Mobile-assisted showroomers: Understanding their purchase journey and personalities

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, the retail sector has undergone a dramatic transformation, driven by rapid advances in consumer and retail technologies, an evolution of omnichannel environments, and changing consumers who increasingly use their smartphones inside brick-and-mortar retail stores as personal shopping assistants. In this context, showrooming has become a common practice for omnichannel mobile consumers (Flavián et al., 2020). The present study investigates the under-researched phenomenon of mobile-assisted showrooming behavior. Adopting an exploratory qualitative research approach, 31 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with consumers in a metropolitan city in Queensland, Australia. The authors propose a shopper journey framework that challenges the sequential consumer decision-making process. Influenced by showrooming pre-dispositions, mobile-assisted showroomers pursue a hybrid product evaluation phase that encapsulates both physical and mobile activities during the brick-and-mortar retail visit. In addition, the research identifies four unique personas of mobile-assisted showroomers. The results contribute to extant literature on omnichannel and showrooming behavior by identifying predispositions, behaviors, and segments of mobile-assisted showroomers. The study provides retailers with new strategies to segment mobile-assisted shoppers more effectively and understand their needs and shopping motivations.

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the retail sector has undergone a dramatic transformation, driven by the evolution from multi- to omnichannel environments, rapid advances in information technologies, and changing consumer shopping behavior (Lee et al., 2018). Today's consumers are seeking a seamless retail experience while interacting simultaneously with offline and online commerce channels (Lazaris et al., 2015; von Briel, 2018). In this context, consumers are increasingly using smartphones during their shopping journey (Skrovan, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2015), transforming how consumers research, experience, and buy goods while interacting with retailers during their purchase journey (Luo et al., 2014; Lazaris et al., 2015; Fuentes and Svingstedt, 2017; Kokho Sit et al., 2018). For instance, according to the recent 2018 iVend Retail Report "Global Path to Purchase Survey", more than 60% of consumers use smartphones when shopping in brick-and-mortar stores (iVend Schneider and Zielke, 2020).

In this context, showrooming (i.e., gathering information by 'touching and feeling' products offline and then purchasing online) has

become a common practice for omnichannel mobile consumers (Flavián et al., 2019, 2020). Showrooming presents a significant threat to retailers (Gensler et al., 2017; Lazaris et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2014; Quint and Rogers, 2013), affecting their market performance and forcing them to take measures to reduce the impact of this mobile-assisted shopping behavior (Daunt and Harris, 2017; Rapp et al., 2015). With the increased adoption of smartphones and the ubiquitous access to mobile Internet online purchases no longer have to be made only through stationary devices at home. Instead, they can be made from the smartphone in the brick-and-mortar store itself (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). Showrooming behavior has evolved into "a practice whereby consumers visit a brick-and-mortar retail store to (1) evaluate products/services first-hand and (2) use mobile technology while in-store to compare products for potential purchase via any number of channels" (Rapp et al., 2015, p. 360). We describe this evolved shopping behavior as '*mobile-assisted showrooming*'.

The trend towards mobile-assisted showrooming is considered to be a great challenge for brick-and-mortar retailers around the world (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Fernández et al., 2018; Flavián et al., 2020; Gensler

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et al., 2017). Industry reports show that more than 60% of consumers worldwide consider themselves 'active' showroomers (Nielsen, 2016). Furthermore, studies indicate that mobile-assisted shoppers "prefer to consult with their phones rather than interact with a salesperson while shopping at the store" (Mosquera et al., 2018, p. 67). Furthermore, according to Burns et al. (2018), consumers do not limit their in-store mobile interactions to information searches but also make purchases while they are still inside brick-and-mortar stores. Ironically, retailers' increased efforts to engage and influence shoppers' in-store purchases with sales staff has caused growing distrust among mobile-assisted shoppers (Daunt and Harris, 2017) and discomfort of being identified as showroomer (Kokho Sit et al., 2018). As such, several scholars have called for further research on mobile-assisted shoppers' showrooming behaviors (e.g., Arora and Sahney, 2018; Arora et al., 2017; Kokho Sit et al., 2018; Lazaris et al., 2015; Rapp et al., 2015).

The goal of this paper is to investigate the under-researched phenomenon of mobile-assisted showrooming behavior. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What drives the planned behavior of showrooming among mobile-assisted shoppers? (2) Which channel activities do mobile-assisted showroomers perform during their shopping journey inside brick-and-mortar retail stores? and (3) How can mobile-assisted showroomers be segmented?

The present study provides three key contributions. First, this study extends current literature on omnichannel and showrooming behavior by investigating channel interactions of mobile-assisted showroomers during their visit of a physical retail environment. In this context, we expand prior showrooming research that has studied consumer decision activities (Kokho Sit et al., 2018). Specially, this study proposes a *mobile-assisted showrooming evaluation stage*, which encapsulates physical and mobile channel activities. The results challenge the classical sequential consumer decision-making process (Engel et al., 1968) that consists of five major stages. Second, the study found intriguing evidence that mobile-assisted showroomers rely highly on their own smartphone as a personal shopping assistant, whereas they prefer to avoid interactions with sales staff. These results contradict some prior showrooming studies that identified the opposite effect of sales associates (Lazaris et al., 2015; Rapp et al., 2015; Arora and Sahney, 2018). Finally, this study identifies four unique personas of mobile-assisted showroomers, expanding recent research on showroomer segments (Schneider and Zielke, 2020). The results offer retailers new strategies for segmenting and targeting showrooming shoppers.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature about omnichannel retailing, mobile-assisted shopping, and showrooming. We then present an overview of our research study. Following the discussion of our results, the paper concludes with implications for research and practitioners, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

