

# **Attachment Styles and Customers' Long-Term Relationships in a Service Context**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this study is to use attachment styles theory to explore long-term relationships in a service context using the mobile market as a case study. Attachment theory focuses on the primary link between maternal loss or deprivation and later personality development. This theory was extended to adult life and commercial contexts. Three attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) were used as the independent variables. Commitment and trust, as constructs of any relationship, were employed as the mediating variables, while intention to stay and cooperation were adopted as the dependent variables, as indicators of long-term commercial relationships. A random sample of 1024 members of an online panel participated in the online survey. Structural equation modeling was performed to measure the validity of the constructs through confirmatory factor analysis, and to assess the hypothesized model as a single theoretical structure using path analysis. Associations were found between most of the study variables. Significant mediation effects were found between attachment styles and long-term relationship indicators, intention to stay, and cooperation, with trust and commitment as the mediators. This study employs a unique theoretical model that has not been previously tested. The model and findings demonstrate that primary psychological structures play a role in creating and maintaining long-term relationships.

**Keywords:** *attachment styles, long-term relationship, trust, commitment, intention to stay, cooperation, service provider*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the seven priority topics of the Marketing Science Institute (MSI)'s Research Priorities 2020–2022 is, “What are the most effective strategies to drive deeper, lasting customer engagement/loyalty with a firm?” (MSI, 2020, p. 4). In parallel, an increasing number of authors have turned toward attachment styles theory to further their understanding of customers' responses to products, services, and marketing communication (Japutra et al., 2018; Mende et al., 2019; Pozharliev et al., 2021a; Thomson et al., 2012). From the combined lines of research (*lasting customer engagement/loyalty and attachment styles theory*), the question we aim to answer in this study emerges thus: Can people's childhood experiences directly or indirectly affect *their long-term relationships with their service providers in adulthood?*

In a marketing context, attachment theory is gaining importance because it is based on people's predictable behavior patterns (working models) in social and commercial interactions (Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Verbeke et al., 2020). This aspect can be particularly significant for understanding customers' emotional and behavioral responses (Verbeke et al., 2020). Attachment theory perceives human relationships as being shaped by their primary relationships with their caregivers in the early stages of life (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton (1992)). Attachment principles have been extended to adulthood and commercial relationships (Brennan et al., 1998; Japutra et al., 2018; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Thomson et al., 2012). Based on their past experiences and expectations, a child who forms working models will likely re-use them in new social or commercial interactions (Raby & Dozier, 2019; Zeifman, 2019).

Until a decade ago, the marketing context did not focus much attention on attachment styles theory (Mende et al., 2013; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Smith, 2015). When

researchers attempted to decipher consumers’ motivations for maintaining a long-term relationship with a company, they focused on certain variables, such as trust, consumers’ emotions, satisfaction, engagement, perceived value, switching costs, brand personality, and many others (Brodie et al., 2011; Chuah et al., 2017; Danesh et al., 2012; Dessart et al., 2015; Hess & Story, 2005; Levy & Hino, 2016; Severi & Ling, 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009). Attachment styles theory offers a fresh perspective on customers’ motivations to start and maintain commercial relationships with service providers (Japutra, 2020; Mende et al., 2013; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Verbeke et al., 2020). The theory posits that primary psychological structures precede all the above-mentioned variables and play a predictable, active role in customers’ long-term relationships (David & Bearden, 2017; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Thomson & Johnson, 2006).

Mende and Bolton (2011) noted the potential explanatory power of attachment style. They were among the first scholars to demonstrate the associations between attachment styles and the different forms of engagement that customers had with a firm and its employees. Following their recommendation to expand the scope of attachment theory research to various contexts in the marketing arena, more researchers have examined a variety of customer–company relationships in different contexts.

Table 1 summarizes some of the groundbreaking studies in the combined fields of attachment styles and marketing.

Table 1. Recent groundbreaking studies of attachment styles theory (AT) in the marketing context.

AS= Attachment styles, RS=Relation Specific Attachment styles, G=General attachment styles)

Reference	Primary Aim	Context	Model variables	Contribution (the attachment styles perspective)
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Mende and Bolton, 2011	How Attachment styles affect the perception of service firms and employees	Insurance firm with agent-based sales infrastructure. Education, online community.	<b>Independent:</b> Relation Specific Attachment styles. <b>Dependent:</b> Satisfaction, trust, affective commitment	RS. AS. explain the different types of engagement customers have with a service provider. Securely attached customers have a more positive view of the firm and its employees.
Mende et al., 2013	How attachment styles influence customers' preference for closeness and repurchase intention.	Insurance firm	<b>Independent:</b> Attachment anxiety and avoidance <b>Dependent:</b> Preference for closeness, repurchase intention, Change in relationship breadth	AS affect preference for closeness. Avoidant related individual refers to less closeness. Anxious related prefers more. High avoidant and high anxiety negatively affect repurchase intentions.
Vieira et al., 2016	How customers' attachment styles moderate the effect on happiness, commitment, loyalty, satisfaction and preference for closeness	Bank, Insurance	<b>Independent:</b> Happiness, preference for closeness, relationship quality <b>Moderator:</b> Insecure AT <b>Dependent:</b> Switching intentions	Attachment avoidance and anxiety interaction have negative associations with switching intentions. Attachment anxiety and avoidance interaction weakens the main effect of marketing variables such as: Commitment, loyalty, preference for closeness
David and Bearden, 2017	How AS affect the purchase decision of products that are advertised using a relational theme	Advertising strategies	<b>Independent:</b> AS <b>Mediator:</b> Perception of fit <b>Dependent:</b> the likelihood to purchase the products presented in the ads.	AS are associated with the effectiveness of relational ads. Relational theme ads might push away an anxious related individual who are less likely to purchase their products. A secure related individual has a higher tendency to purchase relational-theme advertised products.
Mende et al., 2019	Do attachment styles influence romantic Consumption?	Romantic gaming, Non/Romantic fragrances, Romantic movie, Romantic books, Romantic greeting cards, Dating services	<b>Independent:</b> Attachment styles. <b>Moderator:</b> Anxiety <b>Dependent:</b> Six studies with six different romantic products	Attachment styles affect romantic consumption. The avoidant attachment will incline to consume less, less, Anxious, and Secure attachment will consume more.
Verbeke et al., 2020	The impact of General attachment (G) styles Vs. Relation Specific (R.S.) AS. on customers' willingness to recommend services	Four service firms: Banking, Insurance, telecom, energy	<b>Independent:</b> General and Relation Specific Attachment anxiety and avoidance <b>Mediators:</b> Trust satisfaction and commitment <b>Dependent:</b> Customers'	RS. AS. have better predictive power than G.AS. Higher anxiety and avoidance results in lower trust, commitment, and satisfaction, which in turn leads to lower willingness to recommend the firm's services to others

			willingness to recommend	
Pozharliev et al., 2021A	How attachment styles influence customer's responses- affective attitudinal, behavioral-to robot, or human service agents.	Human-Robot Service interaction. Three experiments: Hotel registration with robotic-human voice vs. robotic- robot voice	<b>Independent:</b> Types of service (robots vs. human) <b>Moderator:</b> Anxious attachment style <b>Mediators:</b> Pleasantness, Empathy <b>Dependent:</b> Satisfaction, positive WOM	Secure AS are more satisfied and more likely to engage in positive WOM following an interaction with a human agent. Anxious and avoidant styles did not show any difference in their responses between human and robot service

The table clarifies that only a few studies have been dedicated to the question of repurchase. Furthermore, none of the reviewed studies (even in a broader context than in Table 1) has examined cooperation (with a service provider) and intention to stay (in a service contract), even though these are two cornerstones of relational marketing.

