

Showrooming and retail opportunities: a qualitative investigation via consumer-experience lens

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Showrooming and Retail Opportunities: A Qualitative Investigation via Consumer-Experience Lens

Abstract

Showrooming represents a shopper behaviour prevalent in today's retail landscape, referring to consumers inspect a desired product at a retailer's physical store and then buy it online, usually from a competitor. Showrooming has been examined frequently from a negative standpoint (e.g. free-riding and channel-hopping), via the theoretical lens of multichannel shopping, and with a quantitative (theory testing) approach. The present study seeks to investigate showrooming from a positive standpoint and help retailers to diagnose and appreciate the potential opportunities may be presented by this shopper behaviour. Our investigation is guided by the theoretical lens of consumer experience and a qualitative (theory building) approach, based on convergent interviews with eleven self-proclaimed showroomers based on the shopping context of consumer electronics. The present study contributes to retail theory and practice by illustrating that showrooming can be conceived and managed as a positive shopper behaviour. Its potential opportunities can be better appreciated when retailers give greater consideration of its experiential aspects, such as decision-activities and emotions.

Keywords: showrooming; multichannel shopping; customer experience; decision activities; emotions

Showrooming and Retail Opportunities: A Qualitative Investigation via Consumer-Experience Lens

1. Introduction

Showrooming refers to consumers inspecting a desired product at the physical store of a retailer and then buying it online from another retailer, usually a competitor (Hardgrave, 2013; Teixeira & Gupta, 2015). It is postulated to stem from the multichannel shopping phenomenon (Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Gensler *et al.*, 2012). Showrooming is widespread and exists in many retail sectors such as, for example, fashion, electrical goods, automobile, and home and garden (PR Newswire, 2012). Its prevalence in the retail landscape can be attributed to several factors such as, for example, expanding choices of products and retailers in the marketplace, growing number of shopping channels (i.e. store, online, and mobile channels), and increasing usage of mobile device (e.g. smartphone) for researching and/or shopping (Chiou *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2015). In fact, when showrooming involves the primary use of a mobile device (e.g. smartphone), it is known as mobile showrooming (Tech Insider, 2013).

Market research reports about showrooming are limited despite its prevalence in today's retail landscape. The few available reports have, nevertheless, offered several insights related to the showrooming behaviour (Guruprasad, 2015; Malison, 2015). First, the popularity of showrooming is reported to have a negative effect on brick-and-mortar stores, especially in developed markets, where online shopping is more mature compared to developing markets. Between 2009 and 2014, store-based retailing grew merely by 1% in the developed markets; whereas, online retailing grew by 15%. Second, consumer electronics and appliances,

representing a search product with complex specifications and varied prices, are reported to be showroomed most frequently. Conversely, leisure, entertainment and travel services, representing an experience product, are showroomed least frequently. Third, showrooming is fuelled by a combination of environmental factors such as improved internet connectivity and broadband speeds, continued upsurge of internet retailers, growing number of smaller-size brick-and-mortar stores to increase shopping convenience, increased usage of mobile phone by consumers perform shopping activities. Fourth and final, consumer reasons of showrooming appear to revolve around the need to experience the product, assess the product in person, find better deal online, get more information, and talk to salesperson (Guruprasad, 2015; Malison, 2015).

Brick-and-mortar retailers often regard showrooming as a threat because of its free-riding and research shopping traits. That is, showroomers ‘free ride’ (i.e. take advantage of) a brick-and-mortar store to research and experience the desired product. Yet, showroomers do not buy from the visited brick-and-mortar store; instead, they purchase the desired product online from another retailer, usually a pure-internet retailer (Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Pantano & Viassone, 2015; Sands *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, showrooming is widely conceived as a negative consumer behaviour, especially in academic literature (Daunt & Harris, 2017; Rapp *et al.*, 2015). For instance, Daunt and Harris (2017) characterised showrooming as a value co-destructive behaviour whereby shoppers consume the in-store resources of the visited retailer but do not reciprocate by undertaking a purchase act. Rapp *et al.* (2015) examined the negative impact of showrooming on the self-efficacy and coping strategy of in-store salesperson. These studies consistently opt for the theoretical lens of multichannel shopping and a quantitative (theory testing) approach to verify the negative characteristics and/or outcomes of showrooming.

Studies on showrooming from a positive standpoint, involving other theoretical lens and with a non-quantitative and theory-building approach, are rare in the extant literature. Our current knowledge of showrooming is skewed and incomplete because the extant literature offers very little insight into the extent to which showrooming can be conceived as a positive consumer behaviour and the extent to which it can be managed to benefit retailers. Stated differently, a gap exists in the current knowledge of showrooming, particularly with respect to its positive characteristics and outcomes.

