

The Sentiment of Technology: An Exploratory Study on How Wearable Technology of Outdoor Sports Brands Builds Emotional Attachment Beyond Functionality for the UK Generation Z female Consumer.



University of the Arts London, London Collage of Fashion, MA Fashion Design Management, Master's Project

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1 Abstract and Introduction

The UK wearable technology market is projected to reach £1.29 billion by 2025 (Mintel, 2025). Sports wearables, also known as wearable devices, dominate the market (Ju and Lee, 2020). These devices collect physiological and environmental data and deliver user feedback, merging activity monitoring and outdoor safety assistance (Lee and Beak, 2021).

Outdoor wearable devices prioritize functionality while **ignoring emotional dimensions** (Sethi, 2022). Over 30% of users give up using them quickly (Nelson et al., 2020). At the same time, device design is male-centred, **neglecting female consumers** (Yumuk, 2023; GOV, 2025).

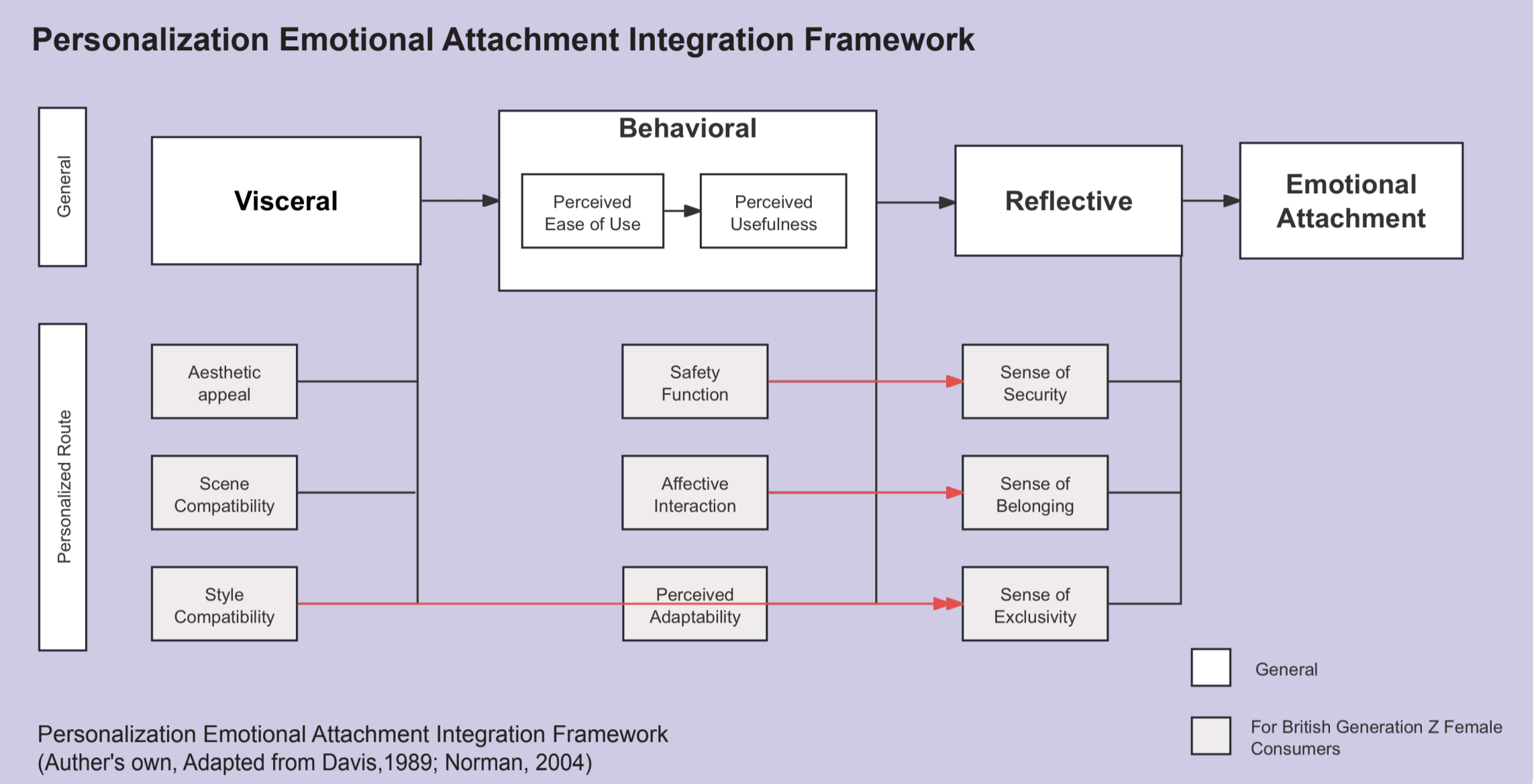


Overarching Research Question: In what ways does wearable technology foster emotional attachment with UK Gen Z female consumers in the outdoor sport fashion sector?
Aim: To investigate how wearable technology is used by outdoor sports brands to build emotional attachment with UK Gen Z female consumers, in order to generate strategic insights for design, innovation, and brand management.