These facts represent a gap in the literature that we aim to narrow in the current study. The main objective of the current study is to use attachment theory to explore customers' long-term relationships in a service context (Bowlby, 1988; Japutra et al., 2018; Mende et al., 2013; Paulssen, 2009). Hypotheses were formulated and tested on a sample of 1024 customers of a mobile phone service provider.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways: First, it addresses a research priority identified by the MSI. Although numerous publications have explained long-term customer relationships, the results remain inconclusive, while new perspectives are required to better understand this complex consumer behavior. We present an expansion of the existing body of knowledge using a different context and theoretical model.

Second, it closely examines an emerging stream of research in the marketing literature on the influence of attachment theory on consumers' emotional (trust and commitment)

and behavioral (intention to stay and cooperation) responses. This psychological theory has only been applied to marketing over the last decade; a solid body of research is required to contrast the validity of its proposals. Therefore, using attachment theory to explore long-term relationships in a service context will fill a gap in relational marketing research (Fastoso et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2016; Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Smith, 2015).

Third, a relationship between attachment styles and customer trust, as well as commitment in a service context, is established. This involves connecting this emerging marketing-psychological theory with the traditional tenets of customers' long-term relationships. Unique to our research, two indicators (intention to stay and cooperation) are used to explain the long-term relationship between customers and service providers, thereby relating it to attachment theory.

Fourth, in response to Mende and Bolton's (2011) call to examine the application of attachment theory in a wide variety of contexts, the context of the current study is the cellular world, specifically the relationship between cellular subscribers and their service providers. Prior to the current study, this specific context had not been examined using attachment theory. The results reinforce the findings derived from other contexts, and thus contribute to attachment theory research in marketing services.

## **2. ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Attachment theory is considered to be one of the most influential theories in developmental psychology (Finkel et al., 2017). The theory focuses on the primary link between maternal loss or deprivation and later personality development (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton (1992)). Bowlby (1973) defines attachment behavior as "behavior that has

proximity to an attachment figure as a predictable outcome and whose evolutionary function is the protection of the infant from danger” (Goldberg et al., 1995, p. 63).

The basic idea is that infant attachment features and patterns are reflected in adult life and significantly influence adult life patterns. Raby and Dozier (2019) explain that bonds with a primary caregiver guarantee survivability and protection. When children’s needs are not met or the children are separated from their caregiver, they experience anxiety and stress that are gradually embedded in their personality. Hence, attachment relationships continue to be significant throughout an individual’s life journey and may predict long-term relationships in various contexts (Ainsworth, 1982; Bowlby, 1973, , 1988; Pozharliev et al., 2021a; Verbeke et al., 2020).

Verbeke et al. (2017) refer to the development of attachment styles as a biologically originated system that is associated with neuroendocrine processes (amygdala functioning) that constantly seek to regain homeostasis and avoid danger or stress (Beckes et al., 2015b). People conserve their psychological and social resources while seeking proximity with others to cope with stress and achieve a state of serenity or pleasure. In the early stages of life, the attachment system is activated in the face of danger or stress. The individual expects that the attachment figure (the caregiver) will eliminate the threat and restore homeostasis (Beckes & Coan, 2015). Gradually, based on the caregiver’s accumulated responses and social environment, the individual forms working models that are used to activate the relevant attachment figure/target when needed. These working models, which operate mainly at the subconscious level, form an attachment style (Beckes et al., 2015; Bretherton, 1992; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Attachment styles are identified in the interaction of two dimensions: attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. Attachment avoidance is the need for self-reliance, whereas attachment anxiety is the worry of abandonment (Mende et al., 2019).

The literature distinguishes between four attachment styles by combining these two dimensions. People with low levels of both dimensions (low need for self-reliance and low concern about abandonment) have a secure attachment style. Conversely, people with high levels of one or both dimensions (high need for self-reliance and considerable concern about being abandoned) have insecure attachment styles (Wei et al., 2007). The three insecure attachment styles are as follows: people with high levels of anxiety and low levels of avoidance have an anxious style; those with low levels of anxiety and high levels of avoidance have an avoidance style; and those with high levels of both dimensions have a fearful (or disorganized) style (Mende et al., 2019). The fourth style is relatively rare and exhibits ambivalent and disorganized attachment behaviors. Therefore, related marketing studies mainly address three major attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant.

### *2.1 Attachment styles, trust, and commitment*

Attachment styles are formed in early childhood, extend to adult life and marital relationships (Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Weiss, 1991), and are present in commercial relationships (Raby & Dozier, 2019; Zeifman, 2019). These working models, which are developed to ensure survivability and regain homeostasis, are implemented in any relationship for the same purpose. Therefore, they may provide additional perspectives on consumer behavior and predict individuals' long-term relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Paulssen, 2009).

Similar to human relationships, attachment styles involve emotions, expectations, needs, attitudes, and social behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Moreover, Aaker et al. (2004) observed that customers would establish a commercial relationship based on the same psychological-emotional foundations as in their interpersonal relationships.



In this vein, Verbeke et al. (2020), Konok et al. (2016), Menidjel et al. (2017), and Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) have determined that attachment styles play an essential role in appealing to trust and commitment to a company. Mende & Bolton, (2011) and Mende et al. (2013) find that attachment styles predict customer behavior better than traditional, well-established, long-term relationship antecedents. (e.g., switching costs or price equity).

However, the distinction between attachment security and insecurity follows from significant differences in the relationships established by individuals (Mende et al., 2019; Sperling & Berman, 1994).

In social and in commercial environments, securely attached individuals are more likely to positively view themselves, their attachment figures, and their relationships. They have a low need for self-reliance and minimal worries about abandonment. (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Szepeswol & Simpson, 2019); they have higher trust in others and a willingness to share their feelings with them (Verbeke et al., 2017). Studies on the role of attachment theory in marketing suggest that people with a secure attachment style are more likely to have long-term relationships (Verbeke et al., 2020; Pozharliev et al., 2021a). This finding may be partly due to their increased ability to express commitment and receive greater satisfaction with their relationships, which may consequently encourage them to remain longer in their relationships (Mende & Bolton, 2011; Mende et al., 2013; Bidmon, 2017; David, 2017; Shabani et al., 2017; Verbeke et al., 2020; Pozharliev et al., 2021a). Thus, it has been suggested that lower attachment anxiety and avoidance are associated with higher satisfaction with social relationships, ease of conduct, confidence, and relaxed behavior when interacting with other humans (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015).