The present study seeks to address the gap by investigating two research issues: *What decision activities do consumers experience during the showrooming process? What emotions do consumers experience during the showrooming process? What opportunities do the experienced decision activities and emotions denote or connote to retailers?* The answers derived from these issues will inform retailers the extent to which showrooming can be conceived as a positive consumer behaviour, and the extent to which it can be valuable to designing and delivering in-store and online operations. The present study opts for the theoretical lens of consumer experience and a qualitative (theory building) approach to guide the investigation. The present study intentionally avoids the theoretical lens of multichannel shopping and a quantitative (theory testing) approach, which previous studies have typically favoured, in order to shed a more positive light on the showrooming behaviour. Our investigation involves convergent interviews with eleven self-proclaimed showroomers based on the context of electronic goods (a popular product with high showrooming potential), thematic analysis on the interview data, and then interpretation of the data to decipher the consumer decision-activities and emotions pertinent to showrooming, as well as, the potential opportunities it may confer to retailers.

The rest of the paper is organised by several sections. First, a critical review on showrooming literature to identify the debate and gap that currently exist. Second, an explanation of the qualitative (theory building) approach employed to address the two research issues. Third, presentation and interpretation of the qualitative results. Finally, a discussion on the results' implications for theory and practice, followed by limitations and future-research directions.

2. Related literature

Showrooming represents a shopper behaviour prevalent in today's retail landscape and, yet, appears to be an under-researched topic in academic literature. Previous studies on showrooming can be clustered into three research groups (Daunt & Harris, 2017; Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Rapp *et al.*, 2015). The first research group, consisting of *conceptual and quantitative studies*, focuses on the unique nature of showrooming (Chiou *et al.*, 2012; Huang *et al.*, 2009; Kucuk & Maddux, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2007). For example, in an experimental design, Huang *et al.* (2009) verified free-riding as an inherent feature of showrooming and that it was more prominent for experience goods than search goods. In a quantitative survey design, Kucuk and Maddux (2010) also established free-riding as a key trait of showrooming and that it was driven primarily by the attributes of price and customer service. Their investigation was based on the wallpaper product category. Verhoef *et al.* (2007), in a conceptual study, discussed research shopping as a defining feature of showrooming and proposed three influential motives, namely, attribute-based decision making, lack of channel lock-in, and cross-channel synergy. Neslin and Shankar (2009) also reiterated the importance of those research shopping motives proposed by Verhoef *et al.* (2007) in explaining showrooming in their conceptual work. In a quantitative survey that involved a mixed sample of students and professionals, Chiou *et al.* (2012)

identified five psychological factors linked to the research shopping aspect of showrooming: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemning the condemners, and appeal to higher objectives. Their investigation focused on car and book purchasing.

The second research group, comprising primarily *quantitative studies*, devote their attention to the decision outcome and affiliated drivers of showrooming (Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Rapp *et al.*, 2015). For example, in an online survey based on various product categories (e.g. clothing, shoes, sporting equipment etc.), Gensler *et al.* (2012) confirmed six categories of factors that significantly influence consumers' decision to showroom (or not showroom): perceived benefits; perceived costs, perceived trade-offs; consumer-related variables; shopping-related variables; and product-related variables. Balakrishnan *et al.* (2014) applied an economic model and data to validate the effects of varied cost factors (product cost versus store-traffic cost) on consumers' decision to showroom. In a survey on the employee group, Rapp *et al.* (2015) tested the negative impact of showrooming on the self-efficacy and performance of salespersons, and also the intervening role of their coping strategies and cross-selling behaviour.

The third research group, representing a minority group when compared with the two aforementioned groups, focuses on value co-destruction process (Daunt & Harris, 2017). In a quantitative survey with a sample of consumers, Daunt and Harris (2017) validated four categories of factors that significantly explains the value co-destruction (as opposed to value co-creation) process in the showrooming context: product factors (technological speed of change, product acquisition value, product price, and product availability); consumer factors (product involvement, in-store shopping savviness, internet savviness); channel factors (trust

in in-store sales employees, trust in online stores, value of in-store shopping, and value of online shopping); and in-store value taking.

Those aforementioned studies have contributed significantly to the extant literature of showrooming by providing the research community with *quantitative or statistically tested knowledge* on several key issues: i) what showrooming entails in terms of inherent characteristics; ii) how consumers decide to showroom in terms of motivating factors; iii) what negative impact showrooming has on non-consumer stakeholders (e.g. employees); and iv) how the value co-destruction process occurs in the showrooming context. This quantitative knowledge has shed light on the unique and complex nature of showrooming; however, it is deemed skewed and incomplete. That is, previous studies have typically examined showrooming from a negative standpoint, conceiving it as a threat to retailers. This negative focus appears to be guided by the theoretical lens of multichannel shopping, which emphasises browsing and switching behaviours across channels (Pantano & Viassone, 2015; Verhoef *et al.*, 2007). There is a lack of consideration of showrooming from a more positive standpoint via other theoretical lens (e.g. consumer experience). Accordingly, there is a lack of theoretical discussion and empirical investigation in relation to the degree to which showrooming can be conceived as a positive shopper behaviour and can be exploited to benefit retailers.

