The predictors explained 9.2% of the variance in impulsive buying ($R^2 = .092$). A mediation model further showed that materialistic values partially mediated the relationship between non-attachment and impulsive buying (indirect effect $B = -0.048$, $p = .027$), with a significant direct effect remaining ($B = -0.149$, $p = .032$). These findings indicate that non-attachment curtails impulsive buying through both a value-mediated pathway (via reduced materialism) and a residual, materialism-independent pathway. The results extend consumer behavior theory by introducing a Buddhist-derived construct as an explanatory mechanism and offer preliminary support for non-attachment-oriented interventions as a tool for promoting more deliberate, well-being-oriented consumption.

Keywords: Buddhist psychology; non-attachment; materialism; impulsive buying; mediation analysis; consumer behavior

1. Introduction

People are highly stressed in the modern economy where uncertainty, competition, technological progress and social comparison reign. In such circumstances, consumption is employed to satisfy basic needs and to fulfill psychological needs, desires, and urges (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Shrum et al., 2013). Consumer Culture Theory explains that consumption of goods and services provides access to specific resources that are attractive to consumers and help them to express their identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The topic is also very pertinent to Belk's Extended Self Theory, which highlights the connection between people and their possessions. This framework has been revisited more recently in the setting of digital and datafied consumer contexts (Belk, 1988; Honarvar & Sepehrinia, 2025). People are strongly motivated to purchase goods and possessions to achieve or maintain their desired identity (Belk, 1988).

Recent literature has expanded the view of materialism to include the idea that people buy things to achieve certain identities, reinforce their values, and protect themselves against threats to their sense of self (Shrum et al., 2013; Shrum, Chaplin, & Lowrey, 2022). Moreover, research continues to highlight the negative consequences of materialism across different facets of wellbeing (personal, social, and environmental), and these negative associations have been documented across the lifespan (Dittmar & Isham, 2022).

The psychological meaning of consumption is especially important in the context of stress. People facing a threat to their self-esteem or social status tend to use symbolic means of consumption to regain a sense of control and restore their positive self-image (Shrum et al., 2013). However, studies have shown that materialistic values and orientations towards consumption are often associated with decreased personal well-being, and that the effects of materialism on social well-being (e.g., loneliness or relationship satisfaction) may be greater than those on individual well-being (e.g., self-esteem or life satisfaction) (Moldes et al., 2025).

Chronic stress not only depletes emotional resources but also induces feelings of inadequacy and threats to one's competence, success, and social acceptance, thereby creating self-discrepancies between actual and desired domains. According to Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), such discrepancies lead to negative affectivity and a desire to restore a positive self-image. In a marketplace context, this desire often manifests as compensatory

consumption, that is, spending to fulfill illusory desires rather than genuine needs (Mandel et al., 2017). Products, particularly luxury items, brands, and status symbols, become a means of temporarily alleviating distress and self-denigration associated with the inability to meet desired standards of competence, success, and social acceptance (Pupelis & Šeinauskėnė, 2023). Recent studies on consumer behavior highlight the role of compensatory consumption as a coping mechanism in response to stress and threats to one's identity (Hamilton et al., 2019; Shrum et al., 2022). Nevertheless, because such transactions rarely resolve self-discrepancies, consumers are often driven to make repeated purchases in an attempt to achieve the desired state.

Evidence further suggests that an increasing number of individuals exposed to stress engage in symbolic compensatory consumption to reduce negative affect and protect their self-esteem (Xiao, Li, & Peng, 2018). Although material purchases often serve as an effective short-term mood-repair mechanism, materialistic tendencies are frequently associated with dysfunctional relationships, impaired well-being, excessive consumption, and a reduced ability to derive satisfaction from consumption (Dittmar et al., 2014; Dittmar, 2005; Shrum, Chaplin, & Lowrey, 2022). Recent studies indicate that materialism is associated with a range of adverse social consequences and consumer outcomes, suggesting that theoretical approaches should move beyond self-enhancement and instead seek to reduce the desire to consume.