Securely related individuals are positively linked to consumer satisfaction, trust, and commitment to companies (Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011). Consequently, a secure attachment style, characterized by relating to attachment figures as trustworthy individuals who enjoy proximity to others and actively establish new relationships, relates to the exact characterization of commercial attachment figures (Verbeke et al., 2020). Therefore, low levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (secure attachment style) induce higher trust and customer commitment to a service provider.

H<sub>1</sub>: A secure attachment style increases the level of customer trust.

H<sub>2</sub>: A secure attachment style increases the level of customer commitment.

Regarding insecure attachment styles, high levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance imply less satisfaction with social relationships. Thomson and Johnson (2006) demonstrate that insecure attachment styles are associated with and may predict consumers' patterns of commitment, involvement, and satisfaction for both products and services.

Individuals with high attachment anxiety seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness from their attachment ties because of their fear of abandonment. They excessively seek proximity and help from their attachment figures, unsure if they will receive it (Verbeke et al., 2017). People with anxious attachment styles may find themselves in long-term, although unhappy, relationships because they are preoccupied with being abandoned and have doubts about their self-worth (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Szepeswol & Simpson, 2019). Consequently, when the level of attachment anxiety increases, the attachment system becomes hyperactive (Van Ijzendoorn et al., 2006). Individuals with an anxious attachment style detect threats in their social and commercial environments and reject their attachment figures. Consumer trust implies

customer familiarity and comfort with a service provider, which should reduce consumers' feelings of anxiety (El-Manstrly, 2016). Verbeke et al. (2020) showed that customers with high anxiety and avoidance scores had lower levels of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to their service providers (in four different service industries).

Therefore, high levels of attachment anxiety (anxious attachment style) generally indicate low levels of trust and commitment.

**H3:** An anxious attachment style decreases the level of customer trust.

**H4:** An anxious attachment style decreases the level of customer commitment.

Another insecure attachment style emerges when individuals experience high levels of attachment avoidance, which typifies a strong need for self-reliance (Pozharliev et al., 2021a; Verbeke et al., 2020). An avoidant attachment style appears when caretakers consistently fail to respond to a child's needs. Consequently, the individual learns to deactivate the attachment system, concluding that trusting others is impractical for managing anxiety (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1992). Individuals with avoidant attachment attributes tend to suppress or conceal their feelings; they are inclined to deal with rejection by distancing themselves from the sources of rejection (their attachment figures). These individuals reject attempts to entice them into close relationships with their service providers in the marketing context. These attempts are perceived as intrusive and a threat to their independence and privacy (Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011). Individuals with high attachment avoidance place less value on friendships or relationships, which would typically reduce stress or anxiety levels (Verbeke et al., 2020). Accordingly, they have a low desire to build relationships and lower trust in and commitment to others. Their ways of developing social relationships are mainly transactional and opportunistic (Verbeke et al., 2020).

Based on findings that show a resemblance between personal and commercial attachment patterns (Aaker et al., 2004; Raby & Dozier, 2019; Zeifman, 2019), as well as on previous attachment-related studies (Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Pozharliev et al., 2021a; Simpson, 1990; Verbeke et al., 2020), we hypothesize that high levels of attachment avoidance (avoidant attachment style) will result in low levels of customer trust and commitment to a service provider.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** An avoidant attachment style decreases the level of customer trust

**H<sub>6</sub>:** An avoidant attachment style decreases the level of customer commitment.

### *3.2. Trust, commitment, and long-term relationship outcomes*

The relationship between trust and commitment has been widely studied in marketing literature since Morgan and Hunt (1994). Individuals who trust others to appropriately manage their needs tend to commit to other parties who provide their needs. Furthermore, individuals who do not feel high trust seek other sources to provide their needs (Consiglio et al., 2018; Fullerton, 2011; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Moliner et al., 2007; Montgomery et al., 2018; White & Yuan, 2012; Zeffane et al., 2011). Many studies have found that customer trust influences customer commitment (Aurier & N'Goala, 2010; Deb & Chavali, 2010; Dimitriadis et al., 2011; Guenzi et al., 2009; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Montgomery et al., 2018; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007; Trif, 2013).

**H<sub>7</sub>:** A high level of customer trust in a service provider leads to a high level of commitment to the service provider.

Trust and commitment influence intention to stay (Chiu et al., 2012; Danesh et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Essentially, intention to stay is comparable to commitment and has a psychological component (Mende et al., 2013).

Individuals who feel committed to their relationships tend to stay longer therein (Erciş et al., 2012; Hur et al., 2010), while individuals who trust others to appropriately fulfill their needs tend to stay in relationships (Chiu et al., 2012; Danesh et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2017; Mende et al., 2013).

**H<sub>8</sub>.** High customer trust in a service provider positively affects the intention to stay in the relationship.

**H<sub>9</sub>:** High customer commitment to a service provider positively affects the intention to stay in the relationship.

Customer cooperation is perceived as one of the core values of relationship marketing, representing a change in marketing philosophy from transactional to relational marketing (Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2017). Similar to intention to stay, cooperation is perceived as a relationship marketing goal (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Solomon, 1992). A cooperative customer may be an excellent information source for an organization, helping it develop new customized products (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2010; Oly Ndubisi, 2007;).

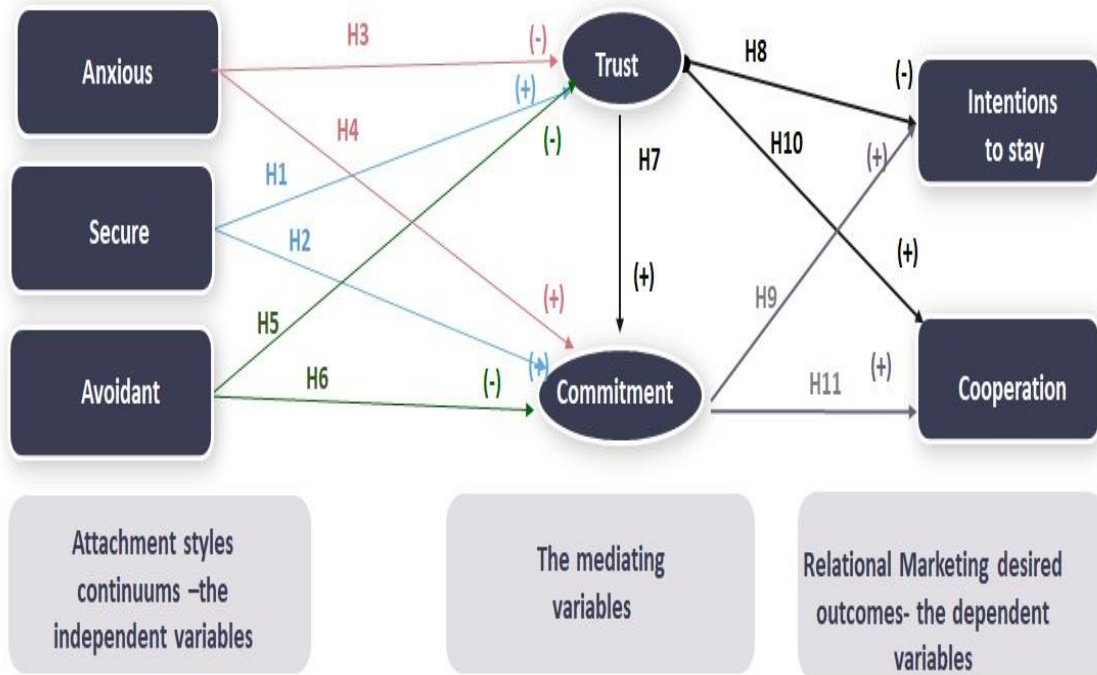
Individuals who trust others to appropriately manage their needs tend to engage in cooperative behaviors (Cheng et al., 2017; L'etang & Pieczka, 2006; Wu et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals who feel high commitment in a relationship tend to exhibit cooperative behaviors because they feel more obligated to others (Dagger et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be concluded that high levels of trust in and commitment to a service provider imply high levels of cooperation.

