Competitive (versus loyal) showrooming: An application of the push-pull-mooring framework

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Showrooming is an increasingly popular practic that threatens retailers' performance. This paper adopts the push-pull-mooring framework to understand the shopper decision to purchase online from a different retailer (competitive showrooming) rather than from the same retailer visited to gather information (loyal showrooming). Going beyond the customer motivation to get the best value, we focus on retailer-situational variables (store crowding and quality of salesperson service) and retailer-relational variables (customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty) in the decision on competitive (vs loyal) showrooming. Data was collected via a survey answered by 659 showroomers and analysed using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to unveil different patterns of competitive showrooming. Results highlight the role of mooring factors, such as a strong customer-retailer relationship and quality salespersons' service, in reducing competitive showrooming.

Introduction

The rapid adoption of e-commerce and the widespread use of smartphones have increased the prevalence of omnichannel behaviours (Fiestas and Tuzovic, 2021). These behaviours are characterized by the interchangeable use of channels during the shopping process. Webrooming, i.e., search online and then purchase in-store, is the most common behaviour (Flavián et al., 2020; Santos and Gonçalves, 2019), but showrooming, i.e., examine products in-store and then purchase online, is reaching up. A report by Conversant (2019) highlights that 58% of consumers start the shopping journey online and complete the purchase offline (webrooming), while 46% start the journey in-store and finish it online (showrooming).

Showrooming benefits online retailers and poses a threat to brick-and-mortar based retailers, which are, thus, reluctant to allow consumers to use their stores as showrooms (Rapp et al., 2015; Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). As showrooming gets ever more widespread, retailers would be advised to welcome showroomers in-store and try to retain them within their channels. Although competitive showrooming (i.e., searching offline at retailer A and purchasing online from retailer B) is the most common pattern, loyal showrooming (i.e., searching offline at retailer A and purchasing online from retailer A) is also a possibility (Schneider and Zielke, 2020). Loyal showrooming can even be beneficial for the retailer, as using several channels contributes to a more

positive customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Sit et al., 2018). As suggested by Gensler et al. (2017), it would be helpful to get further knowledge about how retailers can stimulate loyal showrooming. In a segmentation study of showroomers, Schneider and Zielke (2020) identified a substantial segment of loyal showroomers that exhibits different psychographic characteristics from other segments tending to competitive showrooming.

The role of retailer-related factors in showrooming is a very important research topic (Verhoef et al., 2015), which has received scarce attention. Existing research on showrooming has mainly focused on consumer traits and goals such as price consciousness or price comparison as drivers of showrooming (e.g., Dahana et al., 2018; Kang, 2018). However, Gensler et al. (2017) proved that non-price factors such as perceived gains in product quality, time pressure and salesperson availability play a key role in the showrooming decision. Thus, the search for better value and not just the best price could be a consumer motivation to showroom. Arora and Sahney (2018) included salesperson assistance as a benefit of offline search that affects showrooming attitude. However, other situational variables, such as store crowding have not been analysed. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, previous research has not examined how relational factors, such as the quality of the customer-retailer relationship, can affect the consumer decision to undertake competitive (vs loyal) showrooming.

Adressing this gap in the literature, this paper aims to understand

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competitive (versus loyal) showrooming going beyond consumers' motivation and focusing on the role of retailer-related variables, both situational and relational. More specifically, the objectives of the paper are: first, to investigate the showroomer's decision to purchase at a competing retailer versus the same retailer visited to get information; second, to understand the role of retailer-situational variables, such as store crowding and quality of salesperson service, in the decision on competitive (vs loyal) showrooming; third, to analyse the role of retailer-relational variables, such as customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty, in the decision on competitive (vs loyal) showrooming. For this purpose, we adopt the push-pull-mooring (PPM) framework, widely considered in migration research (Lee, 1966; Longino, 1992). It helps to understand why consumers visiting a store, *migrate* and move from buying in-store to purchasing online at a competing retailer. We apply fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), which is based on complexity theory. This method provides results that are not based on causal relationships but suggest different combinations of factors that result in competitive showrooming. This may be an appropriate way to understand complex and yet little known behaviours such as competitive showrooming.

This paper contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it extends knowledge about showrooming drivers by investigating the role of retailer-related variables, both situational and relational. This provides useful insights into how retailers can influence showroomers' behaviour. Second, it examines the decision of competitive (vs loyal) showrooming. This novel approach goes beyond the channel switching decision and aims to explain the joint decision of switching channels and retailers. This is important because it unveils effective strategies to stimulate loyal showrooming. Third, by applying the fsQCA methodology, we can suggest several competitive showrooming patterns based on the interaction of different drivers. This would help to understand the heterogeneity of showrooming behaviour and serve as a base to design strategies targeted to groups of consumers that undertake competitive (vs loyal) showrooming for different reasons.

Literature review

Showrooming, together with webrooming, are manifestations of the behaviour of "research shopping", defined by Verhoef et al. (2007) as using one channel to search for information and another one to purchase. Webrooming and showrooming build on different consumer motivations (Flavián et al., 2019; Kang, 2018) and impact retailers in quite different ways, requiring looking into the behaviours separately.