According to the Extended Self Theory, possessions can be used as extensions of the self to express, protect, and enhance one's identity (Belk, 1988). Recent literature highlights the critical role of identity in the consumer behavior process, as individuals engage in consumption to gain self-congruity and pursue identity interests (Shrum et al., 2022; Saint Clair, 2023; Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). However, Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), Extended Self Theory (Belk, 1988), and the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model (Mandel et al., 2017) do not acknowledge that the self can be viewed as a processual phenomenon rather than a stable entity. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to the discussion by introducing psychological non-attachment — a construct rooted in Buddhist psychology that reflects a reduced dependence on a fixed, permanent sense of self (Obhasa & Malik, 2022) — into consumer behavior research, on the premise that a more flexible, less fixed sense of self can help reduce materialistic tendencies and impulsive buying behaviors.

2. Objectives

Drawing upon Buddhist psychology, this study proposes that the reduction of psychological attachment to the self, as reflected in non-attachment, may offer an alternative explanation for consumer behavior, one rooted in a decidedly non-Western perspective. Specifically, if attachment to the self is reduced, the value of possessions to that self is also reduced, which in turn lowers the likelihood of buying impulsively. Materialistic values are proposed as the intervening psychological process linking non-attachment and buying impulsiveness, thereby adding to the literature on consumer identity by offering an alternative view of consumption theory grounded in an entirely different set of philosophical and psychological roots.

Building on this premise, the study was designed to pursue the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between psychological non-attachment and materialistic values (H1).
2. To examine the relationship between materialistic values and buying impulsiveness (H2).
3. To examine the direct relationship between psychological non-attachment and buying impulsiveness (H3).
4. To test whether materialistic values mediate the relationship between psychological non-attachment and buying impulsiveness (H4).

3. Scope and Methodology

3.1 Participants and Procedure

Power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). For a multiple regression with two predictors, a minimum sample of approximately 68 participants was required to detect a medium effect ($f^2 = .15$) at $\alpha = .05$ with power = .80. The achieved sample substantially exceeded this benchmark.

The final sample consisted of 200 adult consumers ($N = 200$) with no missing data on the study variables. The sample was selected using convenience and snowball sampling among young adults (18-35 years) who make

independent purchasing decisions, which defines the scope of the study. In terms of gender composition, the sample was predominantly male, comprising 128 participants (64.0%), while female participants numbered 72 (36.0%; $M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.48$, coded 1 = male, 2 = female).

Using standardized tools, an online survey was designed in Qualtrics and shared with participants; data collection occurred between May 2026 and July 2026. Prior to participation, all respondents were informed of the voluntary nature and anonymity of the data and provided informed consent. Ethical approval was taken for the study and the data collection was guided by the prescribed research ethics.

3.2 Measures

Non-attachment. To measure non-attachment, operationalized in accordance with the Buddhist principle of impermanence (*anicca*), the 7-item Non-Attachment Scale (NAS-7; Elphinstone, Sahdra, & Ciarrochi, 2020) was used. This is a short form of the original 30-item scale developed by Sahdra et al. (2010). The NAS-7 is a unidimensional measure with satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α from .81 to .88), excellent test-retest reliability, and established construct, convergent, discriminant, and incremental validity. Multiple confirmatory factor analysis studies have revealed good model fit (CFI around .95; RMSEA around .06). The NAS-7 shows mostly positive relations with mindfulness, well-being, hope, and life satisfaction, and mostly negative relations with depression, stress, and anxiety, and it continues to demonstrate robust psychometric properties across diverse cultural samples (Devine et al., 2025).

Materialistic values. Materialistic values were measured using the Material Values Scale (MVS) developed by Richins and Dawson (1992). The scale has high reliability, as most studies report Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.80 to 0.88 for the total score and appropriate values for each of the three subscales (Richins, 2004). Additionally, the MVS has demonstrated good test-retest reliability ($r = .87$).