**H<sub>10</sub>:** High customer trust in a service provider positively affects the level of cooperation with the service provider.

**H<sub>11</sub>**: High customer commitment to a service provider positively affects cooperation with the service provider.

Figure 1: Study Model

Attachment Styles' Associations with relational marketing's outcomes mediated by Trust and Commitment



## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 The measurement scales

The measurement scales were incorporated into a self-administered and structured questionnaire. The questionnaire relied on seven-point Likert scales for all the model's factors, using closed-ended questions. In addition, the model's variables contained qualifying and sociodemographic questions.

Table 2. Scales of measurement.

Construct	Items	Author
Attachment style	Avoidance: 18 items Anxious: 18 items	Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998)
Trust in service provider	Eight items	Harris and Goode (2004)
Commitment to a service provider	Three items	Meyer and Allen (1997) Bansal et al. (2004, 2005)
Cooperation	Four items	Auh et al. (2007)

Intention to stay	Eight items	Bougie et al (2003)
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The attachment styles scale of measurement, “Experiences in Close Relationships” (ECR), by Brennan et al. (1998), was translated to Hebrew and validated by Mikulincer and Florian (2000). Brennan et al. (1998) reported values for Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82 (0.83) for the anxiety and 0.83 for the avoidance dimensions. The Hebrew-translated version reported values for Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88 for the avoidance and 0.89 for the anxiety dimensions (Findler et al., 2007).

**The commitment to the service provider** (affective) scale measures the degree to which a customer expresses a desire-based attachment to a particular service provider. The scale was used by Bansal et al. (2004) and Bansal et al. (2005). It is a subset of items from the scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997).

**The trust in the service provider** scale is used to measure a person’s belief that a particular vendor is dependable and trustworthy. Used by Harris and Goode (2004), this scale is appropriate for both goods and service providers. Harris and Goode (2004) adapted their scale from Hess (1995).

**The Cooperation** (client with service provider) scale measures the degree to which a person engages in activities to help another party as it provides them with a service. Auh et al. (2007) referred to the scale as co-production and stated that their scale was based on an adaptation of items used in two scales developed by Bettencourt (1997). Auh et al. (2007) created two versions with slightly different scales.

**The intention to stay** (switching intentions) scale measures the degree to which a service provider’s customer plans to continue using services from the provider or intends to switch to a competitor. Bougie et al. (2003) adopted Oliver’s (1996) scale source.

#### 4.2 The procedure

A random sample was designed based on the entire database of a leading online access panel that statistically represented the local population. Sample randomness was obtained using a dedicated panel sampling tool embedded in the panel management software.

The questionnaire was sent via the Internet to the panel members' personal e-mail addresses. The data collection was performed for 18 days, from February 6 to February 24, 2020, ensuring that all respondents (early and late) had an equal opportunity to participate.

A quality assurance process was employed after the fieldwork was done:

**Average answering time.** The average time to fill out the questionnaire was calculated, and all respondents who dedicated well below the average time were excluded from the database.

**Straight-liners.** Responses from these participants evidenced a number of repeated answers, with little or no attention to reading the statements.

**Complete questionnaire.** Respondents who did not complete the entire questionnaire were also excluded from the database.

Of the 8702 invitations that were sent to the panel members, the final database included 1024 participants, after qualifying terms and quality assurance checks. They each owned a mobile phone, were all subscribers to local mobile phone service providers, and were decision-makers regarding the chosen service provider.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Variable	N	%	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Gender					
• Male	407	39.70			
• Female	617	60.30			
Age			42.83	14.83	18-80



Age group					
• 18-24	89	8.70			
• 25-34	266	26.00			
• 35-44	243	23.70			
• 45-54	176	17.20			
• 55-64	141	13.80			
• 65+	109	10.60			
Education					
• Elementary school and below (6-8 years)	11	1.10			
• Junior –high school (7-9 years)	11	1.10			
• High school without diploma (10-11 years)	93	9.10			
• High school with diploma (12 years)	257	25.10			
• Student / first academic degree (BA)	364	35.10			
• Second / third academic degree (MA/ PhD)	159	15.50			
• High professional studies	129	12.60			
Marital status					
• Single	233	22.80			
• Married/Living with a spouse, no kids	141	13.80			
• Married /Living with a spouse + kids	523	51.10			
• Single parent	20	2.00			
• Divorced/ Widower	107	10.40			
Religion					
• Secular (all religions)	582	56.90			
• Traditional (Jew)	192	18.10			
• National religious (Jew)	118	11.50			
• Ultra-orthodox (Jew)	119	11.60			
• Not a Jew	5	0.50			
• other	6	0.60			
Employment					
• Part-time employed	173	16.90			
• Full- time employed	602	58.80			
• Student/ Pupil	73	7.10			
• Soldier	12	1.20			
• Housewife	21	2.10			
• Pensioner	87	8.50			
• Currently not employed	54	5.30			
HH Income					
• Similar to the average	214	20.90			
• Somewhat below the average	151	14.70			
• Much below the average	193	18.80			
• Somewhat above the average	267	26.10			
• Much above the average	102	10.00			
• Prefer not to answer	95	9.30			

### 4.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS software, version 25. The demographic characteristics of the sample were assessed using the mean, standard deviation, range

for continuous variables, and frequencies for discrete variables. The reliabilities of the attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious), emotional variables (trust and commitment), and behavioral variables (intention to stay and cooperation) were assessed using Cronbach's alpha indices.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine construct validity. Notably, CFA is used to test whether measures of theoretical constructs are consistent with the actual measurements that are obtained. The CFA was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to refine the scales used in this study. The maximum likelihood approach was used to estimate the parameters.

Path analysis using SEM was performed to test the indirect effects in the hypothesized model. The SEM approach was tested using the AMOS software. The level of significance (p-value) was 5%.

## **5. RESULTS**

### *5.1 The validity of the scales*

The CFA results support a high validity of the scales used in this study. Table 3 presents the factor loadings of the items for each scale.