2.1. Evolution towards omnichannel retailing

Omnichannel retailing refers to the synergetic integration of retail channels for the purpose of creating a unified brand experience for consumers, regardless of the channel or stage they are in during the purchasing process (Cummins et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018). Over the last decade, the topic of omnichannel retailing has drawn significant attention from the academic community, as evidenced by growing research (e.g., Ailawadi and Farris, 2017; Galipoglu et al., 2018; Verhoef et al., 2015). For example, scholars have investigated the effects of *channel diversification* (Neslin et al., 2006) as well as *channel integration* (Lee et al., 2018; Li et al., 2018), *consumer channel choice* (Park and Lee, 2017), *omniretailing strategies* (Gu and Tayi, 2016), *omniretailing technologies* (Lazaris et al., 2015; Mosquera et al., 2018), and *omnichannel shopping value* (Huré et al., 2017). As a result of changes in the retail environment, researchers now focus on studying consumers'

omnichannel behaviors during the search and evaluation stages of their purchase journey (Ailawadi and Farris, 2017), with increased attention on the emerging trend of showrooming (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Lazaris et al., 2015). However, some scholars argue that previous research lacks to incorporate the mobile channel (Park and Lee, 2017). Yet, with the rise of mobile technology and ubiquitous access to the mobile Internet, there is an increased need to study physical and mobile channel interactions (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020).

2.2. Smartphones as shopping assistants

Mobile devices, in particular smartphones, are increasingly becoming personal shopper assistants for consumers during their in-store purchase journey (Quint and Rogers, 2013; Pantano and Priporas, 2016). Smartphones empower consumers during their purchase journey inside a brick-and-mortar retail store as they enable several different search and comparison functions instantaneously among multiple retailers (Quint and Rogers, 2013). Research suggests these so-called 'mobile-assisted shoppers' increasingly visit brick-and-mortar retail stores during the evaluation stage of their shopping journey (Lazaris et al., 2015; Mosquera et al., 2018) to avoid making suboptimal online purchases (Quint and Rogers, 2013; Rapp et al., 2015). They evaluate and experience ('touch and feel') products firsthand, while using their smartphones to find product information (e.g., product details and reviews). Furthermore, mobile-assisted shoppers prefer to interact with their smartphones instead of sales staff to avoid their perceived lack of helpfulness or product knowledge (Fuentes and Svingstedt, 2017; Mosquera et al., 2018). Some scholars argue that showrooming is directly related to mobile shopping (Rapp et al., 2015).

2.3. Mobile-assisted showrooming

The growth of online retailing as a new retail channel has led to the rise of a new type of consumer shopping or free-riding cross-channel purchase behavior known as showrooming (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). While a formal definition is lacking in the literature (Burns et al., 2018), scholars agree that *showrooming* refers to consumers' practice of searching, examining, and experiencing products in a brick-and-mortar retail store (offline channel) and later purchasing them from an online retail channel (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Arora et al., 2017; Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez, 2017).

According to the showrooming and omnichannel literature, showrooming can be differentiated into 'traditional showrooming' (i.e., visiting offline retailer A and purchasing the product from the online store of retailer A) and 'competitive showrooming' (i.e., visiting offline Retailer A but purchasing the product from online Retailer B, e.g., Gensler et al., 2017; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). Furthermore, literature also divides showrooming into 'desktop showrooming' and 'mobile showrooming' (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). This research focuses on *competitive mobile showrooming*.

Although showrooming appears to be a popular and growing approach to shopping (Arora et al., 2017; Arora and Sahney, 2018; Gensler et al., 2017), the activity of showrooming has received relatively little empirical attention (Burns et al., 2018; Rapp et al., 2015; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). Showrooming has been studied in a variety of different contexts, including *free-riding in retailing* (Basak et al., 2017; Burns et al., 2018), *multichannel and omnichannel retail environments* (Flavián et al., 2020), *channel switching* (Arora et al., 2017), *mobile shopping* (Lazaris et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2014), the *performance of salespeople* (Gensler et al., 2017; Rapp et al., 2015), and *price matching* (Mehra et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2018).

Research on showrooming (see Table 1) can be divided into main categories: antecedents and outcomes. A number of studies analyze the *antecedents* and influencing factors of showrooming (e.g., Arora et al., 2017; Bachrach et al., 2016; Daunt and Harris, 2017; Gensler et al., 2017; Lazaris et al., 2015; Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez, 2017).

Table 1
Literature review.