The theoretical lens of consumer experience serve as a meaningful grounding for the present study that seeks to shed a more positive light on showrooming, whereby it encourages us to investigate the decision activities and emotions that consumers endure in the showrooming context (Holbrook *et al.*, 1984; Lofman, 1991; Marks *et al.*, 1988). Consumer experience is a broad discipline, its measurement is less straightforward and usually consists of multiple

components (Grewal *et al.*, 2009). Decision activities and emotions represent two essential components of consumer experience (Watkinson, 2013). When applied in combination, and with a qualitative approach, decision activities and emotions will provide *novel and deep knowledge* of how showroomers behave and feel during the process, and which moment/s during the process can be infiltrated or managed to benefit the retailer. Experiencing the product and assessing the product in person have been reported as the upmost drivers of showrooming and are more influential than finding a better deal (Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Guruprasad, 2015). Both experiencing the product and assessing the product in person inherently link to *experiential consumption* (Holbrook *et al.*, 1984), and thus further justify the relevance of the theoretical lens of consumer experience for examining showrooming in the present study.

3. Qualitative method

Departed from a quantitative (theory building) approach which previous studies of showrooming have typically favoured (see section 2), we opted for a qualitative (theory building) approach to address the research issues underpinning the present study. A qualitative (theory building) approach was preferred for several reasons, whereby it: i) integrates consumers' personal experiences (i.e. decision activities and emotions) into the investigation; ii) appreciates that there may be more than one reality whereby there may be varied consumer interpretations of the showrooming experience; iii) acknowledges that consumers cannot be objectively separated from the investigation as they are intricately linked to the showrooming experience; and iv) build deeper knowledge, as opposed to test the existing knowledge, about the showrooming experience (Gordon *et al.*, 2015). The research issues guiding the present study are:

- *What decision activities do consumers experience during the showrooming process?*
- *What emotions do consumers experience during the showrooming process?*
- *What opportunities do the experienced decision activities and emotions denote or connote to retailers?*

The qualitative approach consisted of convergent interviews and three decision areas: participants and context; data collection; and data analysis (Dick, 1990; Gatfield *et al.*, 1999).

3.1 Participants and context

The participants were recruited based on four purposeful criteria, whereby an eligible participant must: i) be 18 years or over; ii) own a mobile phone; iii) be an adept mobile shopper who undertakes shopping activities on the mobile device, at least, once a week; and iv) have engaged mobile showrooming activities in the past six months. Data saturation reached in the eleventh interview and, thus, a total sample of eleven participants were recruited for the present study. The sample size might be considered limited and thus it might diminish the theoretical validity and reliability of the results (Pantano & Priporas, 2016). Given the study's exploratory nature, the lacking use of qualitative approach and the lacking consideration of other theoretical lens (see section 2), the sample size was deemed appropriate to provide a catalyst for future studies that seek to illuminate and build knowledge related to a complex consumer behaviour, such as showrooming (Davis & McGinnis, 2016).

3.2 Data collection

Convergent interviewing was chosen on three grounds, whereby it: i) offered the flexibility of refining the research issues throughout the course of the interviewing process; ii) employed a

funnelling process to elicit agreed perspectives and clarify disagreed perspectives; and iii) consequently, helped to refine the subjectivity and enhance the objectivity of the qualitative data (Dick, 1990; Gatfield *et al.*, 1999; Rao & Perry, 2003; Stokes, 2008). The convergent interviewing process involved three key stages (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

In each interview, an interview protocol was used to guide the data collection process in order to ensure data reliability. The protocol consisted of eight major open-ended questions that were supported by probe questions. A picture stimulus was also used to complement the interview process in order to help the participants to concentrate on a specific showrooming experience and, in turn, ensure that the dialogues were purposeful to the research issues under study. The picture stimulus featured several shoppers at a national department store, checking a television model at the physical store and, simultaneously, on various websites (i.e. the official webpage of the department store, Amazon, and eBay). The retail prices varied significantly between those retail channels, whereby the physical store had the highest price, eBay offered the lowest price, and the official website and Amazon advertised average prices. The picture stimulus was chosen because consumer electronics and appliances represent a product category that is showroomed frequently (Guruprasad, 2015).

Example interview questions included: *“Looking at the picture, what is the obvious story to you? What is the hidden story?”*; *“If you were one of the shoppers in the picture, how would you feel about the situation?”* and *“When facing a choice between a physical store and an online store, which would you prefer to buy a TV from? What are your decision criteria?”*

These questions were designed to: i) ensure that the data would capture realistic perspectives and experiences from the sample of showroomers; ii) provide the interviewer with the flexibility to probe the participants when agreement and/or disagreement arisen; and iii) consequently, enhance the internal validity of the data (Rao & Perry, 2003; Riege & Nair, 2004).

All interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants, eleven in total, in a semi-structured and conversation-like setting (Riege & Nair, 2004). The interviews were completed within a four-week period. On average each interview lasted around thirty minutes. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded for transcribing and coding purposes.