The CFA procedure was conducted to validate all the scales' measurements in the same model and showed acceptable goodness of fit indices, indicating that all the items of a specific scale were indeed loaded on it:  $\chi^2 (767) = 360.9$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.88; NNFI = 0.85, and SRMR = 0.09.

Specifically, the ranges of the item loadings (Beta's) on the various scales were as follows: anxious attachment (.580–.764); avoidant attachment (.524–.788); trust (.515–.822); commitment (.787–.928); cooperation (.659–.759); and intention to stay (.702–.910).

Convergent validity was verified: the factor loadings were significant and most were higher than 0.5 (Bagozzi, 1981; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2006), while the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the factors was higher than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Regarding the reliability of the scales, the composite reliability indices for each of the dimensions obtained were higher than 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 4. Analysis of the dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the scales (fully standardized solution)

Items	Factor loading	t-value
<b><i>Anxious attachment scale (CR = 0.91; AVE = 0.90), <math>\alpha=.923</math></i></b>		
I'm worried to be abandoned	0.678	19.257
I worry about my relationships	0.580	19.706
I'm worried that other people will not care about me as much as I care about them	0.678	21.798
I often want to merge entirely with other people, and it sometimes drives them away from me	0.764	18.29
I'm afraid to be alone	0.644	20.875
My wish to be very close to people sometimes drives them away	0.730	20.56
I need many confirmations that I'm loved by the people who are close to me	0.717	16.444
Sometimes I feel that I force other people to show more feelings and more commitment	0.582	18.968
If I can't get people to show interest in me, I get angry or frustrated	0.654	20.684
I feel that other people do not wish to get close to me as I wish	0.721	15.447
When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel certain anxiety and insecurity	0.529	17.833
I become frustrated when other people are not with me to the extent that I would like them to be	0.61	15.041
I get frustrated if other people are not available when I need them	0.518	17.573
When other people do not confirm me, I feel really bad about myself	0.608	17.16
When people close to me spend too much time away from me, it bothers me	0.583	fixed
<b><i>Avoidant attachment scale (CR = 0.93; AVE = 0.91), <math>\alpha=.895</math></i></b>		
I prefer not to be too close to other people	0.684	14.786
I feel that it is easy for me to get closer to other people	0.525	12.512
I try to avoid getting too close to other people	0.788	15.673
I become tensed when other people get too close to me	0.836	16.072
I want to get close to other people. However, I keep withdrawing from them	0.787	15.693
I'm not comfortable opening up to other people	0.685	14.635
I feel uncomfortable when people wish to get close to me	0.725	15.09
I distance myself when people are getting closer to me	0.739	15.157
I feel comfortable being close to other people	0.524	fixed
<b><i>Trust scale (CR = 0.91; AVE = 0.85), <math>\alpha=.861</math></i></b>		
My cellular service provider is interested in more than just selling me goods and making a profit.	0.515	fixed
There are no limits to how far my cellular service provider will solve a service problem I may have.	0.740	12.704

My cellular service provider is genuinely committed to my satisfaction.	0.765	12.837
Most of what my cellular service provider says about its products is true	0.756	12.791
If my cellular service provider makes a claim or promises about its product, it's probably true.	0.780	12.909
In my experience, my cellular service provider is very reliable.	0.822	13.096
I feel I know what to expect from my cellular service provider	0.554	11.354
<b>Cooperation scale (CR = 0.92; AVE = 0.90), <math>\alpha = .770</math></b>		
I try to work cooperatively with my cellular service provider	0.759	17.942
I do things to make my cellular service provider's job easier	0.757	17.928
I prepare my questions before talking with my cellular service provider	0.528	13.916
I openly discuss my needs with my cellular service provider to help the firm deliver the best possible service	0.659	fixed
<b>Commitment scale (CR = 0.90; AVE = 0.91), <math>\alpha = .891</math></b>		
I feel emotionally connected to my cellular company	0.787	fixed
I feel like "part of the family" of my cellular company	0.928	31.065
I feel a strong affiliation with my cellular company	0.855	29.94
<b>Intention to stay scale (CR = 0.90; AVE = 0.85), <math>\alpha = .941</math></b>		
I use the services of this service provider because it is the best choice for me.	0.702	fixed
To me, the service quality this service provider offers is higher than the service quality of other service providers	0.825	24.769
I have grown to like this service provider more than other service providers in this category.	0.881	26.27
This service provider is my preferred service provider in this category	0.910	26.925
<i>Model fit: Chi-squared = 360.9, df = 767, p = 0.001; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.88; NNFI = 0.85; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted</i>		

Table 5 shows the internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) and inter-correlations between all study variables.

Table 5. Discriminant validity of the scales associated with the model.

	<b>Anxious Attachment</b>	<b>Avoidant Attachment</b>	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Intention to stay</b>	<b>Cooperation</b>
Anxious attachment	.92					
Avoidant attachment	.59**	.89				
Trust	.08*	-.01	.86			
Commitment	.02	.03	.20**	.89		
Intention to stay	.01	-.04	.53**	.23**	.94	
Cooperation	.15*	.05	.38**	.13**	.25**	.77

Below the diagonal: correlation estimated between the factors.

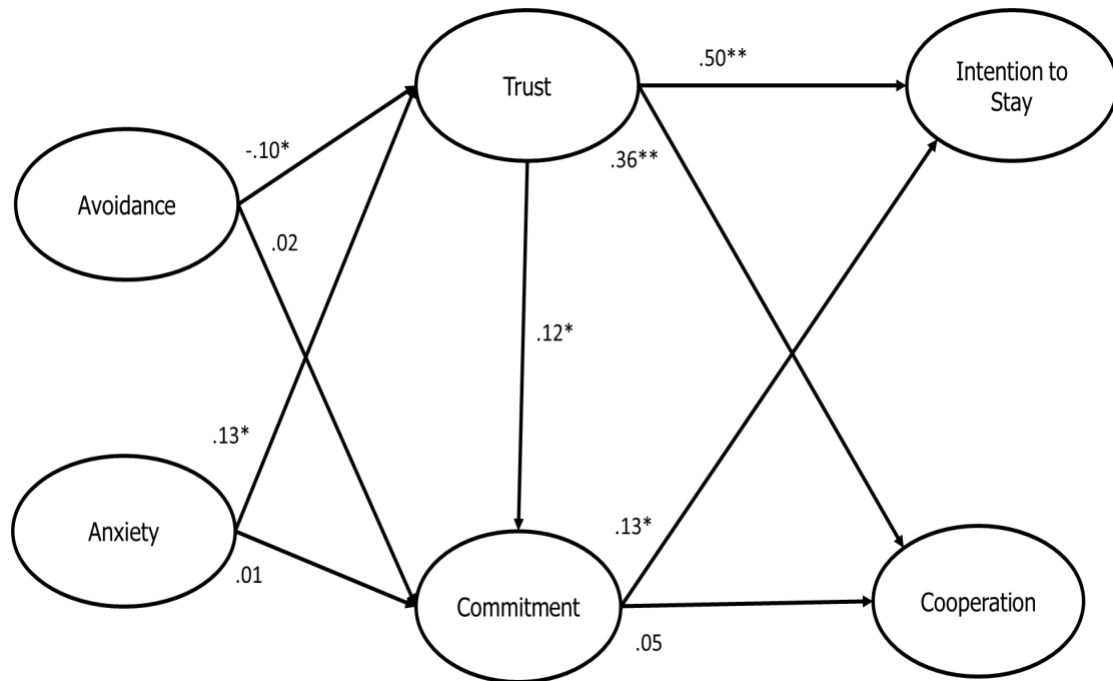
Diagonal: Reliabilities of the scales (Cronbach Alpha).