Buying impulsiveness. Buying impulsiveness was measured using the 9-item Buying Impulsiveness Scale (BIS) developed by Rook and Fisher (1995). The scale was developed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, including acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 49.45$, $df = 27$, AGFI = .92, CFI = .97, NFI = .94) and good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$), supporting its reliability and construct validity for measuring dispositional buying impulsiveness (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

3.3 Data Analysis Strategy

All statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi 28.2 version. Preliminary analyses examined the descriptive characteristics of the sample. To test H1 through H3, a multiple linear regression was estimated with non-attachment and Materialistic Values entered simultaneously as predictors of impulsive buying. To test H4 — the mediating role of Materialistic Values — a mediation model was estimated using Jamovi's medmod module (Gallucci, 2020), which decomposes the total effect of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying into direct and indirect components, consistent with contemporary approaches to mediation testing that evaluate indirect effects directly rather than relying on the sequential causal-steps approach (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Indirect effects were tested using asymptotic (delta-method) standard errors, yielding the Z statistics and associated p-values reported in Table 4. Bootstrapped confidence intervals were not computed in the present analysis; future replications may strengthen inferential precision by applying bias-corrected bootstrap resampling (e.g., 5,000 resamples), as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

4. Literature Review

4.1 Materialism as Attachment to Possessions

Materialism has been identified as one of the key constructs in consumer psychology that can help explain the tendency to strive for more and relate an individual's success and self-worth to the number of things he or she owns. Although Belk's (1985) initial definition described materialism as a personality trait characterized by possessiveness, a desire to possess, and an unwillingness to share, this perspective was later replaced by a value-based approach developed by Richins and Dawson (1992). According to this approach, materialism is viewed as a consumer value characterized by three aspects: an emphasis on acquiring, a link between acquisition and happiness, and a dependence on possession for success. All three aspects, measured by the Material Values Scale (MVS), are considered in the definition of materialism, a key construct in consumer behavior.

Contemporary studies have extended the conceptualization of materialism from a preference for acquiring things to a regulatory process of identity. Shrum et al. (2013) posited that materialistic consumption reflects goal-directed behavior because individuals pursue possession of material items to establish, express, and maintain desired identities. Shrum, Chaplin, and Lowrey (2022), in their analysis of three decades of empirical studies, concluded that materialism is often associated with self-concept clarity, the need for belongingness, self-esteem, and social comparisons, and argued that possessions often serve as identity regulators rather than as a means of satisfying utilitarian needs.

Empirical studies have shown that the prevalence of materialistic values is positively associated with lower life satisfaction and well-being, as well as increased impulsiveness and a tendency toward compulsive buying (Dittmar et al., 2014). A large-scale meta-analysis spanning 259 independent samples confirmed this pattern, finding that materialist values and beliefs are consistently and negatively associated with personal well-being, with the strongest effects observed for risky consumer behaviors and negative self-appraisals (Dittmar et al., 2014). More recent studies also highlight the prediction of materialism from a tendency toward impulsive buying, the influence of social comparisons, and the roles of media and stress in the process (Richins, 2017).

Although Material Values Theory explains this, most contemporary research assumes that the motivation to derive identity and self-esteem from possessions is normal for the average person. Therefore, consumer behavior theories do not address the psychological maintenance of an individual's dependence on their belongings. Such a phenomenon, however, could be regulated. Based on the Buddhist psychological construct of non-attachment, reduced dependence on what defines oneself could lead to reduced dependence on things in general, thereby reducing materialism and its behavioral patterns.

4.2 Buying Impulsiveness as a Behavioral Manifestation of Materialistic Values

Buying impulsiveness is defined as a stable predisposition to engage in unplanned, unconsidered consumption with little regard for the consequences of such behavior (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). Consumers' impulsive buying has traditionally been considered a decision-making style. However, recent studies have begun to view impulsivity as both a coping strategy and a means of regulating identity under stress and negative affective states (Pupelis & Šeinauskėnė, 2023). Consumers often cope with negative emotions by buying things that make them feel better and restore their self-esteem and sense of control; thus, buying behavior is considered a response to identity threat (Mandel et al., 2017; Darrat et al., 2016).

Materialistic value orientations increase the likelihood of impulse purchases (Vohra, 2016), as individuals prone to materialism equate achievement and success with acquiring products (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Shrum et al., 2022). The tendency stems from the fact that people buy items to express social status and competence and to achieve social acceptance, with material possessions becoming a means of communicating one's personal identity (Belk, 1988). Therefore, when an individual engages in impulse buying, they buy to fulfill their desired social self rather than to meet a need or want. Various studies have shown a positive relationship between materialism and impulse buying tendencies, with consistent evidence indicating that high materialistic values increase the likelihood of unplanned purchases and reduce self-control among individuals (Dittmar, 2005; Badgaiyan & Verma, 2014; Shrum et al., 2022).