Author/Year	Context	Focus	Method	Findings
Quantitative				
Arora and Sahney (2018)	Consumers' showrooming behavior	Antecedents	Survey (n = 288)	Showrooming helped consumers avoid the regret of making suboptimal product choices and paying a higher price for the same product.
Arora et al. (2017)	Reasons for showrooming	Antecedents	Survey (n = 278)	Price sensitive consumers are more likely to showroom, but they value in-store experience and service. Retailers can offer 'easy payment options' to provoke showroomers to purchase in-store.
Burns et al. (2018)	Propensity and perceived ethicality to engage in showrooming	Antecedents	Survey (n = 405)	Consumers' shopping perspectives affect their propensities to engage in showrooming activity and the perceived ethicality. The primary motivating factor for showrooming is to pay lower prices.
Daunt and Harris (2017)	Showrooming value creation process	Antecedents	Survey (n = 275)	Showrooming is a complex phenomenon and includes a wide range of contingencies and consumer, channel, and product characteristics.
Fassnacht et al. (2019)	Influence of low-investment retail tactics on showrooming	Interventions	3 experiments	Interaction quality of sales staff increases showroomers' in-store buying intention.
Gensler et al. (2017)	Perceived benefits and costs of showrooming	Antecedents	Survey (n = 556)	Average price savings, perceived dispersion in online prices, perceived gains in product quality, and waiting time in the physical store are positively related with showrooming.
Kang (2018)	Influence of consumers' psychographic characteristics on showrooming	Antecedents	Survey (n = 680)	Omnichannel consumers who seek product information, compare prices across channels, and seek social interaction are likely to engage in showrooming.
Lazaris et al. (2015)	Mobile app use and showrooming	Antecedents; interventions	Survey (n = 815)	Showrooming intention is high among in-store internet users, both retailing mobile app and non app ones. Price matching, omnichannel integration, and role of store associates are proposed to reduce showrooming behavior.
Rapp et al. (2015)	Salesperson performance	Outcomes; interventions	Survey (n = 227)	Perceived showrooming has a negative influence on salesperson self-efficacy and salesperson performance. Cross-selling moderates the relationship between showrooming and performance.
Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez (2017)	Motivations for showrooming	Antecedents	Survey (n = 176)	Customers' past practice of showrooming increases the chances of repeating this behavior.
Schneider and Zielke (2020)	Showrooming forms and segments	Showrooming behavior	Mixed method; qualitative pre-study and main survey (n = 332)	Showrooming segments differ in retailer loyalty, usage of in-store information, place and time of online purchase. Loyal vs. competitive showroomers differ in psychographic variables, such as price consciousness, desire for social contact, and bad conscience during showrooming.
Viejo-Fernández et al. (2020)	Omnichannel showrooming	Showrooming behavior	Database (=4067)	Showroomers are not a homogeneous group of consumers. Shopping behaviors differ during the evaluation stage of their shopping journey (brick-and-mortar store vs. home/office) and their preferred electronic device (stationary vs. mobile).
Qualitative				
Kokho Sit et al. (2018)	Consumer-decision activities and showrooming	Showrooming behavior	Interviews (n = 11)	The authors propose that showroomers conduct problem recognition and information search activities concurrently, instead of sequentially, due to their buying uncertainty.

Other studies focus on the *consequences* of showrooming, for example, the negative impact of showrooming on salesperson's performance (e.g., Rapp et al., 2015). In addition, some scholars have focused their attention on *counter-strategies and interventions*, that is, how retailers can influence (i.e., discourage) showrooming behaviors (e.g. Bachrach et al., 2016; Lazaris et al., 2015; Fassnacht et al., 2019; Rapp et al., 2015). However, showroomers are not a homogeneous group of consumers (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). As such, a few recent studies (Kokho Sit et al., 2018; Schneider and Zielke, 2020) have started to investigate *showroomer behaviors and segments* in more detail. However, some authors agree that there are still gaps in the literature and that more research is needed to understand showroomers' in-store physical and mobile channel interactions as well as different showroomer profiles.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

Previous research has advocated "an in-depth analysis of customers' showrooming behaviors in order to understand their unmet needs and reasons for performing this behavior" (Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez, 2017, p. 193) and called for the use of qualitative research instead of quantitative studies in order to build further

theoretical knowledge of showrooming (Kokho Sit et al., 2018). Thus, this study adopts an exploratory qualitative research approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Mays and Pope, 1995) to elicit attitudes and motivations from mobile-assisted showroomers and their in-store shopping activities. Similar to prior research (Schneider and Zielke, 2020), we do not focus on shoppers in general but more specifically on showroomers only. Ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection (approval number 1800000614).

3.2. Data collection and sample

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 31 consumers. We adopted a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2015; Suri, 2011), which has been used in previous research to study the phenomenon of showrooming (e.g., Kokho Sit et al., 2018). This was complemented by snowball sampling, where initial participants were asked to provide referral contacts based on their social network to reach other consumers with similar characteristics (e.g., Patten, 2019). Participants were recruited in a metropolitan city in Queensland, Australia, based on three purposeful criteria, whereby an eligible participant was required to: (1) be 18 years or over; (2) be an adept mobile shopper, i.e. use mobile devices for in-store shopping activities (e.g., comparing prices, reading online reviews); and (3) have engaged in showrooming

activities in the past six months.

An interview guide was prepared that consisted of three sections: (1) showrooming motivations, (2) in-store offline shopping practices, and (3) use of mobile devices during in-store shopping journeys. The use of an interview protocol facilitates the interview process in a systematic, consistent, and comprehensive manner (Patton, 2015). The in-depth personal interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. Two-thirds were female. The average age was 29, which means that the sample was skewed towards a younger age group. More than half of the participants had a Master's degree. Furthermore, the sample consisted of participants of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The majority were Australian with Western backgrounds, followed by Asian. All participants practiced showrooming and used their mobile phones while they were shopping inside a brick-and-mortar retail store. Electronics and fashion were the two main product categories that attracted showrooming.