## 5.2 Hypothesis testing

### 5.2.1 Anxious and avoidance attachment styles lead to higher intention to stay and cooperation values

Path analysis was performed for each of the three styles to assess the hypothesized model. The results for the anxious and avoidant attachment styles showed acceptable goodness of fit indices:  $\chi^2(1) = 3.78, p = .052, CFI = .99, GFI = .98, RMSEA = .05,$  and  $SRMR = 0.05$ .

Figure 2: Anxious and Avoidance attachment styles lead to higher intention to stay and cooperation.



The results show that high avoidance leads to lower trust ( $\beta = -.10, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>5</sub>). However, no significant association was found between avoidance and commitment ( $\beta = .02, p = .93$ ) (H<sub>6</sub>). In addition, the results show that high anxiety leads to higher trust ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>3</sub>). However, no significant association was found between anxiety and commitment ( $\beta = .01, p = .78$ ) (H<sub>4</sub>). An examination of the relationships between the mediators and outcomes in the model revealed that high trust levels led to a higher intention to stay ( $\beta = .50, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>8</sub>) and higher cooperation ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>10</sub>). A higher commitment to a service provider was found to lead to a higher intention to stay ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>9</sub>) but not to higher cooperation ( $\beta = .05, p = .61$ ) (H<sub>11</sub>). Higher trust in a service provider leads to higher commitment ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>7</sub>).

Last, mediation effects were examined to determine the indirect effects of attachment styles on the mediators' outcomes. A significant indirect effect was found between the avoidant style and intention to stay through trust ( $\beta = -.06, p < .01$ ). This mediation effect was partly due to a direct path between avoidance and intention to stay ( $\beta = -.03, p < .01$ ).

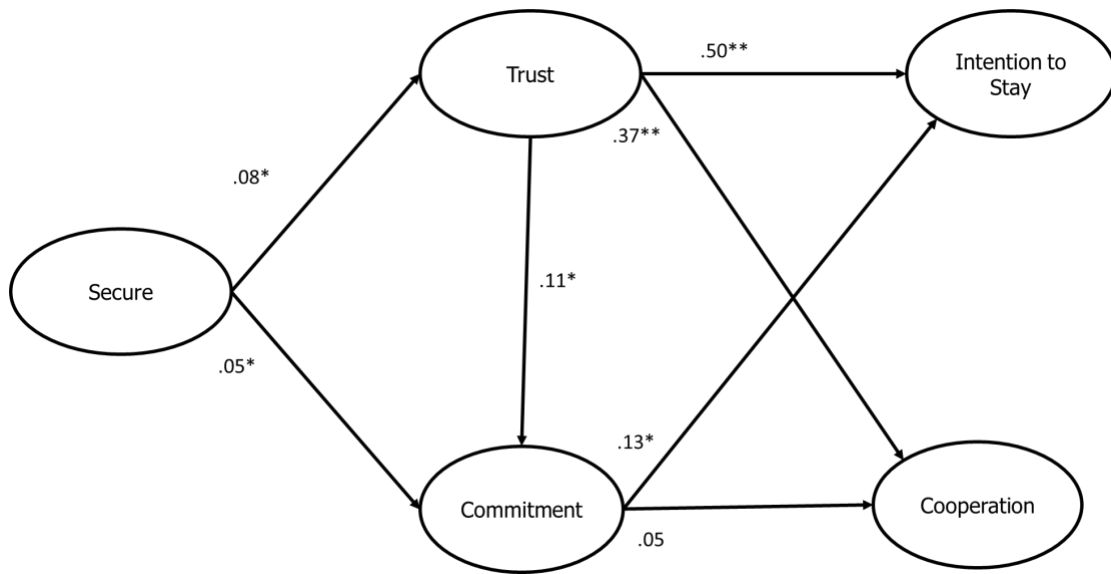
A significant indirect effect was also found between the avoidant style and cooperation through trust ( $\beta = -.04, p < .05$ ), which was partly due to a direct path between avoidance and cooperation ( $\beta = -.03, p < .01$ ). Higher avoidance leads to lower trust and subsequently lower intention to stay and lower cooperation.

A significant indirect effect was found between the anxious style and intention to stay through trust ( $\beta = .07, p < .01$ ), which was fully due to the lack of a direct path between anxiety and intention to stay ( $\beta = -.02, p = .58$ ). A significant indirect effect was also found between the anxious style and cooperation through trust ( $\beta = .05, p < .01$ ), which was partly due to the direct path between anxiety and cooperation ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ). Higher anxiety leads to higher trust, and consequently lower intention to stay and lower cooperation.

### **5.2.2 Secure attachment style leads to higher intention to stay and cooperation**

The results of the path analysis for the secure attachment style showed acceptable goodness of fit indices:  $\chi^2(1) = 3.41, p < .01$ , CFI = .99, GFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, and SRMR = 0.05.

Figure 3: Secure attachment style leads to higher intention to stay and cooperation



The results show that a secure attachment style leads to higher commitment ( $\beta = .05, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>2</sub>) and higher trust ( $\beta = .08, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>1</sub>). An examination of the relationships between the mediators and the outcomes in the model showed that higher trust led to higher intention to stay ( $\beta = .50, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>8</sub>) and higher cooperation ( $\beta = .37, p < .01$ ) (H<sub>10</sub>). A higher commitment to a cellular provider was found to lead to higher intention to stay ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>9</sub>), but not to higher cooperation ( $\beta = .05, p = .85$ ) (H<sub>11</sub>).

Last, the mediation effects were explored to examine the indirect effects of the secure attachment style on the mediators' outcomes. A significant indirect effect was found between the secure attachment style and intention to stay through trust ( $\beta = .04, p < .05$ ). In other words, a secure attachment style leads to higher trust, and thus a higher intention to stay. This mediation effect was fully due to the lack of a direct path between the secure style and intention to stay ( $\beta = .02, p = .75$ ).

No mediation effect was found between the secure attachment style and cooperation ( $\beta = .01, p = .82$ ).

Table 6. Structural model relationships obtained.