Showrooming strictly means searching offline and purchasing online. However, most showrooming studies assume that the online purchase is always made at a competing retailer (e.g., Chiou et al., 2012; Rapp et al., 2015). Nevertheless, consumers who visit a physical store could purchase online at the same retailer. Thus, it is relevant to be precise in the definition of showrooming. We follow the approach of Gensler et al. (2017) and Schneider and Zielke (2020) and define competitive showrooming as gathering information offline in Retailer A but purchasing online from Retailer B. In contrast, loyal showrooming, is defined by Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez (2017) as getting information offline in Retailer A and purchasing online from Retailer A. The latter type of showrooming can be even beneficial for the retailer as it improves the consumer experience (Sit et al., 2018; Schneider and Zielke, 2020).

Most showrooming studies have tried to explain showrooming attitudes or intentions. These studies have considered as drivers of showrooming mostly individual traits, such as price consciousness (Arora et al., 2017; Dahana et al., 2018), or perceived benefits of showrooming (Arora and Sahney, 2018; Flavián et al., 2020; Kang, 2018; Viejo--Fernández et al., 2020). Despite those studies being a starting point for the aim of our study, we need to widen the perspective if we want to understand the decision of a showroomer to purchase online from a different retailer than the one visited physically to gather information.

Thus, we look at the literature that has analysed free-riding behaviour and customer switching behaviour to uncover the retailer-related factors affecting showrooming.

Competitive showrooming can be classified as a modern form of free-riding (Burns et al., 2018). Free-riding, as a cause of channel conflict, was defined by Coughlan et al. (2001, p.252) as "shoppers gaining services from one channel while placing its business with another". Free-riding is likely to exist when the retail marketplace includes retailers offering different levels of service (Burns, 2010). As many of the retail services are provided before the purchase (e.g., customer service, assortment display), consumers may use high-service retailers with no intention to purchase from them but from a low-service retailer at a lower price (Dulleck and Kerschbamer, 2009). The omnichannel context increases the incidence of free-riding as online retailers tend to offer lower prices and wider assortment, but physical stores offer the possibility of examining the product and getting advice from store personnel (Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez, 2017).

One of the first studies on showrooming (van Baal and Dach, 2005) looked at this behaviour under the free-riding lens. In fact, in 2005, the term "showrooming" had not been coined and the authors used the term "cross-channel free-riding". The study of van Baal and Dach (2005) supported the free-riding assumption as it found that when customers switch channels within one transaction, multichannel retailers lose more customers than they retain. The studies that focus on the free-riding aspect of showrooming highlight the role of retailer strategies and actions to combat this practice. Chou et al. (2016) suggested that retailers could retain customers within their channels by investing in service quality and cultivating customer loyalty, which would act as switching barriers. Rapp et al. (2015) evaluated how perceived showrooming affects salesperson performance and suggested strategies to decrease the impact on the retailer's sales. Burns et al. (2018) highlighted the benefits of integrating smartphone usage into the retailer's business model and improving post-purchase customer service. Fassnacht et al. (2019) explored the efficacy of four salesperson tactics: customer interaction quality, price matching, suggesting an alternative product, and explaining the return policy. In synthesis, these studies indicate that despite the attractiveness of competitors' online offers, a multichannel retailer has tools to retain showroomers and avoid losing sales.

Conceptual framework

To understand why showroomers switch retailers when moving online and how retailers could retain them, we adopt the push-pull-mooring (PPM) framework, a dominant paradigm in migration research (Lee, 1966; Longino, 1992). In the marketing field, this model was initially used by Bansal et al. (2005) to explain customer migration to new service providers. More recently, the PPM paradigm has been taken as a framework to explain customer switching among alternative sellers in several contexts, e.g. personal cloud storage services (Cheng et al., 2019), green transportation (Wang et al., 2020), telecommunication (Al-Mashraie et al., 2020), or online grocery shopping (Singh and Rosengren, 2020). In the specific context of omnichannel retailing, the PPM framework has been applied to understand customer switching among channels during the shopping process, i.e. cross-channel behaviour. Li et al. (2018) build on this framework to uncover customers' reactions to cross-channel integration. Haridasan et al. (2021) use the PPM model to explain cross-channel switching intention, but they do not refer to any specific form of cross-channel behaviour, such as webrooming or showrooming. In contrast, Chiu et al. (2011) and Chou et al. (2016) employ the PPM framework to study webrooming. These examples evidence the usefulness of PPM in the omnichannel context and support our novel attempt to examine cross-channel switching from offline to online and retailer switching (i.e. competitive showrooming) building on this framework.

The PPM framework initially identified two types of factors that affect the individual's decision to migrate (Lee, 1966). Push factors are

the perceptions about the place of origin that motivate people to migrate, thus, are negative factors at the origin. When applied to customer switching behaviour, push factors have been related to high prices or low-quality service (Bansal et al., 2005). Pull factors are those that make the new destination appealing and attract migrants to it. Pull factors in retail have been considered as those that make the offer of a competing firm more attractive (Chiu et al., 2011; Chou et al., 2016). The literature argued that even when push and pull factors are strong, people may not migrate, and Longino (1992) added the concept of mooring to the push-pull framework. Mooring factors in the migration literature are family obligations at the origin or high costs of moving that hold the individual to his place of origin. Chou et al. (2016) suggested that mooring effects in webwrooming are linked to switching costs and represent opportunities for multichannel retailers to retain customers.