4. Data analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 650 pages of transcripts containing more than 220,000 words. Transcripts were read to ensure their correctness and then exported to MAXQDA (https://www.maxqda.com), a qualitative data analysis software platform. Similar to prior qualitative showrooming research (e.g. Kokho Sit et al., 2018), the interview data was subject to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which began with one of the authors independently coding the raw data. Thematic analysis is suitable to discover emerging themes within the raw data, and it helps to describe the data in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). While single coder research can produce biased results that affect measurement reliability (Roh et al., 2013), scholars have argued that the reality of many

Table 2
Sample characteristics.

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality[1]	Occupation
1	Male	27	Mexican	Advertising specialist
2	Female	24	Vietnamese	Master student
3	Male	23	Filipino/Australian	Bachelor student
4	Male	24	Australian	Retail staff
5	Male	26	German	Engineer
6	Male	34	Australian	Marketing lecturer
7	Female	28	Peruvian/Japanese	Management staff
8	Male	21	Filipino/Australian	Bachelor student
9	Female	24	Chinese/Australian	Marketing specialist
10	Male	26	Australian	Master student
11	Female	30	Finnish/Australian	Marketing specialist
12	Female	26	Vietnamese	Business executive
13	Female	32	Brazilian	HR executive
14	Female	40	Australian	Marketing lecturer
15	Female	35	Indian	Advertising specialist
16	Female	20	Australian	HR executive
17	Male	39	Australian/Greek	Advertising specialist
18	Female	25	Australian	Retail specialist
19	Female	30	Australian	Marketing manager
20	Female	26	Chinese/German	Business IT specialist
21	Female	34	Vietnam	PhD student
22	Female	44	Australia	Marketing specialist
23	Female	34	Saudi Arabia	Marketing specialist
24	Female	24	Indian/Australian	Marketing staff
25	Male	20	Australian/New Zealand	Bachelor student
26	Female	30	Mexican	Retail specialist
27	Female	34	Australian/New Zealand	Marketing specialist
28	Female	38	English/Australian	Marketing specialist
29	Male	25	Chinese/Australian	Master student
30	Male	30	Peruvian/Australian	Engineer
31	Female	28	Chinese/Australian	Retail specialist

Note: (1) Many of the participants had multiple citizenships, but they identify their shopping behaviors with one in particular – usually the one influenced by their immediate social group (i.e., family or childhood friends). The first citizenship is understood as the participants' nationality.

qualitative research projects, particularly in early-career contexts, is that a single coder codes the majority of the data (Campbell et al., 2013; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020).

Adopting an integrative inductive/deductive research approach, the thematic analysis involved three phases. In Phase 1 (open coding) the textual data was analyzed line-by-line to identify relevant concepts based on the actual language that the participants used. Phase 2 (axial coding) involved contextualizing the open codes with supplementary literature into pre-defined codes. In Phase 3, selective coding was used to group axial codes into broader themes. The coding structure was developed in the context of critical discussion and reflection with the second author. This involved regular meetings to check reliability and consistency and to resolve discrepancies. External validity was enhanced by drawing analytical conclusions based on the literature review. Table 3 provides a snapshot of our coding activities.

5. Results

The analysis of the data generated four main themes:

- *Predispositions towards mobile-assisted showrooming*: Factors that influence a person's tendency to practice mobile showrooming at brick-and-mortar retail stores including attitudes and motivations, perceived benefits, and shopping productivity;
- *Mobile-assisted showrooming behaviors*: Physical and mobile channel activities conducted during a person's in-store shopping journey, indicating the role of smartphones as a shopping concierge and the avoidance of sales staff assistance;
- *Consumer, product, and shopping-related contextual factors*: Various contingencies that can influence on the showrooming journey.
- *Mobile-assisted showroomer personas*: Identification of different segments among showroomers.

Fig. 1 summarizes the overarching framework that illustrates the shopping journey of mobile-assisted showroomers.

5.1. Predispositions towards mobile-assisted showrooming

The results show that all participants had positive attitudes towards the practice of showrooming. For example, 71 percent of respondents said they 'liked' showrooming, almost half of them 'enjoyed' showrooming, and 29 percent 'loved' showrooming. All of the participants had vast experience with showrooming, and they agreed that the practice of showrooming is an integral part of their purchase journey ("I always do it", P30). Furthermore, participants enjoy showrooming because it makes them feel *savvy* (74%), *smart* (65%), and *intelligent* (35%).

> *When I am showrooming I feel that I am being a smart consumer, a savvy one, that is getting the best benefit. (P20)*

Participants indicated several benefits of showrooming. While some are similar to the practice of desktop showrooming (e.g. finding a better value), others are unique to mobile-assisted showrooming. For example, showrooming provides "peace of mind" (P9), increases perceived purchase assurance (mentioned by one-third of participants), and it helps "to make the best [purchase] decision" (P13). There was considerable agreement among participants (almost nine of ten) that mobile-assisted showrooming is useful to find the best *value-for-the-time-and-money* deal.

> *For me, is getting the best of the offline and online channel; product experience from the brick-and-mortar store and financial benefits and convenience from the online retailers. (P30)*

While these financial and emotional benefits motivate showrooming intentions in general, the data shows that the use of smartphones increases participants' motivations to practice competitive showrooming

Table 3
Overview of coding activities.