Hypothesis	Path	Parameter	t	Results
H1	Secure attachment → Trust	.08	2.24	Supported
H2	Secure attachment → Commitment	.05	2.14	Supported

H3	Anxious attachment → Trust	.13	3.39	Supported
H4	Anxious attachment → Commitment	.01	0.34	Not supported
H5	Avoidant attachment → Trust	-.10	2.31	Supported
H6	Avoidant attachment → Commitment	.02	0.54	Not supported
H7	Trust → Commitment	.12 (insecure attachments) .11 (secure attachment)	2.71 2.29	Supported
H8	Trust → Intention to stay	.50 (insecure attachments) .50 (secure attachment)	2.58 2.51	Supported
H9	Commitment → Intention to stay	.13 (insecure attachments) .13 (secure attachment)	3.12 2.98	Supported
H10	Trust → Cooperation	.36 (insecure attachments) .37 (secure attachment)	2.39 2.25	Supported
H11	Commitment → Cooperation	.05 (insecure attachments) .05 (secure model)	1.01 0.87	Not supported
Note: Insecure attachment model fit: $\chi^2(1) = 3.78, p = .052, CFI = .99, GFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = 0.05$ . Secure attachment model fit: $\chi^2(1) = 3.41, p < .01, CFI = .99, GFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = 0.05$ .				

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1. Theoretical contributions

The primary goal of relational marketing is to retain customers and maintain long-term relationships. To achieve this goal, many studies have explored the associations and causality between variables that participate in most commercial relationships and are considered the building blocks of customers' long-term relationships. Trust, satisfaction, commitment, brand equity, emotional attitudes, and many other variables contribute significantly toward understanding customer behavior (Brodie et al., 2011; Chuah et al., 2017; Danesh et al., 2012; Dessart et al., 2015; Hess & Story, 2005; Levy & Hino, 2016; Severi & Ling, 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009). However, these variables could not reveal whether there was a hidden narrative behind the scene that preceded the relationship and guided customers' choices and preferences. In 2004, it was demonstrated that customers tended to establish commercial relationships similarly to how they developed their interpersonal relationships (Aaker et al., 2004). This revelation has led researchers to look for an early factor that drives customers to start and maintain commercial relationships. Palmatier et al. (2006) issued a call for



researchers to go beyond established marketing constructs to deepen their insights into the mechanisms that affected consumer behavior. Researchers who have responded to this call have opened up the possibility that psychologically and biologically based early processes significantly influence customers' decisions to start and maintain relationships with a firm or brand (David, 2020; David & Bearden, 2017; Japutra et al., 2018; Konok et al., 2016; Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Paulssen, 2009; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2012;).

Neuroscience marketing, an emerging stream of research, provides tools to better understand consumer decisions from a biological perspective. It provides evidence of the processes that are activated before a customer decides to start a relationship with a brand (Karmarkar & Plassmann, 2019; Pozharliev et al., 2021b; Shaw & Bagozzi, 2018; Verbeke et al., 2017). Attachment styles theory draws from the same primary source. It reveals the psychological processes that are part of a customer's psychological and neurological systems and affect marketing decisions. This means that customers experience psychological processes anchored in their personality while long-term relationships are being developed (or neglected) (Japutra et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2012; Menidjel et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2017).

The current study aligns with this stream of research by exploring and demonstrating that the foundations of attachment styles play a role in maintaining long-term customer relationships (He et al., 2012; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Specifically, the current study explores the effects of attachment styles on consumers' willingness to maintain long-term relationships based on their level of cooperation and intention to stay in relationships with their mobile service providers. These two variables (cooperation and intention to stay) had not been explored before the current study and were not used in the theoretical model presented here.

This study also reflects the fundamental differences between the three attachment styles. Securely attached individuals are more likely to develop trust and commitment to brands and stay longer in relationships (H<sub>1</sub> + indirect effects) (Verbeke et al., 2020). In comparison, individuals with insecure attachment styles (avoidant and / or anxious) exhibit less clear-cut behaviors. Those with high levels of avoidant attachment develop lower levels of trust (H<sub>5</sub>) and are less likely to form long-term relationships. However, anxiously attached individuals develop high levels of trust and are more likely to form long-term relationships. The latter finding is only partially consistent with attachment styles theory, as high levels of anxious attachment have previously been found to generate low levels of trust (H<sub>3</sub>) (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Szepsenwol & Simpson, 2019; Verbeke et al., 2020). One possible explanation is that anxiously attached individuals seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness from their attachment ties because of their fear of abandonment. They excessively seek proximity and help from their attachment figures, unsure if they will receive it (Verbeke et al., 2017). People with anxious attachment styles may find themselves in long-term, albeit unhappy, relationships because they are preoccupied with being abandoned and have doubts about their self-worth (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Szepsenwol & Simpson, 2019).

Insecure attachment styles do not have a direct link to commitment. This relationship is established indirectly through trust. In the current service context, while securely attached individuals are positively linked to consumer trust and commitment (H<sub>1</sub>) (Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011), insecure attachments are not directly linked to consumer commitment but indirectly through trust.

This finding does not support the two hypotheses relating to the associations between insecure attachment styles and commitment (H<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>6</sub>). The third hypothesis regarding

the association between commitment and cooperation is also not supported (H<sub>11</sub>). To explain why commitment is not supported as a mediating variable, we refer to Allen and Meyer (1990), who showed that commitment was not a unidimensional variable but a complex and sometimes unstable construct (Lariviere et al., 2014). Commitment may also result from coercive power or may be based on the stability (or instability) of mutual benefit in the relationship between a customer and a service provider (Greenberg P. in Dewnarain et al., 2019 ). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), a lack of better alternatives keeps customers in relationships until circumstances change. The same is true in a market in which most competing service providers offer similar marketing propositions or a comparable quality of service.

This last point accurately represents the local market situation and may explain the elusive role of commitment in the current context.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides an additional evidentiary layer to the emerging stream of research on attachment styles theory in marketing. Thus, the study further accommodates a major marketing priority proposed by the MSI (2020) to explore the complex construct of lasting customer engagement/loyalty and provide a new, updated, and more profound understanding thereof.

The MSI's call fits well with the determination of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) that relational marketing refers to strategies for segmenting consumers to build long-term relationships.(Adapted from AMA, 2019) We accept and support this well-defined goal in the current study.

Second, this study uses a unique theoretical model that has not previously been used in the literature, and a new set of variables connecting an emerging marketing theory with traditional components of customers' long-term relationships. By employing this

model, this study narrows the gap in the literature on the establishment of long-term customer relationships (Fastoso et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2016; Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019; Smith, 2015). Based on this model, attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) were used as the independent variables; customer long-term relationship antecedents (trust and commitment) were the mediating variables, while two relational marketing indicators (cooperation and intention to stay) were the dependent variables. The findings from this model demonstrate that customers' long-term antecedents (trust and commitment) are directly affected by attachment styles, whereas relational marketing indicators (cooperation and intention to stay) are indirectly affected by attachment styles. In other words, primary psychological structures (attachment styles) have the power to influence long-term relationships.