The PPM framework is able to accommodate specific factors that are related to competitive showrooming. Consumers visiting a physical retailer may end up purchasing online because some negative situational factor makes them willing to leave the store (push factor), or because they are attracted by the offer of a competing online retailer (pull factor), or a combination of those. Mooring factors may interact with push and pull factors to keep showroomers as customers of the retailer (loyal showrooming). The PPM framework allows a comprehensive overview of the drivers of a phenomenon (Singh and Rosengren, 2020), which is in line with the complexity theory underlining the fsQCA methodology. Therefore, our research model (see Fig. 1) addresses several propositions. The first proposition refers to the interaction of push, pull and mooring factors influencing the showroomer's decision to switch retailers when purchasing online:

- Proposition 1: Showroomers undertake competitive (vs loyal) showrooming as a result of different combinations of push, pull and mooring factors.

The specific push, pull and mooring factors in our research proposal are mainly suggested by the shopper behaviour literature, and to a lesser extent by the scarce showrooming studies that contemplate retailer-specific variables, as we discuss in the following paragraphs.

Push factors: perceived crowding

Perceived crowding is one of the situational variables related to the in-store experience that could strongly influence competitive showrooming behaviour (Gensler et al., 2017); it could *push* the individual to leave the store, increasing the chances of purchasing online.

Retailing research has found that an optimal crowding level exists that maximizes the individual's satisfaction (Eroglu et al., 2005) and

patronage intentions (Mehta et al., 2013); lower levels of crowding would result in feelings of isolation and low stimulation, while higher levels of crowding would negatively affect shopper satisfaction (Jones et al., 2010). Most studies suggest that perceived crowding not only reduces shoppers' satisfaction but also affects the product valuation negatively and results in cognitive and affective outcomes that precipitate an earlier departure from the store (Eroglu et al., 2005; O'Guinn et al., 2015). A crowded retail environment would lead the shopper to expectations of high waiting time to get salespersons' service (Grewal et al., 2003). The annoying situation of having to wait, could lead the shopper to competitive showrooming, as a way of venting the individual's negative feelings (Gensler et al., 2017). Therefore, our second proposition states:

- Proposition 2: The presence of push factors (i.e. a crowded store) is related to competitive (vs loyal) showrooming.

Pull factors: Individual's value consciousness.

Finding lower prices online is believed to be the strongest motivation for showrooming (Flavián et al., 2020; Kang, 2018), and the literature has consistently presumed that showroomers are price-conscious shoppers (Burns et al., 2018). Price-conscious shoppers have positive attitudes towards showrooming, and thus, a greater propensity to engage in this behaviour (Arora et al., 2017; Burns, 2006; Burns et al., 2018). More specifically, Schneider and Zielke (2020) found that price consciousness was higher for those segments leaning towards competitive showrooming. Going beyond price benefits, Fiestas and Tuzovic (2021) discussed that getting the best value is a benefit sought by showrooomers. Value-consciousness is "a concern for paying low prices, subject to some quality constraint" (Lichtenstein et al., 1993, p. 235). This individual trait drives the person to be a smart shopper, sensitive not just to price but also to quality (Cho et al., 2006). Value-conscious shoppers regularly carry out in-depth information processing because their main goal is to get the best quality product at the lowest price (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2014). Value-conscious behaviour results in higher shopping hesitation, purchase postponement, and weaker loyalty intentions (Zheng et al., 2017), which could lead to competitive showrooming. The effect of value consciousness on showrooming has not been tested; however, Gensler et al. (2017) found that showrooming likelihood is affected by perceptions of better quality and perceptions of lower prices. In line with the above arguments, we state:

- Proposition 3: The presence of pull factors (i.e. value consciousness) is related to competitive (vs loyal) showrooming.

Mooring factors: Quality of in-store salesperson, customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty to the retailer.
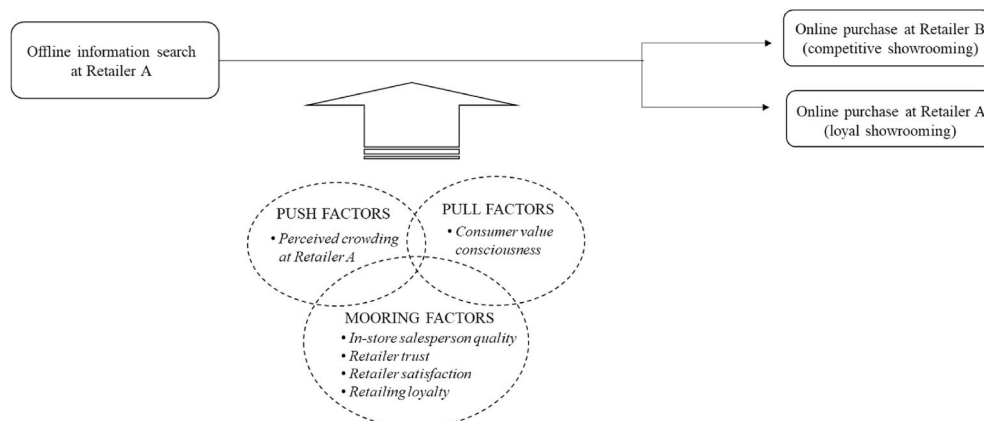

Fig. 1. Research framework.