Sample of open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
"Every time I want to buy electronic goods, for example, a laptop or a digital camera, I always showroom." (P6)	*Attitudes and motivations* (Arora et al., 2017)	*Predispositions towards mobile-assisted showrooming*
"When I am showrooming I feel that I am being a smart consumer, a savvy one, that is getting the best benefit." (P20)	*Perceived benefits* (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Gensler et al., 2017)	
"Using my smartphone while I am experiencing a product, I make my shopping journey more efficient." (P27)	Shopping productivity (Voropanova, 2015)	
"I need to see the product, touch it, turn it on and understand how can I use it properly; like when you are doing a test run of a car, you feel it, and then you buy it." (P22)	*Physical channel interaction* ('touch and feel') (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Arora et al., 2017)	*Mobile-assisted showrooming behavior*
"After testing a product, I will use my smartphone to watch YouTube reviews of the product I am looking [at] inside the store, convince myself it is the correct choice, and then I will compare the offline price with the online ones, without leaving the store." (P26)	*Mobile channel interaction* (price comparison) Kang (2018)	
"When I have a doubt, I prefer to text my partner, or friends, to ask them about products that I do not know." (P11)	*Social interactions* (Kang, 2018)	
"Every time I want to buy electronic goods, for example, a laptop or a digital camera, I always showroom. I also do it when I am buying fashion, such as shoes or jackets." (P6)	*Product-related* (Gensler et al., 2017)	*Contextual factors*
"[It] Is stressful to interact with them. They only want to be friendly with you to sell you something." (P16)	*Shopping-related* (Gensler et al., 2017)	

even further. In particular, showroomers referred to the convenience of using their smartphone simultaneously during the physical product evaluation. The results support prior research that the use of mobile devices for shopping increases *shopping productivity* (e.g., Voropanova, 2015).

> *When I am using my smartphone for showrooming inside the store, I feel I am getting all the information I need to make the best product decision. I can check reviews from YouTube or compare prices on Google Shopping or eBay. Using my smartphone while I am experiencing a product [in-store], I make my shopping journey more efficient. I compare the product information and prices at the same time I am looking, touching, or wearing the product I want to buy. Before, I needed to go to my home or office and remember all my experience inside the store to browse the internet and make a purchase decision. (P27)*

This study demonstrates that the showrooming process has evolved. Smartphones are now the primary shopping tool ('mobile concierge') in the evaluation stage of their purchase journey.

5.2. Mobile-assisted showrooming behaviors

The data shows that participants actively use their smartphones for assistance during their purchase journey, integrating physical (e.g., touch and feel) and mobile (e.g., consumer reviews) channels in a unified, seamless shopping experience. Participants state the first thing they do when they are inside a brick-and-mortar retail store is to 'touch, feel, and try out' products they intend to buy.

> *I need to see the product, touch it, turn it on and understand how can I use it properly; like when you are doing a test run of a car, you feel it, and then you buy it. (P22)*
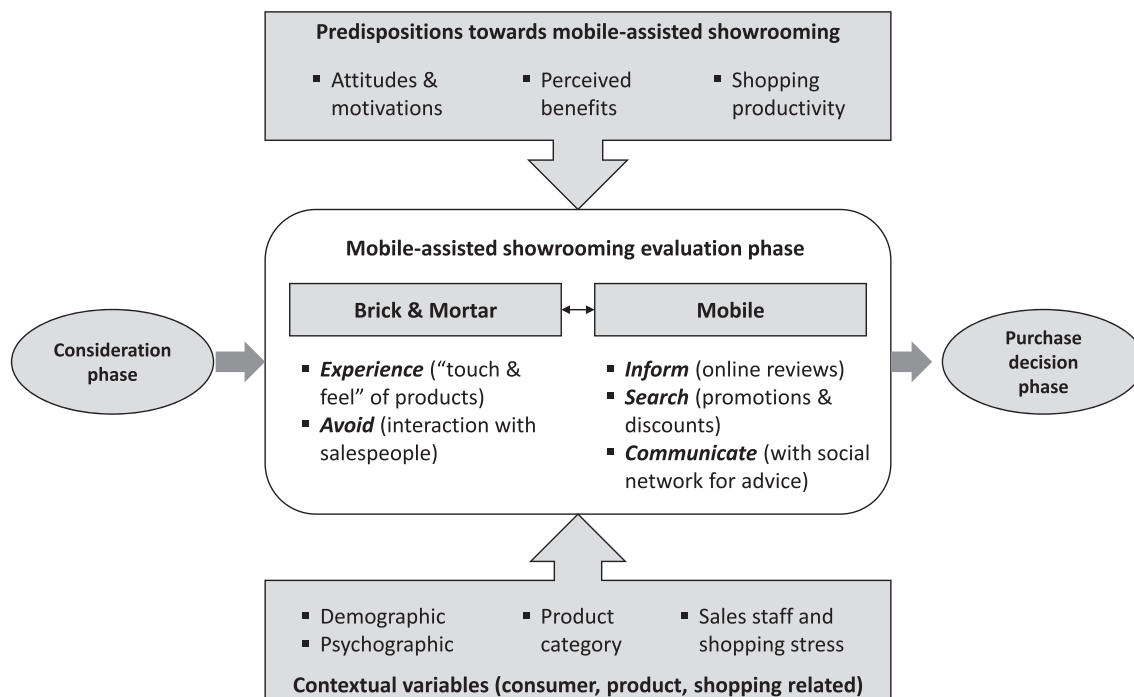

Fig. 1. Framework of shopping journey of mobile-assisted showroomers.