3.3 Data analysis

The interview data was subjected to thematic analysis, which began with a researcher independently and manually coded the raw data, according to the procedure proposed by Bazeley (2013). The coding template was developed based on several sources: the research issues under study; the consumer-decision making framework developed by Ashman *et al.* (2015); the consumer-emotions framework developed by Watson *et al.* (1988); and additional themes emerging from the interviews. Those frameworks were selected because of their: sound theoretical underpinning; user-friendliness; nascence to the showrooming context and thus facilitate the theory-building intent of the present study. The coding template was reviewed and agreed by other researchers involved in the present study prior to the development of the final outputs.

The thematic analysis involved three phases. More specifically, Phase 1 (open coding) involved coding the transcripts into major questions asked by the interviewer (i.e. “Looking at the picture, what is the obvious story to you? What is the hidden story?”; “If you were one of the shoppers in the picture, how would you feel about the situation?”). Phase 2 (axial coding) involved manually coding the transcripts into pre-defined codes corresponding to the research issues. That is, the first issue was about the decision activities occurred during showrooming, included codes about problem recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase. The second issue related to the emotions experienced during showrooming, included codes about positive and negative emotions. Phase 3 (developing the framework) involved manually cross-tabulating the codes identified for the decision activities and emotions to address the third issue: the potential opportunities offered by showrooming.

4. Results and discussion

The present study investigates the showrooming phenomenon via the theoretical lens of consumer experience and with a qualitative (theory building) approach in order to shed a more positive light on this shopper behaviour and identify the potential opportunities it may present to retailers. We interviewed a sample of eleven self-proclaimed showroomers of both genders and who declare to mobile showroom at least every six months. The sample consisted of five females and six males who resided in southwest England. Table 1 presents the participant profile.

Insert Table 1 here

4.1 Consumer-decision activities

Ashman *et al.* (2015) framework proposes five groups of consumer-decision activities potentially underpin the showrooming process: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase. Our results showed strong and partial support for Ashman *et al.* (2015) framework, whereby showrooming appears to involve four, rather than five, groups of consumer-decision activities. More specifically, problem recognition and information search are likely to occur as a joint or integrated group instead of two separate groups within the showrooming context. The details are explained next.

4.1.1 Problem recognition and information search

Problem recognition may arise in two forms in the showrooming context, namely, one relates to the need to purchase a product and another relates to the need to showroom (Karaatli *et al.*, 2010), and the chief interest of the present study is the latter. Accordingly, we asked the participants to describe the probable reasons that induce them to showroom in a consumer electronics context. The participants mentioned ease of searching information online; convenience of cross-checking information between retail channels; and the opportunity of inspecting product and/or consulting with personnel in-store. Later on, when asked how people searched for information during mobile showrooming, the participants uttered researching in-store using an internet-connected device, browsing on the retailer's website, researching on search engines, and inspecting product options in store.

There appears to be a strong overlapping between the activities related to problem recognition and information search and, collectively, they correspond to the free-riding and research shopping traits of showrooming (Kucuk & Maddux, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2007). Because of purchase uncertainty, showroomers conduct information search at a retailer's physical store to

develop knowledge on desired choices, shortlist or filter possible choices or reaffirm preferred choices. Equally, these search activities can also be interpreted as the ‘problems’ (needs) that trigger mobile showrooming (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2014). For instance, Participant H expressed “*When you going to the store, [you] examine the products, acquire enough knowledge and information about the products, and then you can purchase online or from mobile at that store. I [have] done it before with electronics and fashion items.*” Similarly, Participant K stated “*The high value product categories like this TV case involve risks in purchase, so I would prefer both searching online and going to store to have a better decision.*” This result suggests that the problem recognition and information search stages can occur synchronously within the showrooming context due to buyer uncertainty and the desire to experience the product (Guruprasad, 2015). Buyer uncertainty may stem from either knowledge uncertainty, choice uncertainty or a mixture of both (Urbany *et al.*, 1989).

In this decision stage, the participants claimed to frequently visit the retailer’s mobile application, the retailer’s website and web browsers (e.g. Google), and seek information such as product prices, product descriptions, delivery and payment options, reputation of product brand retailer, and customer feedback or reviews. These results suggest that showroomers do rely on a single source of information; instead, garner and triangulate varied sources of information to inform, or confirm, their purchase decisions (Gensler *et al.*, 2012). For example, Participant D stated “*Other than price, I would like to look at all the terms relating to delivery, warrantee and after-sales service.*” Participant H stated “*I would also have a look at the reputation of the retailers that I might purchase from. Customers’ past experiences and online reviews are also very important to provide knowledge about product or retailer business with previous customers.*” Participant K concurred “*The high value product categories like this TV*

case involve risks in purchase, so I would prefer both searching online and going to store to have a better decision.”