There is plenty of literature supporting the relevance of in-store salespersons and, in general, customer service quality for brick-and-mortar retailers (Verhoef et al., 2007). Salespeople can reduce shopping risks, increase customer satisfaction, and reduce return rates (Cronin et al., 2000; Ertekin et al., 2020; Puccinelli et al., 2013). Also, salespersons' friendliness and competence could positively influence the perception of products' quality (Ertekin et al., 2020). Bansal and Taylor (1999) also conclude that service quality perceptions negatively influence attitude towards switching providers.

In showrooming literature, the role of in-store salesperson has been investigated by a few papers with no conclusive findings so far. Supported by the reciprocity theory, Fassnacht et al. (2019) proved that in-store high-quality interactions between the salesperson and potential showroomers could drive in-store buying intentions. These conclusions are not wholly consistent with Gensler's et al. (2017), who evidenced that the quality of salesperson had no impact on showrooming. The mixed evidence suggests that high-quality in-store salesperson could motivate consumers to showroom as they would visit the store to get high-quality information that would reduce the risks of online shopping; in this line, Burns et al. (2018) found that consumers who value customer service are more likely to engage in showrooming. In contrast, Chou et al. (2016) suggested that high-quality salesperson service can be a factor that moors customers to the brick-and-mortar retailer. Thus, quality of in-store salesperson could be a driver of general showrooming intention, but when we look at competitive showrooming it would be a mooring factor that the retailer can use to retain customers, i.e. to turn competitive showroomers into loyal ones.

In addition to salesperson quality, the relational bonds between the consumer and the retailer could act as mooring factors. Relationship marketing theory argues that a firm would get more profit by investing in maintaining close and long-lasting relationships than by attracting new customers (Rafiq et al., 2013). Customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty are three fundamental constructs that characterize a robust customer-retailer relationship. Although there is some literature supporting the role of these variables on customer switching among sellers, research relating them to showrooming is practically non-existent.

Based on the conceptualization of trust by Moorman et al. (1992), we define retailer trust as the customer's willingness to rely on the retailer's ability to perform its role. Trust plays a pivotal role in building lasting exchange relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), thus reducing the propensity of switching behaviours (Fintikasari and Ardyan, 2018) and increasing loyalty (Aydin et al., 2005). The positive relationship between trust and loyalty has been explicitly tested in the multichannel retail context (Badrinarayanan et al., 2012; Frasquet et al., 2017). There is no evidence so far on the role of retailer trust in showrooming; however, researchers found that consumers tend to choose sources they trust when looking for valid and reliable information (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Consumers who trust the seller believe it will fulfil promises (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); therefore, trust towards a retailer would positively affect search intentions at the retailer's online store (Hahn and Kim, 2009) and purchase intentions at the retailer's website (Jones and Kim, 2010). Thus, trust could have a mooring effect in retaining the showroomer within the retailer's channels, particularly if additional bonds (satisfaction, loyalty) exist. Notwithstanding, showroomers could use the reliable information gathered at the store to make a more informed decision at a competing retailer offering better value (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020).

Customer satisfaction represents the consumer fulfillment response to the shopping experience (Oliver, 1980). Relationship marketing focuses on overall satisfaction with the firm, which is different to satisfaction with a specific purchase. Overall satisfaction is relational in nature; that is, it is constructed cumulatively as a result of various discrete episodes of contact with the retailer (Shankar et al., 2003). Bansal and Taylor (1999) prove that satisfaction with a service provider is negatively associated with the individual's intention to switch providers. However, the relationship between overall satisfaction and

customer retention should not be assumed to be automatic (Ghazali et al., 2016; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). Evidence shows that dissatisfied customers continue purchasing at a given seller (Burnham et al., 2003). This inconsistent link could be the case in showrooming; in the omnichannel context, shoppers use multiple touchpoints that can make them change the planned course of action at any stage. As mentioned above, there is no evidence on the effect of satisfaction on showrooming; anyhow, if we take into consideration that customer satisfaction reduces price sensitivity (Meng and Sego, 2020) and that price is a key motivation to showroom (Flavián et al., 2020), it is reasonable to think that if the customer is satisfied with the retailer, he will have less propensity to engage in competitive showrooming.

Customer loyalty is a critical relational outcome in business-to-consumer relationships. Loyalty captures the relationship's strength and reflects in attitudinal and behavioural responses (Dick and Basu, 1994). Loyal customers tend to revisit the retailer, repurchase products, and recommend it (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Research shows that the online medium challenges customer loyalty (Shankar et al., 2003), as the customer can easily compare information about competing retailers and decide to switch provider just by a click. The abundant information and stimuli make showroomers experience conflicting emotions during the purchase process, challenging the intention to be loyal to the retailer (Sit et al., 2018). To the best of our knowledge, only Gensler et al. (2017) analysed the effect of loyalty on the customer engaging or not in competitive showrooming, but their data did not support a significant relationship. The role of loyalty on the decision to engage in competitive showrooming can be further discussed looking at the literature on customer switching behaviour. Ailawadi et al. (2001) found that switching costs are higher for store-loyal consumers, and El-Manstrly et al. (2011) proved that relational switching costs are positively correlated with loyalty. Thus, it could be expected that customer loyalty would deter consumers from purchasing online at a competing retailer.