Third, attachment styles affect marketing results mostly indirectly when mediated by trust and commitment, which means that their impact does not occur in a vacuum. To achieve long-term relationships, trust and commitment should be established as the inherent goals. Attachment styles present the most effective approach to building and maintaining long-term relationships. One may view this conclusion as a cycle, which starts with a customer's psychological structure (attachment style), which affects their responses to marketing offerings, degree of accessibility, and the degree of acceptance of the marketing message. With the correct approach (attachment-based considerations), long-term relationships have been gradually established. While maintaining the behavioral components of the relationships (in our study, cooperation and intention to stay), adopting appropriate attachment-based considerations will facilitate the realization of desired long-term relationships.

## *6.2 Practical implications*

The current study shows that attachment styles affect marketing results when mediated by trust and commitment. Thus, practitioners should consider a distinct approach to each attachment style when planning a new marketing offering.

Therefore, the first practical implication is to segment the customer base using the characteristics of attachment styles theory. To this end, service providers may conduct a survey based on a representative sample of their customer database to determine their customers' attachment style segmentation.

While this recommendation was previously expressed (Mende et al., 2013; Mende et al., 2019), it was reaffirmed in the current study in a completely different context using relational marketing indicators previously unexplored. The findings of the current study suggest the following general guidelines:

A securely attached individual mostly has a positive view of life, the ability to trust and share feelings with others, and a tendency to turn to others for help and comfort (H<sub>1</sub>). A securely attached individual feels loved and competent and can join forces and work cooperatively to solve problems. These characteristics explain the positive correlation with trust, commitment, cooperation, and intention to stay (H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> + indirect effects). A secure attachment style provides a solid foundation for marketing efforts and is expected to respond more positively to reasonable marketing offerings while granting a balanced judgment. Practitioners may approach securely attached individuals through all available means and channels, including personal or mass media, digital media, print advertisements, or letters. Marketing-related promises should treat the consumer as a partner or an equal, without patronization. We can only assume that, following a similar recommendation, one of the three leading mobile service providers in the local market was named "Partner."

Avoidant-oriented individuals tend to be excessively self-reliant, particularly in stressful situations. They do not trust others to come to their rescue (H<sub>5</sub>), and generally tend to avoid social engagement. They develop a positive self-image based on their competence to perform tasks and solve problems independently, yet conceal their sense of insecurity. Avoidant-oriented individuals tend to trust their relationship partners less readily (H<sub>5</sub>). Less trust leads to a lower level of intention to remain in a relationship and a lower level of cooperation (H<sub>8</sub> and H<sub>9</sub>). Avoidant-oriented individuals pose a challenge to marketing practitioners. This type of consumer seeks independence in relationships, prefers to decide on their service provider, and rejects being dictated to on their choices. They will most likely seek less intimacy with a service provider, which means that they will look for fewer advertising and marketing contacts. Avoidant individuals can be expected to be reluctant to disclose personal details (required in many recent marketing campaigns). The appropriate marketing approach for avoidant individuals is to offer multiple choices via digital channels rather than through direct personal contact (e.g., telephone calls). Marketers should not pressure avoidant individuals into making immediate decisions. When service providers target avoidant customers in the mobile context, they should offer multiple monthly tariff plans, a few exit points in the service contract, and diverse access points to customer service.

Anxiously attached individuals strive for proximity with others as a means of reducing their fears and stress when facing threats, yet are uncertain that others will indeed come to their rescue. As a result of this constant dualism, anxiously attached individuals constantly look for negative signals from their social environment and exhaust their energy on fear and stress instead of enjoying their social ties. Anxiously oriented individuals suffer from low self-esteem and may be intrusive and overly controlling in their relationships. An appropriate marketing plan for anxiously attached individuals

should emphasize a service provider's commitment to satisfying their needs and solving their problems. The marketing plan should provide accessible and tangible steps through which the provider proves its reliability and thus establishes trust and commitment (H<sub>8</sub> and H<sub>9</sub>). Generally, anxiously attached individuals require intense marketing contacts to reassure them of a service provider's good intentions. In the mobile context, an anxiously attached customer will happily accept customer service initiatives to assist them with any problem, "Happy holidays" wishes, or offers to save them money with a new program that better fits their consumption characteristics.

However, practitioners should be aware that devoting attention to the role of attachment styles in marketing cannot replace the need to establish trust and commitment in the first place. The current study's findings show that the most significant influence of attachment styles on marketing results is indirect and mediated by long-term relationship antecedents (i.e., trust and commitment) (H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>8</sub>).

### *6.3 Limitations and future research*

The current study's results should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study used the original ECR scale developed by Brennan et al. (1998) to measure attachment styles. The advantage of using this scale is its broad scope and ability to successfully measure human relationships, which can be projected onto commercial relationships. However, this broad view of human attachment might overlook some specific commercial aspects of a relationship. Additional attachment scales have been developed, including the M.B. scale developed by Mende and Bolton (2011), which is a shorter version of the ECR developed specifically for marketing research (David et al., 2020). Second, the present study relies on data collection over a single period. Therefore, causality should be considered carefully. Third, different countries with different market characteristics may produce different findings. Fourth, in the current

study, the associations between anxious attachment styles and the study variables differed from other attachment style-related studies (El-Manstrly, 2016; Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Szepsenwol & Simpson, 2019) and from what was hypothesized. However, these findings do not explain these differences. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that context, local culture, and social norms may have affected the participants' responses. Therefore, further exploration of this issue is strongly recommended.

A review of the research on attachment styles in marketing (David & Bearden, 2017; Japutra et al., 2018; Japutra, 2020; Mende et al., 2019; Mende & Bolton, 2011; Pozharliev et al., 2021a; Swaminathan et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012; Whelan & Dawar, 2016; Yuan & Lei, 2017) reveals that this perspective of looking for hidden narratives behind consumers' overt behavior to start or end relationships is only upheld at the beginning of potential discoveries.

First, future studies should discover how these predispositions (attachment styles) help to start and sustain relationships (Hollmann et al., 2015). Attachment-based studies should be conducted across industries and cultures to establish the universal nature of attachment styles in consumer behavior in various commercial fields. As the effect of attachment styles on marketing increases, practitioners from various industries and under different market conditions will implement this knowledge in practice.

Second, attachment styles theory deals with mental and social needs, fears, and desires. Future research should focus on these elements in a marketing context. For example, does an emphasis on being an equal partner in a relationship and cooperating with a service provider increase the motivation of securely attached consumers to remain in the relationship? Or how can the fear of abandonment that anxiously attached individuals might feel be moderated? Or can small-task-oriented marketing plans overcome avoidant individuals' reluctance to remain in a relationship?



Third, additional long-term relationship mediators should be examined alongside attachment styles, such as the level of engagement and switching costs. These elements may be adopted as mediators using the theoretical model tested in the current study. Additional relational marketing indicators (as mediators or moderators), such as communication, conflict handling, and freedom of choice, should also be studied. Finally, it is recommended that future research use demographic control variables to test their effects on long-term relationships. For example, there has been some evidence that attachment styles are affected by gender (Ardenghi et al., 2020; Stewart, 2017), which may affect long-term relationship outcomes differently. While differences in the significance attributed to specific service elements may exist across industries and cultures, the basic attachment style characteristics are expected to be the same.

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