4.1.2 Evaluation

Ashman *et al.* (2015) framework proposes that evaluation of alternatives, as a consumer-decision stage, generally involves consumers narrowing down the choice of purchase and searching for more information on price, physical attributes, availability and purchase channels. Consumers trying product in-store and browsing products online are also commonly reported at this stage. Consistently, the participants interviewed in the present study also reported weighting up product choices, prices, and offline versus online retailers, as well as, exploring in-store promotion and payment options to get the best deal at this decision stage. For example, Participant G mentioned *“For a purchase like this TV, I will first look at my budget, then product features/functions, warranty terms or quality condition, the design, and finally the payment term of the purchase.”* Likewise, Participant H stated *“When in store, I will also look at other models or brand at the same price range but more functions, or cheaper price but the same benefit package.”* The participants appeared to apply a range of economic and service-excellence criteria when evaluating shortlisted options. In particular, economic attributes relate to price similarity, price disparity, product features, in-store promotional activities, whereas service-excellence attributes refer to product warranty, after-sales service, and payment plan (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001). Evaluating selected choices based on an array of attributes is parallel to a key facet of research shopping, namely, attribute-based decision making (see section 2).

4.1.3 Purchase

The purchase stage, also known as the choice stage, involves consumers select the best option amongst the alternatives. The purchase stage is also characterised as a prolonged trial due to the ease of product returns in today's retail landscape (Ashman et al., 2015). When deciding on the final choice, the participants interviewed in the present study seemed to rely ultimately on convenience of purchase, speed of purchase, and perceived best deal. This result corroborates the funnelling process that takes place at the purchase stage whereby showroomers start with an array of attributes and choices (the consideration set) at the evaluation stage and then narrow down to a limited few to select the best choice (the evoked set) (Comegys *et al.*, 2006).

Our results suggests two major activities underlying the purchase decision, specifically when showrooming for a television product. They are value trade-off and price matching. First, value trade-off refers to the likelihood of showroomers buying from the e-tailer if it offers a competitively lower price than the physical retailer. Besides prices, showroomers would also weight their purchase decisions based on other non-price attributes such as brand reputation and customer service offered by the e-tailer versus the physical retailer. Value trade-off closely corresponds to the e-purchase and store-visit costs discussed by Balakrishnan *et al.* (2014). Second, price matching refers to showroomers' desires for physical retailers to proactively and openly communicate and offer price matching. Our results indicated that whilst the participants were willing to buy at the physical store, they did not always feel either comfortable or confident with respect to asking for a price match and this might be due to the fact that bargaining practice remains less ingrained and acceptable in the British society when compared with other Asian societies (Lai & Aritejo, 2009). For example, Participant A expressed "*I would not stand forward to ask for [a price match]. I would feel embarrassed and confronted to ask [for a price match]. But if the retailer automatically offers [a price match], I would buy*

from them, because I will benefit many such as shipping cost which eBay could not offer.”

Participant E stated *“I preferred retailers who initially provide price-matching and I would definitely buy from them as I have all the same condition plus knowledge from the sales staff.”*

Participant F concurred and stated that *“I will choose to buy the TV at the store if they provide price-matching, because I don’t want to waste more time in searching.”* This result suggests the strong opportunity potential at the purchase stage whereby retailers can reduce e-purchase and store-visit costs and/or make price matching openly available to customers.

4.1.4 Post-purchase

The post-purchase stage refers to the stage where, after having purchased a product, consumers reflect on their purchase experience and then act (or not act) on this reflection (Ashman *et al.*, 2015). Our results revealed that showroomers are likely to post reviews about their purchases when they are satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Our results also indicated the reciprocal behaviour can exist within the showrooming context whereby consumers post reviews or feedback online as a ‘return the favour’ behaviour for accessing and digesting other customers’ reviews at other decision stages (i.e. problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives). For instance, Participant K stated *“I am a regular customer of Amazon and depend heavily on its review system. I myself also post review on the purchase because it reflects the quality and service of the transaction and might echo the voice of other buyers.”*

4.2 Emotions

Consumer emotions are rarely discussed or examined in the extant literature of showrooming (see section 2), representing a major gap in the body of knowledge about this retail shopper behaviour. An understanding of consumer emotions, such as how they feel during a shopping

process, can provide retailers with a valuable insight to diagnose and design desired shopping experience (Watkinson, 2013). As the present study seeks to explore the extent to which showrooming offers potential opportunities to retailers, an examination of the positive and negative emotions experienced by showroomers were deemed to be a good fit for the present study. Drawn on Watson *et al.* (1988) framework, our results identified eleven positive and negative feelings that the participants experienced during the showrooming process. They are excitement, curiosity, disappointment, distrust, cheat, stress, confusion, happiness, hesitance, confidence/controlled, and satisfaction (Appendix A). The participants did not seem to experience these positive and negative feelings equally, in terms of frequency, during the showrooming process. In particular of positive feelings, the participants seemed to experience happiness and satisfaction more frequently than excitement and confidence. Six out of the eleven participants interviewed in the present study expressed a lack of confidence or control during the showrooming process in spite of they were at the physical store and armed with a mobile device, which enabled them to access and digest a wealth of information instantly and effortlessly (e.g. the retailer's website, the competitors' websites, and online reviews). In terms of negative feelings, the participants seemed to feel distrust, confused, disappointed, cheated and hesitant more often than stressed.