Findings further show that there are two main activities that all participants perform with their smartphones during their visit of a brick-and-mortar retail store. First, they search for third-party *product information and reviews*, generally from other users. When the product is very expensive, consumers complement their information search with an online third-party expert reviewer. The second most important activity is looking for *online deals*. This happens after participants have finished their physical product evaluation.

After testing a product, I will use my smartphone to watch YouTube reviews of the product I am looking [at] inside the store, convince myself it is the correct choice, and then I will compare the offline price with the online ones, without leaving the store. (P26)

I like to compare prices with my mobile, online versus store. Also, [I] check online product reviews, videos, blogs, consumer reviews. (P29)

Further evidence was found that participants actively avoid crossing paths with sales staff. Participants had negative attitudes towards sales staff.

Since I started practicing showrooming with my mobile I can completely avoid sales staff at the store and enjoy browsing at the store. Before, I did not have a choice if I needed to know something about a product or discounts, I was forced to interact with them and waste my time when they did not have the information I am looking for, and uncomfortable when they give you the judgmental look when they realize you are showrooming. Now I just enjoy going to the store, ignoring what is going on there and check for reviews or discounts online and then purchase online. (P28)

Finally, participants mentioned that they would contact a family member or friend rather than interact with sales staff when they are not sure about some features of their product choice.

I use my mobile to (…) ask my friends or family about their opinion regarding the product I want to buy. I prefer to (…) call my friends or family than interact [with] sales staff. (P24)

5.3. Contextual factors

The data indicates that several contextual factors have an influence on mobile-assisted showrooming. These include consumer-, product-, and shopping-related factors which is supported by prior research (Gensler et al., 2017). First, the current study highlighted potential *gender* differences. For example, females in the sample tended more to connect with friends during the visit of a physical retail environment. Yet, these results need to be interpreted with caution given the small sample size. For instance, prior research suggests that gender has relatively little effect on consumers' showrooming activity (Burns et al., 2018). Furthermore, showroomers in the sample illustrated some differences with regards to their *personalities*. This will be discussed in more detail below in the section on personas.

Second, this study identified *product*-related factors. Participants agreed that self-experiencing their product choices is important to reduce the risks associated with online shopping, especially when they intend to buy electronics or fashion products. This supports prior research and industry reports that show differences with regards to *product categories* (e.g., Quint and Rogers, 2013).

Every time I want to buy electronic goods, for example, a laptop or a digital camera, I always showroom. I also do it when I am buying fashion, such as shoes or jackets. (P6)

Finally, we identified an important *shopping*-related factor that is related to *interactions with sales staff* and the perception of *shopping stress*. Prior research has emphasized the dominant role of store associates to counter the phenomenon of showrooming (e.g. Lazaris et al., 2015; Rapp et al., 2015). In this study, we identified that the majority of mobile-assisted showroomers tend to avoid interactions with sales staff.

The majority of times I try to avoid talking to the sales staff (P1)

I prefer to avoid sales staff inside the store. (P16)

Showrooming helps me avoid sales staff. (P30)

Almost all (97 percent) participants showed discomfort when interacting with sales staff for a number of reasons. That included the belief that sales staff have a lack of product knowledge and that they pressure consumers to purchase products.

(…) because most of the time they do not know all the product information, they always read the information that is printed in front of the product and try to push the sale, so it's better to avoid them. I do not trust them. (P1)

They [sales staff] want you to make a purchase right away, sales staff push you to buy, even when they are not offering the correct price for the correct product. (P30)

[It] Is stressful to interact with them. They only want to be friendly with you to sell you something. (P16)

In addition, participants mentioned that they felt being *judged* when they were discovered to be showrooming. This further increased the motivation to avoid stressful interactions with sales staff.

What is worst, is that sales staff makes you feel uncomfortable when they discover that you are showrooming, when for me, showrooming is an ideal way to buy. (P30)

And, when they [sales staff] see you checking on your phone for discounts or online reviews, their friendliness usually disappears. I feel a little embarrassed and judged. Because sometimes they don't talk in a polite way, and their body language shows aggressiveness. So is just better to avoid them and do your shopping without interacting with them. (P24)

5.4. Personas of mobile-assisted showroomers

Previous research has investigated shopper segments and personas (e.g., Schneider and Zielke, 2020; Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). While mobile-assisted showroomers appear to be more self-determined than other more traditional consumers to utilize their smartphones as personal shopping assistants, the study also indicates that there are some differences among this consumer segment. Based on the data, we identified four unique personas (i.e., profiles) that summarize the attitudes, motivations, and behaviors of mobile-assisted showroomers (see Table 4).

5.4.1. The Undaunted Treasure Hunter

The *Undaunted Treasure Hunter* is an omnichannel consumer by nature characterized by their high levels of physical and mobile channel interactions. This persona is not afraid of showrooming; they are open, non-discrete, fearless online discount seekers that are experiencing products and seeking for the best price online without caring to be observed by sales staff. They need to 'touch and feel' products to avoid sub-optimal purchases but that does not mean having assistance from sales staff. In this context, they are actively avoiding sales staff assistance as they consider them an obstacle for their showrooming practices. This means, they are willing to sacrifice their in-store experience with sales staff to obtain a financial benefit when showrooming on their mobile phone. They will never buy at the store as they feel overconfident about finding the best deal online. As long they get free delivery on top of their online discount, they can wait between two to five days to receive their 'treasure' purchase and share it with their friends and family. For them, showrooming brings them enjoyment and pride.

Table 4
Personas of mobile-assisted showroomers.