Based on the above literature on the role of mooring factors and the logic of the PPM framework (Bansal et al., 2005), we expect that mooring factors intervene with the expected effects of push and pull factors in the competitive (vs loyal) showrooming decision:

- Proposition 4: The absence of mooring factors (i.e. in-store salesperson quality, retailer trust, retailer satisfaction, retailer loyalty) interacts with the presence of push or pull factors to explain the decision of competitive (vs loyal) showrooming.

Methodology

Data was collected via an online survey administered in Spain by a professionally-managed consumer panel. The population was defined as individuals who had visited at least one physical store in the apparel or electronics category in the previous six months to get information about a product that was finally bought online. Following a quota sampling by gender and age to reflect the online shopper population, the initial sample was integrated by 659 showroomers. With the aim to analyse situational variables, we asked respondents to think about the last purchase made in the category. In this particular study, we selected only those individuals who had interacted with a salesperson in-store in the previous shopping process, which were 61.6% of the initial sample, that is, 401 consumers. The sample had a balanced composition with respect to sociodemographic characteristics. 41.6% of the sample was under 35 years old, with the largest age group between 35 and 44 (30.2% of those surveyed), while those over 45 were 28.2% of the sample. Regarding sex, 51.6% were men and 48.4% women. As regards education, 58.6% of the sample held university degrees, 38.4% completed primary or secondary studies, while 3% had no studies. Our sample comprises regular showroomers; 16.5% showroom every time they go shopping, 40.1% half of the times, 30.4% nearly every time, an only 13% rarely showroom.

The outcome variable, i.e., competitive versus loyal showrooming,

was operationalized as a dichotomous variable by asking showroomers if they had bought online from a competing retailer or from the retailer they visited to examine the product. The results showed that 81% of the respondents undertook competitive showrooming and 19% loyal showrooming. The remaining variables were measured using 7-point multi-item Likert scales taken from the literature. Before using the data, the scales' psychometric properties were assessed via a confirmatory factor analysis with EQS 6.1. The appendix shows the scales with information about their sources and the results of the reliability and validity analysis.

Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) was employed to explore the research propositions. This technique analyses how different combinations of causal conditions (in our case, the push, pull, and mooring factors) lead to an outcome (engaging in competitive showrooming behaviour). Instead of estimating how, on average, a change of an independent variable changes a dependent one, as regression analysis does, fsQCA identifies whether the presence and/or absence of the causal conditions combined are consistent with the outcome (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). Two tenets of this technique are of particular relevance in the present study: equifinality (there can be more than one path or solution to the outcome), and contrarian case (a simple antecedent in a solution can contribute positively or negatively to the outcome depending on the presence or absence of the other ingredients in the recipe) (Woodside, 2016).

To work with fsQCA, we had to calculate the average of each multi-item scale and recode the outcome variable. Additionally, we calibrated the measures to transform them into fuzzy set membership scores (see Table 1) by using the median value as the cross-over point for all the causal conditions (Wagemann et al., 2016). Moreover, we set the 10% percentile for full non-membership and the 90% percentile for full-membership.

We applied Harman's single-factor test to identify possible common method biases. We performed an exploratory factor analysis with all the variables, obtaining four factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1. The first factor accounted for 44.0% of the variance, which was not the majority of the variance. As a more sophisticated test we undertook a confirmatory factor analysis Harman's single factor model test (Podsakoff et al., 2003); the one-factor model received a quite poor fit to data (S–B $\chi2$ (152) = 1055.81 (p = .000), BBNFI = 0.663, BBNNFI = 0.657, CFI = 0.695, and RMSEA = 0.122). Consequently, the common method variance, if existed, was not a salient problem in this study.

Results

First, we performed the analysis of necessary conditions to know if

any of the push, pull, or mooring factors was a necessary cause for the individual to participate in competitive showrooming. According to the reviewed literature, we considered the push and pull factors in presence, and the mooring factors in absence. For a causal condition to be a necessary condition, it has to reach a consistency threshold of 0.90 and a coverage threshold of 0.75 (Ragin, 2006). As Table 2 suggests, there are no necessary conditions for the outcome. In other words, competitive showrooming does not occur as an unequivocal consequence of any of the variables considered individually. This initial result suggests that the retailer will have to consider several factors to deter competitive showrooming.