We cross-tabulated the feelings experienced by the participants with the groups or stages of decision activities identified in order to examine their possible connections, and the endeavour suggests the potential existence of goal-directed emotions within the showrooming context (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999). The participants seemed to experience positive emotions (e.g. curious and excited) primarily at the problem recognition and information search stage, negative emotions (e.g. distrust, disappointed, cheated, confused and stressed) mostly at the evaluation stage, mixed emotions (e.g. happy, controlled and hesitant) at the purchase stage, and positive

emotions again at the post-purchase stage (see Appendix B). This result suggests the emotions experienced by consumers during the showrooming process are fluid or malleable in nature.

Positive emotions tend to occur at the problem recognition and information search stage because showroomers learn more about with the choices suitable to them and thus become more curious and excited about the process (Comegys *et al.*, 2006). For instance, Participant A stated *“I would feel curious about how the product looks in real, therefore I decided to go to store and check it.”* Negative emotions tend to arise at the evaluation stage because showroomers may feel overwhelmed, such as confused and stressed, when they face a range of attractive choices (e.g. prices, product types and after-sales services) offered by the physical store *and* by the online retailers. Showroomers may also feel distrust, disappointed and cheated when the retailer which they visit (e.g. the physical store and the website) offer varied prices on varied channels (the physical store versus the website) for a similar product. For example, Participant J mentioned *“I would feel confused because there were too many prices and purchase information need to clarify and compare.”* Participant I expressed *“I would feel disappointed and cheated because the store said it was on sale, but actually it was not if I put a bit of effort to search online.”* A mixture of positive and negative emotions may be experienced by showroomers at the purchase stage, whereby they feel happy when find a better deal online but hesitant to buy it online. They would have preferred to buy the product at the physical store because of, for example, immediate ownership and/or excellence service; however, the price offered by the physical store is less competitive than the online retailer (Comegys *et al.*, 2006). Positive emotions are likely to occur at the post-purchase stage, when showroomers feel they have researched diligently and made the ‘best choice’. For instance, Participant K uttered *“Overall I feel quite happy and satisfied with this type of purchase, because I did research, examined it and chose the best one from what I have seen.”*

5. Conclusion

The present study does not seek to discount the relevance of the multichannel-shopping lens and quantitative (theory testing) approach for investigating the showrooming behaviour. Instead, we aim to inspire future studies to consider other theoretical lens and qualitative (theory-building) approach to build a deeper and more balanced understanding of this shopper behaviour.

5.1 Implications for theory

Previous studies have typically examined showrooming from a negative standpoint (e.g. free-riding and channel hopping), via the theoretical lens of multichannel, and with a quantitative (theory testing) approach (see section 2). The present study contributes to the extant literature by investigating showrooming from a positive standpoint, via the theoretical lens of consumer experience, and with a qualitative (theory building) approach. More specifically, we analysed the consumer decision-activities and emotions specific to showrooming by conducting convergent interviews with a meaningful sample of self-proclaimed showroomers. Consumer decision-activities and emotions related to showrooming are rarely discussed and thus represent two under-researched issues, or gaps, in the extant literature. With respect to consumer decision-activities, we find Ashman *et al.* (2015) framework relevant for explaining the showrooming process but some amendments are needed. It has its origin from the classical consumer decision-making process proposed by Engel *et al.* (1968) and consists of five major stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase. We identify the four, instead of five, consumer decision-stages are more meaningful to explain the showrooming process. Problem recognition and information search do not exist as two separate

stages but as one joint or integrated stage whereby their underlying activities intertwine closely. The joint stage of problem recognition and information search encapsulates the research shopping trait of showrooming (Daunt & Harris, 2017; Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Kucuk & Maddux, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2007). We also identify consumer decision activities that are more specific to showrooming and some of which are not discussed by Ashman *et al.* (2015) framework.

Guided by Watson (1988) framework, we identified eleven positive and negative consumer emotions that are meaningful to explain the showrooming process. They are excitement, curiosity, happiness, confidence/control, satisfaction, disappointment, distrust, cheat, stress, confusion, and hesitation. The positive and negative emotions experienced by showroomers appear to be fluid and likely to fluctuate between the varied decision stages. More specifically, showroomers are likely to experience positive emotions at the stages of problem recognition/information search, and post-purchase, negative emotions at the evaluation stage, and mixed emotions at the purchase stage. These findings reinforce three theoretical notions about consumer emotions: i) the essential role of emotions in diagnosing a consumption experience (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Watkinson, 2013); ii) the co-existence of positive and negative emotions in a consumption experience such as showrooming (Richins, 1997); and iii) the positive versus negative nature of experienced emotions is closely linked to a consumption goal or activity (Ruth *et al.*, 2002).

5.2 Implications for practice

We seek to inspire retailers to view showrooming from a positive and experiential standpoint in order to develop deeper understanding of this shopper behaviour and greater appreciation of the opportunities it may bring forth. Our study echoes Freeman's notion (2014, p. 1): "*If your*

store is being used as a showroom, make sure that it's your goods ending up being purchased."