Recent research provides further evidence that these negative aspects contribute to impulsive buying behavior. Studies carried out in digital and post-pandemic consumer cultures reveal that stress triggers an increase in the rates of impulsive buying among consumers due to the development of feelings of emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and social comparisons of one's own position, which leads to elevated motivations to consume (Islam et al., 2021; Xiao & Nicholson, 2022). It can be concluded that impulsive buying is not only driven by an individual's inability to refrain from consumption but is also motivated by the need to protect or enhance one's identity and cope with negative emotions.

While existing theories on consumer behavior provide insight into the precursors of impulsive buying, such as materialism, emotions, and threats to one's identity, there is a need to explore whether non-attachment from the self might reduce the urge to buy as a means of obtaining a sense of self. The Buddhist psychological tradition is built upon a complex system of beliefs and practices aimed at achieving non-attachment from the self, holding that excessive attachment to material wealth and to a fixed self-concept are sources of suffering. By introducing

the idea of non-attachment, Buddhist psychology provides an alternative to materialism as a driver of consumption and impulse buying.

4.3 Psychological Non-Attachment: Definition and Conceptualization

Psychological non-attachment offers a way of understanding the self as neither permanent nor substantial, without requiring commitment to any particular doctrinal framework. Sahdra et al. (2010) explain that non-attachment is a flexible approach to inner desires, external objects, and relationships that does not depend on attempts to avoid, desire, or deny them. Similarly, it should not be mistaken for a cold or indifferent approach, or for a willingness to give up what one owns. Instead, non-attachment refers to the ability to engage with objects of possession without being excessively dependent on them (Sahdra et al., 2010; Sahdra et al., 2015). At the same time, this excessive dependence leads people to feel that their self-worth and identity depend on the items they own.

Unlike detachment, which implies emotional aloofness, psychological non-attachment is associated with openness and flexibility, as well as reduced identification with thoughts, feelings, and possessions (Whitehead et al., 2019). Thus, people who practice non-attachment are still capable of enjoying interpersonal relationships and achieving their ambitions, but do not depend on these outcomes to increase their well-being. Such an attitude is typical of individuals who hold a more flexible, process-oriented view of the self rather than treating it as a permanent entity that needs to be defended and enhanced (Shonin et al., 2014). Therefore, non-attachment is now considered a psychological concept that can be applied within behavioral science to empirically analyze how Buddhist-derived psychological principles influence human behavior.

There is growing evidence that psychological non-attachment is associated with a range of positive psychological outcomes. Studies have found that, compared to low non-attachment individuals, people high in non-attachment reported increased well-being, life satisfaction, self-compassion, and emotional regulation, as well as reduced levels of anxiety, depression, rumination, and perceived stress (Sahdra et al., 2010; Sahdra et al., 2015; Whitehead et al., 2019). More recently, non-attachment has been found to facilitate psychological flexibility and prevent maladaptive coping by weakening the automatic response to threat (Van Gordon et al., 2018; Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). Overall, the emerging literature suggests that non-attachment can serve as a psychological resource, enabling individuals to respond to potentially stressful life events in a less dependent manner.

Although this construct has been the subject of extensive scrutiny in relation to psychological health and wellness, its interconnections with consumer behavior remain understudied. The reviewed consumer behavior theories posit that materialistic values are a phenomenon rooted in the consumption-driven identity-construction process (Belk, 1988; Shrum et al., 2022). Nevertheless, non-attachment, as a psychological state, could undermine reliance on material possessions as a source of self-identification and, therefore, serve as a tool to reduce the affective pull toward buying and owning things for the sake of happiness, success, and validation. Accordingly, in the present study, non-attachment is conceptualized as a psychological disposition whereby one's self-worth and well-being do not hinge on material possessions. This consideration allows the current study to explore the associations between non-attachment, materialism, and impulsive buying behavior among stressed consumers.