Next, we performed sufficient condition analysis. Table 3 shows that four different causal configurations emerged as sufficient conditions for engaging in competitive showrooming. Together, they explain 66.5% of the competitive showrooming behaviours, with an overall solution consistency of 0.84, reaching the minimum thresholds required (Ragin, 2000). Proposition 1 is, thus, accepted, as different combinations of push, pull and mooring factors relate to competitive (versus loyal) showrooming: a) solution 1: individuals who are not satisfied with the retailer, do not trust it and are not loyal; in this solution the absence of satisfaction and trust play a key role, as they are core conditions; b) solution 2: individuals who are loyal to the retailer, are satisfied with it and perceive high in-store salesperson quality, but they experienced high crowding during the store visit; in this solution, loyalty and perceived crowding play a core role; c) solution 3: individuals who are not loyal to the retailer, did not perceive the store was crowded and evaluated in-store salesperson quality as high; in this solution, the absence of loyalty as well as the absence of perceived crowding are core conditions; d) solution 4: individuals who are value-conscious and are satisfied with the retailer, but they did not perceive high-quality in-store salesperson, which plays a core role. Most of the cases are identified in solution 1 (35%) and solution 2 (28%).

Our results point out that push and pull factors are not enough to explain why a consumer would purchase online at a competing retailer, as in all four solutions mooring factors appear. Perceived crowding seems to be a critical variable as it explains why consumers undertake competitive showrooming even when they are loyal and satisfied with the retailer. Accordingly, Proposition 2 is accepted, as the presence of push factors (i.e. store crowding) relates to competitive (vs loyal) showrooming (solution 2). The pull factor (value consciousness) appears with a peripheral role in solution 4, giving support to Proposition 3, that is, the presence of pull factors is related to competitive showrooming. Notwithstanding, in solution 4 the lack of perceived quality of in-store salesperson plays a key role, suggesting that the pull factor is not enough to drive individuals to undertake competitive showrooming.

Thus, following the PPM framework, mooring factors play a role in preventing competitive showrooming. Proposition 4 set that the absence of mooring factors interacts with the presence of push or pull factors to explain the decision of competitive (vs loyal) showrooming, and solutions 1, 2 and 4 support that. As solution 1 shows, the absence of mooring factors, with no presence of push or pull factors, results in competitive showrooming. Additionally, the presence of mooring factors plays a role in solutions 2, 3 and 4. The presence of retailer loyalty in

Table 1
Descriptives and thresholds used for calibration.

	Mean (SD)	Thresholds used for calibration		
		Full non-membership	Cross-over point	Full membership
PUSH FACTORS				
Perceived crowding	4.69 (1.42)	3	4.8	6.6
PULL FACTORS				
Value consciousness	5.96 (.96)	4.7	5.7	7
MOORING FACTORS				
Perceived quality of in-store salesperson	5.89 (1.06)	4.3	5.7	7
Retailer trust	5.74 (1.03)	4.3	5.7	7
Retailer satisfaction	5.81 (.97)	4.3	5.7	7
Retailer loyalty	5.71 (1.00)	4.3	5.7	7

Table 2
Necessary conditions leading to competitive showrooming.

Causal conditions	Consistency	Coverage
PUSH FACTORS		
Perceived crowding	.48	.79
PULL FACTORS		
Value consciousness	.59	.79
MOORING FACTORS		
Perceived quality of in-store salesperson (absence)	.40	.85
Retailer trust (absence)	.47	.85
Retailer satisfaction (absence)	.44	.85
Retailer loyalty (absence)	.48	.84

Table 3
Sufficient configurations leading to competitive showrooming.

Causal conditions (Consistency cutoff = .76)	Solutions			
	1	2	3	4
PUSH FACTORS				
Perceived crowding		●	∅	
PULL FACTORS				
Value consciousness				●
MOORING FACTORS				
Perceived quality of in-store salesperson		●	●	∅
Retailer trust	∅			
Retailer satisfaction	∅	●		●
Retailer loyalty	∅	●	∅	
Raw coverage	.35	.28	.21	.18
Unique coverage	.04	.11	.02	.02
Consistency	.85	.78	.80	.78
Overall solution coverage: .66				
Overall solution consistency: .84				

Note: ● indicates the presence of a condition and ∅ indicates its absence. Blank spaces indicate "don't care". Large circles indicate core conditions, and small ones represent peripheral conditions.
This table excludes solutions with very low unique coverage (lower than 0.01).

solution 2 seems to be counteracted by the perception of a crowded store. However, the absence of retailer loyalty plays a key role, even when the perception of crowding is low, in driving showroomers to buy at a competing retailer. Finally, solution 4 highlights the role of salespersons' quality, as low perception of quality of personal customer service plays a core role in explaining why shoppers migrate to an online retailer to purchase.

Predictive validity

To provide a more robust support to the results, we tested the predictive validity of the four sufficient conditions. It will show if the model predicts competitive showrooming behaviour in additional samples (Woodside, 2014). We split the sample in two and obtained the sufficient conditions on the first subsample. As Table 4 shows, the overall solution coverage and consistency on the subsample are similar to those of the whole sample (shown in Table 3). This means that the causal conditions considered are consistent indicators of engaging in competitive showrooming behaviour when analyzing the subsample. In a second step, the results obtained on the subsample were tested against the holdout sample. To this end, it was necessary to model each causal configuration of Table 4 as a new variable. Fig. 1 shows the results for solutions 1 and 2, although the four causal configurations were tested. As Fig. 2 shows, for the tested model, the raw coverage and the consistency values are similar to the raw coverage and the consistency values when testing those models with the holdout sample. These results suggest a high predictive validity of our model.