Distinct from the multichannel shopping lens, the consumer-experience lens encourages retailers to focus on the interaction and qualitative aspects that a consumer has with showrooming at any point in time, such as the decision activities and emotions experienced during the process (Watkinson, 2013). We illustrate that the consumer decision-activities and emotions complement each other and can be developed into a framework to diagnose the potential opportunities pertinent to showrooming. For example, showroomers are likely to experience positive emotions (e.g. curiosity and excitement) in the problem recognition/information search activity (e.g. experience the product and checking online information). Retailers can fruitfully exploit this decision activity by managing instore and online content to ensure that they are matched and user-friendly, offering interactive product experiences and interactive sessions with sales assistants instore, designing persuasive online content (e.g. product videos and/or social forums), and monitoring competitors' prices and content. Showroomers are prone to experience negative emotions (e.g. confusion, stress, distrust and disappointment) in the evaluation activity. Retailers can take advantage of this decision activity by implementing several customer-service strategies. For example, retailers can post authentic peer reviews and offer live chats and/or consultations with sales assistants as sounding boards to help showroomers to narrow down their choice sets and in turn help minimise confusion and stress. Retailers can also ensure the product information (e.g. prices and/or special offers) displayed in store and online is consistent to avert distrust and disappointment arising. These customer-service strategies may enable retailers to lock in and persuade showroomers to transact at the physical store or on the official website. In the purchase activity, we recommend retailers to synchronise their varied channels (in-store and online) to facilitate consumer purchase decision and focus on convenience, speed and competitive offer. If desirable, we recommend retailers to proactively monitor and match, or

outmatch, competitors' prices. If price matching is less desirable, retailers can consider non-price strategies such as stocking exclusive product range or offering bundled deals to avert price comparison practices. These strategies may help to instil purchase confidence and in turn promote purchase happiness in showroomers. In the post-purchase activity, showroomers are likely to experience mixed emotions. We recommend retailers to cultivate the post-purchase satisfaction of showroomers by encouraging them to: proactively post positive reviews; promptly respond to negative reviews; and constantly monitor and manage online content of relevant sources (Ashman *et al.*, 2015).

5.3 Limitations

The present study has contributed to the extant literature of showrooming by examining the shopper behaviour from a positive standpoint. However, it is not comprehensive and has several limitations that will provide fruitful directions for future research. First, the sample size used in the present study is considered exploratory and may limit the theoretical validity and reliability of the results. Future studies can replicate the present study by interviewing a larger sample size and more diverse samples (e.g. varied socio-demographic and/or behavioural backgrounds). Second, the present study has focused mainly on consumers and not considered the experiences of other stakeholders with showrooming (e.g. store employees and/or managers). Future research can enrich the validity and reliability of our results by interviewing non-consumer stakeholders and triangulating their perspectives with those garnered from consumers.

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Appendix A: Themes and issues identified from convergent interviews

Themes & issues identified	Participants (pseudonyms*)											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	
<u>Problem recognition & information search</u>												
1. Researching in store using internet connected devices	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
2. Search on retailer website	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
3. Search on search engines/apps/competitors websites	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Search about price	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Search about product description	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
6. Search about customer service and delivery	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Search about payment term	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Search about brand/retailer reputation	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x
9. Search about other customers' reviews or comments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Evaluation of alternatives</u>												
1. Price conflict contributes to active evaluation	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓
2. Price comparison is a criterion critical for purchase decision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Customer service influences the choice of retailer	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Comparison of product features to decide on product/brand choice	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. In-store marketing activities influence evaluation	-	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓
6. In-store experiences encourages active evaluation	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
7. Added-value/ bundled promotion affects evaluation	✓	✓	x	x	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Prefer to mix instore and online channels for choice evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Themes & issues identified	Participants (pseudonyms*)										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
<u>Purchase</u>											
1. Inconsistent prices trigger departure from the physical store	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓
2. Customers enquiring about price match	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	✓
3. Retailers offering price match without prompting by customers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Price match motivates customers to buy in store	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
5. Convenience influences purchase decision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Speed influences purchase decision	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
7. Secure payment influences purchase decision	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	X
8. 'Best deal' option influences purchase decision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Technology savviness influences purchase decision	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
<u>Post-purchase</u>											
1. Posting reviews online about the purchase	-	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x
2. Repeating the showrooming behaviour	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Emotions</u>											
1. Excited	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓
2. Curious	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
3. Disappointed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-
4. Distrust	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Cheated	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Stressed	✓	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-
7. Confused	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Happy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Hesitant	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-
10. Confident/controlled	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	x	x
11. Satisfied	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Notes: *Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the anonymity of the participants. Agreed ✓ Disagree X Not mentioned -											

Appendix B: Connection between decision-stages and emotions

Described feelings	Negative emotion	Positive emotion	Consumer decision-stages
Excited		X	Problem recognition/ information search
Curious		X	Problem recognition/ information search
Disappointed	X		Evaluation
Distrust	X		Evaluation
Cheated	X		Evaluation
Stressed	X		Evaluation
Confused	X		Evaluation
Happy		X	Purchase
Hesitant/free to act	X		Purchase
Confident/controlled		X	Purchase
Satisfied		X	Post Purchase