4.4 Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

The above review shows that modern trends in consumer psychology can provide valuable insights into materialistic values and impulsive buying behavior. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), Extended Self Theory (Belk, 1988), and the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model (Mandel et al., 2017) can help explain the mechanisms prompting the emergence of the condition. Similarly, the reviewed literature confirms that materialism is closely linked with impulsive buying, particularly in situations associated with uncertainty and high pressure (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Dittmar et al., 2014; Shrum et al., 2022).

Despite this discussion, three critical gaps remain in the reviewed literature. First, consumer research theories that recognize the importance of self in the consumption process implicitly assume that a consumer is committed to maintaining, expressing, or restoring their self-concept; the role of material goods in this process dominates the analysis, as opposed to investigating whether a consumer's attachment to themselves drives materialism. Second, while the literature highlights mindfulness-related practices and their value in modern consumer and managerial practices, the construct of non-attachment is rarely mentioned; research emphasizes the benefits of non-attachment for psychological well-being, resilience, emotion regulation, and overall mental health (Sahdra et al., 2010;

Whitehead et al., 2019), yet there is limited analysis of its impact on consumer values and buying behaviors. Third, no study has tested whether non-attachment to the self may account for both the decrease in materialistic tendencies and in impulsivity; in other words, the mechanism by which non-attachment from the self reduces one's attachment to things is poorly understood.

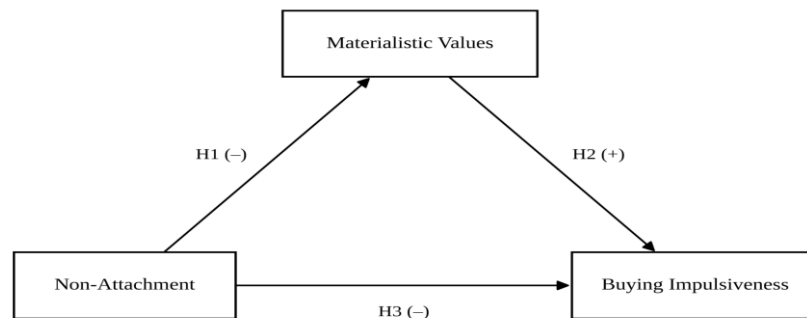


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework. Psychological non-attachment is expected to reduce buying impulsiveness, both directly and indirectly, by reducing materialistic values.

4.5 Hypothesis Development

Materialistic values are characterized by the belief that possessions play a critical role in achieving happiness, success, and identity (Richins & Dawson, 1992). People who score high on measures of materialism are likely to define themselves and others in terms of material possessions and to rely on acquisitions to gain psychological satisfaction (Shrum et al., 2022; Kasser, 2016; Pandelaere, 2016). The concept of psychological non-attachment is associated with experiencing things in their transient nature rather than developing an emotional connection or dependence on them (Sahdra et al., 2010). Thus, non-attachment may diminish the tendency to condition self-esteem on acquisitions and reduce the need for permanence. Therefore, people showing high psychological non-attachment would be less likely to value possessions as a precondition of success and happiness.

H1: Psychological non-attachment is negatively associated with materialistic values.

Materialistic values provide people with a sense of identity and happiness through acquisition, since, according to Richins and Dawson (1992) and Belk (1988), possessions are perceived as important markers of who we are and what we want to become. As a result, consumers high in materialism are more likely to engage in impulse buying to seek happiness by possessing items that signal their status and self-image (Dittmar, 2005; Shrum et al., 2022).

H2: Materialistic values are positively related to buying impulsiveness.

Psychological non-attachment facilitates psychological processes that allow individuals to act rationally rather than be driven by desires and cravings (Sahdra et al., 2010). In turn, since impulsive buying often results from temporary desires or problems with the sense of self (Mandel et al., 2017), individuals who demonstrate psychological non-attachment are expected to be less impulsive and to exhibit fewer unplanned purchases driven by cravings.

H3: Psychological non-attachment is negatively correlated with buying impulsiveness.