4 Findings and Discussion

- Key Finding**
- Functional attitude:**
- Purpose-oriented
 - Focus on experience
 - Adaptability
 - Emotional value
 - Outdoor personal safety
- Acceptance:**
- High acceptance
 - High criticism
 - High expectations
- Appearance:**
- Aesthetics appeal
 - Personal style
 - Scene compatibility
- Personalization:**
- Appearance
 - Functional services
 - Driving deep emotions

Discussion: Appearance compatibility and functional adaptation are essential to consumers' pleasurable engagement, while personalization is a key driver of emotional attachment. Aesthetically personalized appearance and safe-oriented design can directly foster deep emotional attachment. Simultaneously, personalized services require leveraging personal information while respecting user subjectivity. Basic device quality is a primary challenge. This study developed the convergence conceptual framework for British female Gen Z outdoor sports consumers, see the figure to the right.

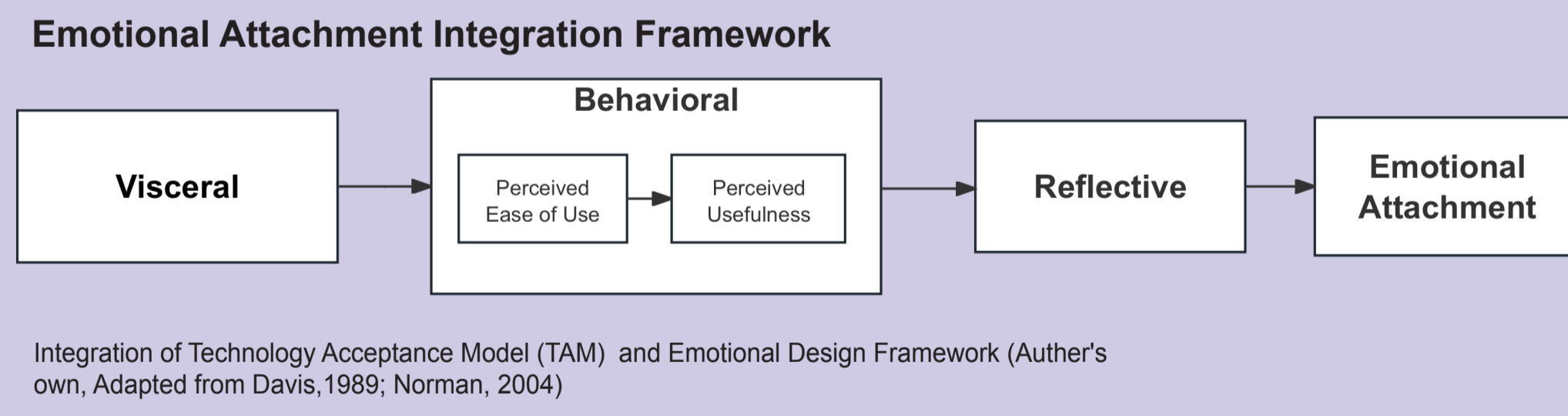


2 Literature Review

- **British female Gen Z outdoor sports consumers** They value self-subjectivity, emotional value, and a need for exclusivity, and are highly receptive to technology.
- **Emotional Attachment Theory** (Bowlby, 1969) It strengthens the emotional bonds between brand and consumers, improving brand management.
- **Emotional Design Framework** (Norman, 2004) Emotional attachment is enhanced visceral, behavioral, and reflective design.
- **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** (Davis, 1989) It emphasizes usability and usefulness but ignores user affective and long-term adoption.

· The **pleasure** and **personalization** of product experience are the core of cultivating attachment (Ristau et al., 2023; Page, 2014).

This research builds on the TAM and emotional design frameworks, investigating the behavioral impact of perceived usability and usefulness in wearable technology. It also integrates these two frameworks for analysis. The figure below provides a visual reference. Existing research on user experience, emotional dimensions, and the neglect of women will be examined through primary research.