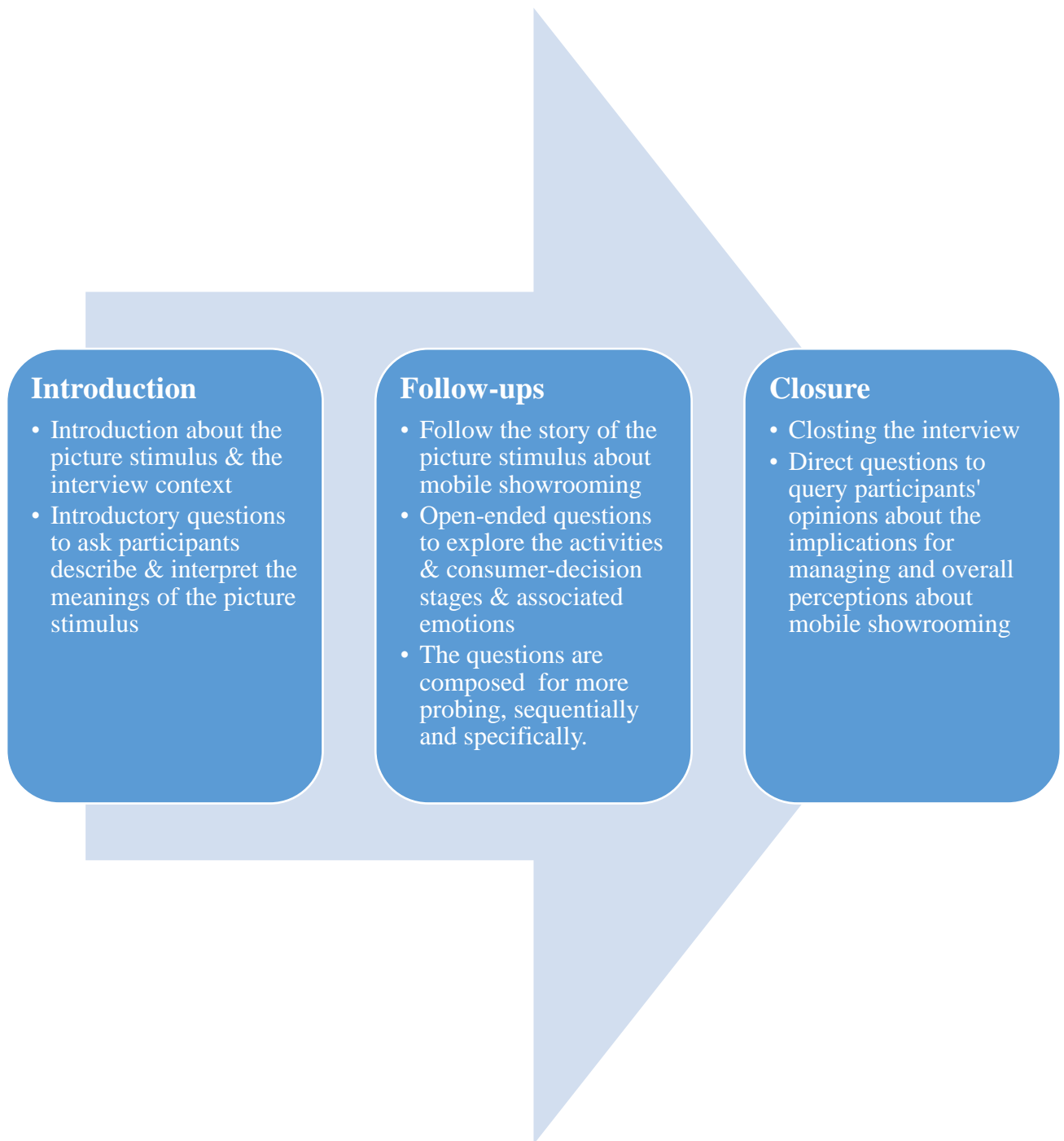
Source: develop from convergent interviews

Table 1: Participant profile

Pseudo name*	Gender	Showrooming experiences (self-reported)	Product category reported to showroom frequently	Showrooming frequency	Mobile device/s owned
A	Female	1 year	Mobile device	Every four months	Smartphone
B	Female	6 months	Electronic appliances	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
C	Male	6 months	Home furniture	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
D	Male	6 months	Shoes and clothing	Every six months	Smartphone
E	Male	6 months	Male grooming	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
F	Male	1 year	Home appliances	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
G	Female	1 year	Mobile device	Once in a year	Smartphone
H	Female	6 months	Electronic appliances	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
I	Male	6 months	Gardening tools	Every six months	Smartphone, Tablet
J	Female	6 months	Electronic appliances	Every four months	Smartphone, Tablet
K	Male	2 years	Electronic appliances	Every four months	Smartphone, Tablet
Notes: *pseudo names were applied to protect the anonymity of the participants.					

Source: developed from convergent interviews

Figure 1: Convergent interviewing stages of the present study



Source: Dick (1990) and Rao and Perry (2003)