Although psychological non-attachment may directly reduce buying impulsiveness, the effect may also occur through the mediation of consumers' value systems. Those who are less attached to their psyche are expected to have lower levels of materialism as a core value. As a result, such individuals would be less prone to buy impulsively, and materialistic values would mediate the impact of non-attachment on buying behavior.

H4: Materialistic values mediate the association between psychological non-attachment and buying impulsiveness.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 Preliminary Analysis

The final sample consisted of 200 respondents ($N = 200$) with no missing data. In terms of gender composition, the sample was predominantly male, comprising 128 participants (64.0%), while female participants numbered 72 (36.0%). The descriptive profile of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Sample Gender Composition ($N = 200$)

Variable	N	%	Mean	SD
Gender			1.36	0.481
Male	128	64.0		
Female	72	36.0		

Note. Gender was coded 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

5.2 Regression Analysis: Non-attachment, Materialistic Values, and Impulsive Buying

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which Non-attachment (NAS) and Materialistic Values (MVS) predicted Impulsive Buying (IB) behavior. The overall model was statistically significant and explained a modest but meaningful proportion of variance in impulsive buying, $R = .302$, $R^2 = .092$, indicating that the two predictors jointly accounted for approximately 9.15% of the variance in impulsive buying behavior.

As shown in Table 2, Non-attachment emerged as a significant negative predictor of impulsive buying ($B = -0.149$, $SE = 0.070$, $t = -2.13$, $p = .035$), indicating that individuals reporting higher levels of non-attachment engaged in less impulsive buying. Conversely, Materialistic Values was a significant positive predictor of impulsive buying ($B = 0.236$, $SE = 0.069$, $t = 3.41$, $p < .001$), such that individuals endorsing stronger materialistic values reported higher levels of impulsive buying.

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Impulsive Buying ($N = 200$)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
(Intercept)	20.419	3.599	5.67	< .001
Non-attachment (NAS)	-0.149	0.070	-2.13	.035
Materialistic Values (MVS)	0.236	0.069	3.41	< .001

Note. $R = .302$, $R^2 = .092$. Dependent variable: Impulsive Buying (IB Total).

5.3 Mediation Analysis

To formally test whether Materialistic Values mediated the relationship between Non-attachment and Impulsive Buying, a mediation analysis was conducted. The path model comprised three components: the effect of Non-attachment on Materialistic Values (path a), the effect of Materialistic Values on Impulsive Buying (path b), and the direct effect of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying controlling for Materialistic Values (path c'). Path estimates are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Path Estimates for the Mediation Model

Path	B	SE	Z	p
Non-attachment → Materialistic Values (a)	-0.203	0.070	-2.89	.004
Materialistic Values → Impulsive Buying (b)	0.236	0.069	3.43	< .001
Non-attachment → Impulsive Buying (c', direct)	-0.149	0.070	-2.14	.032

Note. NAS = Non-attachment; MVS = Materialistic Values; IB = Impulsive Buying.

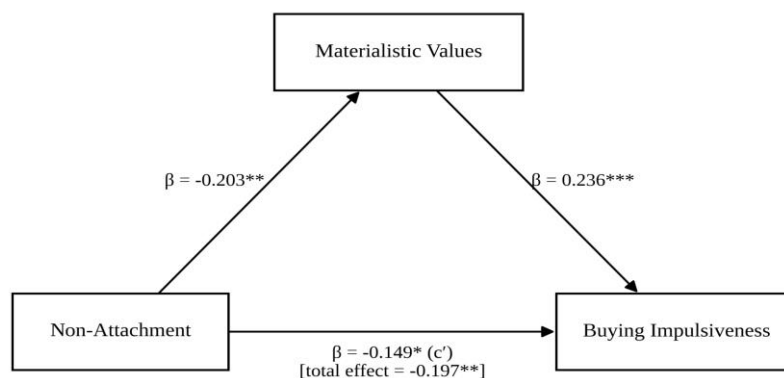
Non-attachment significantly and negatively predicted Materialistic Values ($B = -0.203$, $SE = 0.070$, $Z = -2.89$, $p = .004$), and Materialistic Values, in turn, significantly and positively predicted Impulsive Buying ($B = 0.236$, $SE = 0.069$, $Z = 3.43$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying, controlling for Materialistic Values, remained statistically significant ($B = -0.149$, $SE = 0.070$, $Z = -2.14$, $p = .032$).