Discussion and implications

This paper aims to understand the factors affecting the decision to engage in competitive showrooming versus loyal showrooming,

focusing on retailer-actionable variables. We show that the PPM framework (Lee, 1966; Longino, 1992) from migration research is useful for the study of competitive showrooming as it is able to accommodate different push, pull, and mooring factors that may explain this behaviour. This comprehensive framework calls for the use of a methodology of an exploratory nature, such as fsQCA, which does not hypothesize the effect of one single variable over another, but offers solutions in which the variables combine in presence or absence.

Our results offer the following conclusions. Firstly, our data show that none of the variables analysed is a necessary condition for the individual to engage in competitive showrooming. Notwithstanding, four configurations of factors are sufficient conditions to explain competitive showrooming. This highlights the complexity of the showrooming phenomenon (Schneider and Zielke, 2020), which cannot be explained solely by price-related motivations (Gensler et al., 2017). Secondly, our study has proved the crucial role of relational variables (trust, satisfaction, and loyalty) in deterring competitive showrooming. If those relational mooring variables are not present (as in solutions 1 and 3), the individual will undertake competitive showrooming. These results are in line with Conversant (2019) report, which showed that 39% of customers are likely to purchase in-store when they are part of a loyalty program. A third conclusion points to the importance of the shopping experience at the physical store. Even in a situation in which several mooring factors exist, the perception of a crowded store plays a core role (solution 2) in competitive showrooming. This is a novel finding in the showrooming literature, as no previous study had analysed the effect of crowding at the moment of visiting the store as a catalyst of competitive showrooming. A fourth conclusion is related to the quality of the salesperson service. This is a relevant mooring factor, as it appears in three of the four solutions. However, it only plays a core role in solution 4, which shows that perception of low quality of in-store salesperson could lead to competitive showrooming even when the consumer is satisfied with the retailer. Taken together, our results would suggest different degrees of intentionality of showrooming behaviour and how situational variables can play a role. For example, the behaviour shown in solution 2 represents a loyal and satisfied consumer who decides not to resume the purchase at the retailer because the store is too crowded at the time of the visit. On the contrary, higher intentionality to showroom is evident in solution 3 picturing a non-loyal consumer who visits the retailer to get high-quality personal service with the intention to buy from a competing online retailer.

Our research contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, we focus on the role of retailer-related variables in showrooming. The literature has mostly considered individual traits, such as price-consciousness, but has virtually ignored variables related to the retailer, both situational, i.e., perceived crowding, or relational, i.e. variables characterizing the customer-retailer relationship. Second, we examine the consumer decision to engage in competitive showrooming versus loyal showrooming, not the overall attitude towards showrooming as most studies do. From the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine the decision taken by a showroomer to buy from a competing retailer instead of doing from the retailer visited to gather information (i.e., competitive showrooming versus loyal showrooming). Third, by applying the fsQCA methodology, we are able to uncover different patterns leading to competitive (versus loyal) showrooming,

Table 4
Sufficient configurations leading to competitive showrooming for subsample 1.

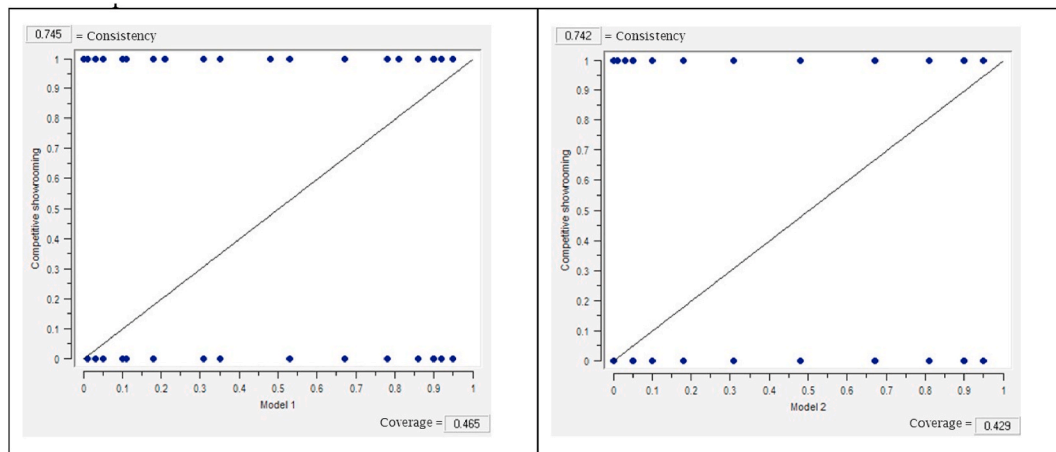| Causal conditions (Consistency cutoff = .77)	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
Model 1: Value consciousness*Perceived quality in-store salesperson	.47	.03	.82
Model 2: Perceived quality in-store salesperson *Trust*Satisfaction	.43	.04	.80
Model 3: Value consciousness*Trust*Satisfaction*Loyalty	.37	.02	.79
Model 4: ~Perceived crowding*~Trust*~Loyalty	.30	.07	.89
Model 5: Perceived crowding*~Perceived quality in-store salesperson *~Satisfaction*~Trust	.18	.02	.82

Note: This table excludes solutions with very low unique coverage (lower than 0.01). "~" indicates the absence of a condition, and "*" the logic operator "AND".