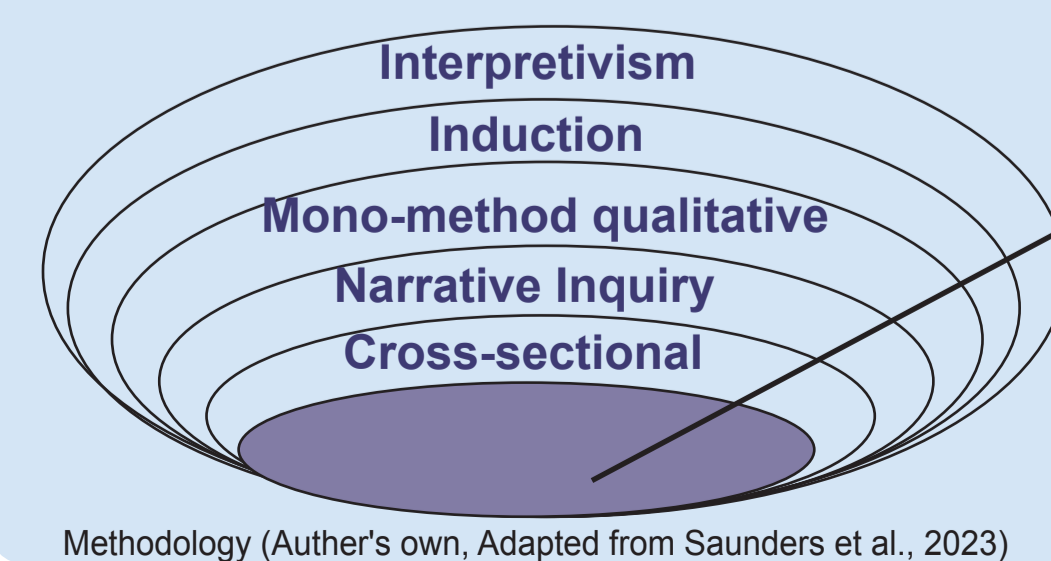


5 Recommendations

- | Managerial Implications | Strategy Recommendations | Viable Recommendations | Priority |
|--|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reverse the design form to focus on 'wearability' rather than 'technological devices' and enhance adaptability. · Move beyond male-centric design, integrating female-friendly adaptability to enhance user experience. · The emphasis is on equipment reliability rather than on diverse functionality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improve team empathy and gender parity. · Immersive female user experience and scenario driven improvement. · Realize the user co-creation ecosystem focusing on empathy and emotional connection · Manage quality issues or reshape communication, transform crises into opportunities for emotional connection. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improve the gender parity in product development team. · The design team conduct longitudinal observation of usage scenarios, following at least 20 participants for 24 hours. · Provide users with personalized appearance and services, as well as tiered management of personal information. · Prioritize critical issues by providing fun, human communication or mobile power, before investing resources in addressing quality issues. | <p>!</p> <p>!!</p> <p>!</p> <p>!!!</p> |

3 Methodology and Research Method

This study aims to analyze the emotional experience of consumers and ensure the contemporary value within the research.



Research Method: This study adopted purposive sampling to select 11 eligible participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. Data collection followed the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics (2020).

Participant:

- Female
- Generation Z
- Live in UK
- Consumers of outdoor sports fashion brands
- Have purchased at least one wearable device

Reference

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss, Volume I: Attachment*. 2nd ed. [online] *The British Journal of Sociology*, Basic Books, pp.1–326. Available at: https://mindsplain.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ATTACHMENT_AND_LOSS_VOLUME_1_ATTACHMENT.pdf [Accessed 5 Aug. 2025].

Davis, F.D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), pp.319–340. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>.

Norman, D.A. (2004). *Emotional design: why we love (or hate) everyday things*. [online] New York: Basic Books. Available at: <https://www.boscogroupofschools.in/starstudentbuilder/educational-theory/E-Books/Students/09%20Emotional%20Design%20Why%20we%20Love%20Or%20Hate%20everyday%20things%20-%20Donald%20Norman.pdf> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2025].

(For more reference information, please scan the QR code)

6 Conclusions

Theoretical and Managerial Contribution: This study is the first to offer an integrated conceptual framework combining TAM and emotional design, encompassing both emotional and functional dimensions (Davis, 1989; Norman, 2004). It also applies these frameworks to segmented populations, further developing a personalized emotional attachment integration framework for British female Gen Z outdoor sports consumers. In addition, this study proposes management implications, strategies and feasible suggestions on how to form emotional attachment with consumers.

Limitation and Further Research: This study still has limitations for a single sample size, lack of industry recommendations, time constraints, and a failure to differentiate between device form and exercise risk. Future research could integrate current industry studies and technologies to propose practical and actionable recommendations.