The indirect effect of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying through Materialistic Values was statistically significant ($B = -0.048$, $SE = 0.022$, $Z = -2.21$, $p = .027$), confirming that Materialistic Values partially mediated the relationship between Non-attachment and Impulsive Buying. Because both the direct and indirect effects were significant, the pattern is indicative of partial mediation rather than full mediation. The indirect pathway accounted for approximately 24.3% of the total effect ($-0.048 / -0.197$), with the remaining variance attributable to the direct pathway. The total effect of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying was also significant ($B = -0.197$, $SE = 0.070$, $Z = -2.81$, $p = .005$). Full results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects of Non-attachment on Impulsive Buying

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect effect (NAS → MVS → IB)	-0.048	0.022	-2.21	.027
Direct effect (NAS → IB)	-0.149	0.070	-2.14	.032
Total effect (NAS → IB)	-0.197	0.070	-2.81	.005

Note. Indirect effect = NAS → MVS → IB; Direct effect = NAS → IB (controlling for MVS); Total effect = sum of direct and indirect effects.



Note. Indirect effect (Non-Attachment → Materialistic Values → Buying Impulsiveness) = -0.048, $p = .027$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 2. Results of mediation analysis.

This study explores whether Buddhist non-attachment has a direct and indirect effect on impulsive buying through materialistic values. The findings offer empirical support for the proposed decoupling model: non-attachment was associated with lower materialism, lower materialism was associated with lower impulsive buying, and non-attachment maintained a significant direct effect on impulsive buying after controlling for materialism.

The significant negative path from non-attachment to materialistic values ($a = -.203$, $p = .004$) suggests that those who are less psychologically fused with a fixed sense of self, and less driven by craving and possessiveness — the core features of non-attachment in Buddhist psychology — tend to place less value on the acquisition and ownership of material possessions. This result directly replicates previous findings that nonattachment is associated with less materialism due to its reduction of public self-consciousness and relative deprivation, both of which would otherwise drive materialistic strivings (Elphinstone & Whitehead, 2019; Sahdra et al., 2010). It is also consistent with theoretical accounts proposing that materialism is partly sustained by an insecure or externally validated sense of self, such that practices or dispositions that loosen self-object identification should correspondingly reduce materialistic strivings.

The strong positive path from materialistic values to impulsive buying ($b = 0.236$, $p < .001$) echoes a well-established finding in consumer behavior literature that people who value possessions more as a source of identity, status, or happiness are more likely to engage in unplanned, emotionally driven purchases (Richins, 2017; Shrum et al., 2022). Materialistic values seem to increase sensitivity to consumption cues and reduce the psychological friction that would otherwise inhibit impulsive spending. Importantly, the significant indirect effect ($B = -0.048$, $p = .027$) suggests that materialistic values represent a genuine mechanism underlying the effect of non-attachment on impulsive buying. These findings also fit with a small but growing body of literature that links Buddhist-derived constructs directly to consumer materialism: Buddhist ethics have been shown to reduce materialism both directly and through associated virtues such as compassion, loving kindness, and equanimity (Pace, 2013), and qualitative research on practicing Buddhist consumers suggests that religious engagement can help individuals to reconcile spiritual values with the pressures of a consumerist marketplace (Choudhury, 2019).

However, the strong direct effect ($c' = -0.149$, $p = .032$) indicates that materialism is not the sole explanatory path. Apart from materialism per se, non-attachment seems to inhibit impulsive buying via other mechanisms, such as greater present-moment awareness, less reactivity to desire, and less sensitivity to triggers of hedonic or social consumption, all of which are considered elements of non-attachment (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; Mick, 2016; Whitehead et al., 2019). Likewise, ontological accounts of attachment suggest that it might be the fixation on “me, mine, and I,” and not materialism per se, that is the more proximal driver of compulsive acquisitive behavior (Van Gordon et al., 2018). The relatively higher magnitude of the direct effect compared with the indirect effect (around three-quarters of the total effect) indicates that interventions to develop non-attachment may decrease impulsive buying, yet they may not necessarily change materialistic value orientations, although the latter would enhance the effect. These results, taken together, contribute to the literature by clarifying a part of the psychological mechanism linking Buddhist-derived constructs to consumer behavior, differentiating between the value-mediated pathway (via less materialism) and the leftover direct pathway, and providing a more complex account of how detachment of self from material goods restrains impulsive buying, instead of presenting non-attachment as a blanket, all-encompassing barrier to impulsive purchasing.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