Criteria	Personas			
	Undaunted Treasure Hunter (32%)	Frugal Experience Seeker (24%)	Organized Juggler (38%)	Friendly Diplomat (6%)
Predispositions				
Motivation to showroom	●	●	●	‚
Negative attitudes towards salespeople	●	‚	●	○
Price consciousness	●	‚	‚	‚
Convenience seeking	○	●	‚	●
Experience seeking	○	●	●	‚
In-store behaviors				
Desire to feel & touch the product	●	●	●	‚
Mobile channel usage	●	‚	●	○
Information search	●	‚	●	○
Price comparison	●	‚	●	○
Desire for sales staff assistance	○	‚	○	●
Social support while showrooming	○	○	●	●
Personality				
Self-confidence	●	‚	●	○
Showrooming task-orientation	●	‚	●	○
Bad conscience during showrooming	○	○	○	●
Omnichannel self-efficacy	‚	‚	●	○

Notes: ● = very high; ‚ = medium to high; ○ = low.

5.4.2. The Frugal Experience Seeker

The *Frugal Experience Seeker* is a price-conscious showroomer but also cares a lot about the shopping experience and convenience. This persona visits specialty stores (i.e., Apple, Bose) to create their own personalized high quality in-store product experience. This showroomer enjoys interacting with their favorite brands in their own "turf" before committing to a purchase. Similar to the *Undaunted Treasure Hunter*, this type of showroomer actively uses their mobile phone to search for product information while they try to avoid interacting with sales staff as they fear them to spoil their purchase experience. This persona wants his/her shopping experience not to be interrupted as they isolate themselves in their own personalized, hybrid product experience. However, in contrast to the *Undaunted Treasure Hunter*, the *Frugal Experience Seeker* is susceptible to in-store price matching strategies if the quality or additional benefits related to their product choice are not compromised (e.g., free shipping, same product model, special editions) as they do not want to pay extra for the exclusive value they aim to obtain.

5.4.3. The Organized Juggler

The *Organized Juggler* is the master of omnichannel retailing. This showroomer is the most tech-savvy of all showroomers. They are capable of balancing several shopping aspects: (i) the time costs of showrooming, (ii) the financial benefits of omnichannel retailers, and (iii) the overall brick-and-mortar shopping experience to enjoy their showrooming experience. Furthermore, this showroomer has the 'I love showrooming' attitude as he/she is both price and time conscious while shopping, seeking the 'value for the money-time experience' by pursuing an organized omnichannel showrooming purchase journey. But in contrast to the *Undaunted Treasure Hunter* or the *Frugal Experience Seeker*, this persona tries to minimize the time spent searching for product information inside the brick-and-mortar store. They plan their showrooming ahead of time, that is, they know which retailers to visit and which ones to avoid to obtain the best benefit of their shopping journey. They actively use their mobile devices to compare prices or view videos of product reviews. But in addition, they interact with friends and family to ask for their opinions. They appreciate the convenience of the omnichannel purchase experience, experiencing a seamless offline and offline shopping journey. Interestingly, they are not afraid of asking for in-store discounts from the sales staff, but they will not ask for their advice as they believe that they have all the product information that they need. This showroomer almost always will purchase their product choice using their mobile device after touching and feeling the product of their preference.

5.4.4. The Friendly Diplomat

The *Friendly Diplomat* is the most easy-going, discreet showroomer. He/she prefers to interact with one brand touchpoint and commerce channel at a time. They also tend to avoid in-store negative interactions with sales staff by showrooming discreetly, without losing the opportunity of finding lower prices at the store or online. The possibility of interacting with sales staff is greater for this group than for other showroomer profiles, especially if they are not convinced by the online information they find while experiencing products at brick-and-mortar stores. This profile seeks good deals, but they also care about their social interactions with sales staff. Regardless, they are highly motivated by discounts; they are willing to stop showrooming to avoid sales staff confrontations. They are easily influenced to make an in-store purchase if they receive a discount close to a price match or with a nice friendly shopping experience and finish their showrooming without any social conflicts. Finally, this showroomer is more inclined to perform desktop showrooming in addition to their mobile-assisted showrooming for continuous product information search.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This study confirms that showrooming behavior consists of complex facets and that retailers need to identify different segments of showroomers in order to address them more effectively. Mobile-assisted showroomers visit brick-and-mortar retail stores to experience products firsthand and, at the same time, bounce between physical and mobile channels, creating a seamless omnichannel shopping experience. In this context, these channel agnostic consumers embrace the benefits of competitive mobile showrooming by using their smartphones as personal shopping concierge. Yet, not all mobile-assisted showroomers are the same. Different showroomer profiles have been identified in this research. In the following, we discuss theoretical and managerial implications.

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study provides several implications for theory. First, this paper contributes to multiple literature streams, including omnichannel and showrooming behavior research. The study responds to calls for qualitative research to build further theoretical knowledge of showrooming (Kokho Sit et al., 2018) and an in-depth study of showroomers' in-store mobile activities (e.g., Arora and Sahney, 2018; Luo et al., 2014; Rapp et al., 2015; Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez, 2017). Our findings support some prior showrooming studies, and also challenges existing marketing theory. First, our study supports findings by Kokho Sit et al. (2018) who argue that some showroomer decision activities are closely

intertwined; however, we propose that those decisions are not part of consumers' problem recognition or information search stage. Instead, mobile-assisted showrooming is a *planned behavior* that happens after an initial consideration phase where showroomers perform simultaneously physical and mobile channel activities as part of their product evaluation stage. In this context, our study also contributes to the broader literature of consumer behavior, in particular consumer journey mapping. The results challenge existing marketing theory which widely adopted five sequential stages (problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, choice/purchase, and post-purchase behavior) of the consumer purchasing decision process (Butler and Peppard, 1998; Engel et al., 1968).