The current study contributes to Consumer Culture Theory, Extended Self Theory, and Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model by incorporating a non-Western, Buddhist-derived construct, psychological non-attachment, whose philosophical origin can be traced to the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā*, or not-self, as an upstream antecedent of materialistic value formation. While existing theories generally assume that the self is a stable entity that consumers seek to maintain, protect or restore through consumption (e.g. Belk, 1988; Higgins, 1987; Mandel et al., 2017), the current findings highlight that the degree to which the self is held as fixed or permanent (i.e. low vs. high non-attachment) shapes the strength of materialistic value orientations and, in turn, impulsive buying tendencies. This contributes a novel upstream mechanism to consumer identity theory and provides a preliminary empirical bridge between Buddhist psychology and mainstream consumer behavior research (Mick, 2016).

These results have practical consequences. Interventions to promote consumer well-being (e.g., mindfulness-based or contemplative programs that foster non-attachment) may be effective in reducing impulsive buying, both by attenuating materialistic value orientations and by routes that are not materialism-dependent. Likewise, marketers, policymakers, and financial counselors interested in promoting more intentional consumption may find value in including non-attachment-oriented content in consumer education programs. More broadly, these implications are in line with the literature on Buddhist economics that calls for a reorientation of economic and consumption systems toward sufficiency and well-being rather than the maximization of acquisition (Zsolnai, 2011).

6. Findings

All four hypotheses proposed in this study were supported. Non-attachment was found to reduce materialistic values, materialistic values in turn increased impulsive buying, and non-attachment retained a direct, materialism-independent effect in reducing impulsive buying. Materialistic values were confirmed as a partial mediator of the relationship between non-attachment and impulsive buying, accounting for roughly a quarter of the total effect, with the remaining three-quarters operating through a direct, non-attachment-specific pathway. Table 5 summarizes the results of all four hypothesis tests.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path / Relationship	Result	Decision
H1	Non-attachment → Materialistic Values (negative)	$B = -0.203, p = .004$	Supported
H2	Materialistic Values → Impulsive Buying (positive)	$B = 0.236, p < .001$	Supported
H3	Non-attachment → Impulsive Buying (negative, direct)	$B = -0.149, p = .032$	Supported
H4	Materialistic Values mediates Non-attachment → Impulsive Buying	Indirect $B = -0.048, p = .027$ (partial mediation)	Supported

7. Limitations and Research Gaps

There are a few limitations to be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inference; longitudinal or experimental designs (e.g., manipulating non-attachment via brief contemplative interventions) would provide for stronger causal claims. The sample was gender imbalanced (64.0% male), which may limit generalizability, and future research should explore whether the mediation pathway is moderated by gender or other demographic variables. The data was collected only for the 18-35 age group; comparative analyses across different age groups can be conducted in future studies. Finally, the small amount of variance explained ($R^2 = .092$) suggests that future models should incorporate additional predictors of impulsive buying, such as self-control, emotional regulation, or situational cues, so as to create a more holistic explanatory framework. Future studies may also benefit from bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), and from testing the proposed model in diverse cultural and religious contexts, as non-attachment is a construct with roots beyond Buddhism and into other contemplative traditions.

8. Conclusion

The present study proposed psychological non-attachment, a construct rooted in Buddhist psychology, as a new antecedent of materialism and impulsive buying. A sample of 200 consumers revealed that non-attachment directly and indirectly influences impulsive buying via its negative association with materialistic values. Taken together, these findings suggest that decoupling the self from possessions, rather than solely the treatment of

materialistic values or impulsive tendencies individually, may be a promising, theoretically grounded approach to enabling healthier, more deliberate consumption.

9. References

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