Second, our study extends the current debate in omnichannel and showrooming research investigating the role of sales staff assistance. Consumer behavior research has suggested that abandonment is an avoidance coping strategy in response to stress (Albrecht et al., 2017). Mobile-assisted showroomers in our sample tend to reduce stressful shopping experiences by avoiding interactions with in-store sales staff. Instead, they rely on their own smartphone as a personal shopping assistant. For instance, one participant commented: "I rather use my mobile to get product information and discounts while I am experiencing the product at the store than interacting with them" (P30). These results are in contrast with some prior showrooming studies (e.g., Fassnacht et al., 2019; Rapp et al., 2015; Arora and Sahney, 2018) that found a positive influence between sales staff assistance and showroomers' in-store buying intention. We believe that previous research has not sufficiently captured the evolved nature of consumers' shopping journeys and the role of smartphones as personal shopping assistants at the point-of-sale. For example, Arora and Sahney (2018, p. 447) argue in their directions for future research that "increasing penetration of smartphones is expected to give a huge push to showrooming behavior, in-store mobile usage can be considered by future researchers". Thus, our study sheds first light on gaining a better understanding of mobile-assisted showrooming behavior.

Finally, the present study contributes to showrooming segmentation research. The results support recent studies revealing that "not all showroomers present the same behavior, and, therefore, they cannot be described as a homogenous group of shoppers" (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020, p. 102,048). We identified four different personas of mobile-assisted showroomers. The study provides empirical insights for understanding different facets of the complex relationship between mobile-assisted shoppers and retailers (Spaid et al., 2019). For instance, Gensler et al. (2017) have identified lower prices online as one of the reasons behind consumers' showrooming behavior. This study confirms the role of price consciousness among discount seekers (Exploiters); however, other personas seek a balanced shopping experience. The study provides evidence that omnichannel retailing and showrooming behavior are a more complex phenomenon that require an in-depth understanding of the person's motivations, emotions, and personalities.

6.2. Managerial implications

This research presents three managerial implications that can help guide practitioners to address the challenges of showrooming. First, the study identifies important predispositions towards mobile-assisted showrooming and in-store behaviors (e.g. physical and mobile channel interactions). Smartphones have become an integral part of the shopping journey as connected consumers bounce between physical and mobile browsing during their visit of brick-and-mortar retail stores. This highlights the urgency for retailers to create a seamless omnichannel shopping experience (Skrovan, 2017) and to implement "mobile shopper marketing" (Shankar et al., 2016) and location-based technologies to more effectively engage shoppers (Mosquera et al., 2018). Since mobile-assisted showroomers primarily seek out discounts as well as additional product information, retailers should "synchronize their varied channels (in-store and online) to facilitate consumer purchase

decisions and focus on convenience, speed, and competitive offer" (Kokho Sit et al., 2018, p. 173).

The second managerial implication relates to the role of sales associates. Our findings indicate that mobile-assisted showroomers prefer to avoid interacting with sales staff for several reasons. First, they do not trust sales staff efforts to engage with them; instead, they rather rely on their own smartphone as a personal shopping concierge. Second, they feel that the interaction with sales staff increases perceived shopping stress (Albrecht et al., 2017; Zboja et al., 2016). For example, showroomers experience negative judgmental attitudes that make them feel stressed and uncomfortable. Retailers are therefore required to rethink the role of their sales staff in an environment of "omniretailing technologies" (Mosquera et al., 2018). Understanding motivations and behaviors of mobile-assisted showroomers offers the opportunity to train sales staff in order to leverage the integration of the physical store with location-based technologies to enhance the overall in-store shopper journey.

Finally, the study provides retailers with a nuanced view of different showroomer personas. The four personas offer retailers a basis to develop segmentation strategies to target each segment adequately. The study provides managers with empirical evidence for the need to adapt their marketing tactics and engage showroomers separately based on their preferences of price, customer service, and sales staff interactions. It further indicates that retailers need to strengthen their omnichannel integration and utilize their own retailing apps and supplemental location-based technologies (e.g., Wi-Fi, beacons) at the point-of-sale to influence showroomers' in-store purchase intensions.

6.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the meaningful implications, there are several limitations to this study. The first limitation relates to the exploratory qualitative nature of this research. For example, asking participants about their shopping showrooming behaviors may trigger a social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985) since the activity of showrooming often has a negative social connotation related to free-riding behavior (Arora et al., 2017). In addition, the results are not generalizable. The current study focused on a particular consumer type, that is, tech-savvy, younger consumers who use their smartphones as personal shopping assistants. Thus, the findings may not apply to 'non-showroomers' or so-called 'desktop showroomers'. Given the exploratory nature of this study, future quantitative research is needed to test the nature and relationship of the intertwined showrooming activities empirically. Furthermore, future research is needed to validate the different segments, for example, with cluster analysis.

Finally, academics could use observational research methods to understand how retailers can engage with the different types of mobile-assisted showroomers and find ideal factors to influence their in-store purchase journey. In particular, future research is needed to investigate the contradictory findings of sales staff effectiveness in an omnichannel showrooming context.

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