Note: Each dot in the XY plot represents one or more cases (i.e., individuals) in the study—some individuals have the same scores in the plot.

Fig. 2. Test of solutions 1 and 2 from the subsample using data from the holdout subsample.

Note: Each dot in the XY plot represents one or more cases (i.e., individuals) in the study—some individuals have the same scores in the plot.

which seems to be suitable to understand this complex and still under-researched phenomenon. Thus, our paper offers a novel approach to the topic showing how different combinations of push, pull, and mooring factors can result in competitive (versus loyal) showrooming behaviour.

Managerial implications

Our findings provide retailers with knowledge about how to reduce the impact of competitive showrooming by retaining showroomers within their channels. If the retailer succeeds in retaining showroomers, the firm will benefit not only from avoding the sales loss but also by providing a more positive customer experience (Sit et al., 2018; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

The fact that our analysis does not find any single factor that is a necessary condition for competitive showrooming highlights the complexity of this behaviour, and points out that the retailer would need to consider several factors when trying to minimize competitive showrooming and stimulate loyal showrooming.

Our results have confirmed the relevant role of the quality of the customer-retailer relationship to reduce the incidence of competitive showrooming. Thus, brick-and-mortar should cultivate trust, satisfaction, and loyalty with their customers. Providing clear and compelling information on the return policy, warranties, and using efficient communication channels could increase buyer confidence. On the other hand, satisfaction should be continuously measured, identifying the factors that impact it and seeking its improvement. Developing loyalty programs, newsletters, direct, fluent, and when possible personalized communication through mass and social media, among others, could build strong relational links.

Our conclusion on the perception of in-store crowding as a factor that can lead consumers to competitive showrooming indicates that retailers should avoid negative perceptions of crowding. Retailers could identify peak hours in physical stores to reduce crowding. Perhaps, more staff at checkouts to avoid queues and the consequent perception of waiting time, or special actions such as events or personal shoppers in non-peak hours to redirect the influx of customers, could be effective. Specific omnichannel actions such as allowing payment through the retailer app could be effective to serve those customers that intended to buy at the retailer but were discouraged because of high perceived crowding. Loyal customers (as solution 2 shows) are put off by high crowding, thus, it is vital to address this issue to avoid losing those valuable customers.

The implications related to salespersons are complex. Indeed, the omnichannel buyer is a very informed individual who requires from the staff additional valuable information to what he can obtain on the Internet by himself. Our results suggest that salespersons' quality plays a key role when absent; therefore, the first recommendation to retailers with physical stores would be training their staff to identify customers' needs to succeed in the challenge of showrooming. However, the results also show that high-quality personal service (combined with other variables) can also contribute to competitive showrooming. In this case, it is recommended that retailers train their salespeople in adaptive sales techniques so that a potential showroomer can be identified and offered additional incentives to buy in the store, or through the retailer's online channel. In synthesis, the role of this mooring factor, perceived quality of in-store salesperson, is consistent with the role of the other mooring factors considered (relational variables): their absence results in competitive showrooming but their presence does not guarantee that behaviour does not take place. Therefore, the retailer should weight the costs of improving the quality of salesperson service against the benefits of increasing customer spending in online channels of the firm. Building customer trust and loyalty are long-term investments for the firm, and this study has shown the benefits of building strong customer relationships in the omnichannel era.

Limitations and future lines of research

Competitive showrooming is a very complex behaviour, since it encompasses switching both channel and retailer during the purchase process. By involving offline and online channels, being smartphone usage in-store a growing trend, the motivations to carry it out are influenced by many factors, related to the individual, the retailer, and the situation itself. Our research has focused on retailer-related variables that could retain customers, in addition to considering a key individual motivation for showrooming, i.e., getting the best price for a given quality (value consciousness). Although this paper has analysed a theoretically consistent set of variables that includes a wide spectrum of explanatory factors of competitive showrooming, we acknowledge the need to continue studying this behaviour by considering additional variables in the analysis.

Regarding variables referring to the influence of the specific shopping experience on carrying out competitive showrooming, we included two variables: perceived crowding and salespersons' quality. Other variables of interest would be the availability of salespeople in the store,

the sales tactics used, the degree of store digitalization, or the level of sensory stimulation. It would also be advisable to analyse the influence of the integration of online and offline channels, as a measure of the degree to which customers can move from one channel to achieve a seamless purchasing process. Additionally, specific characteristics of the products could affect the influence of the variables considered in the research. Future research could explore the moderating role of product category. Other variables of the product that could be measured in future research are: the frequency of purchase, the price of the product as an indicator of the acquisition effort, the importance of breadth of assortment for shopping the product category, the desire or need for immediate possession, or the importance of after-sales services in the product category. Finally, it seems highly relevant to investigate how the use of the smartphone affects showrooming, through measures such as dependence on the smartphone or the effective use of the device during the purchase process.

Acknowledgements

Appendix I. Reliability and convergent validity of the scales

Factor	Item	Convergent Validity		Reliability		
		Loading (t)	Load average	Cronbach α	CR	AVE
Perceived crowding (Mattila and Wirtz, 2004)	The store was crowded	.83 (19.91)	.87	.90	.91	.75
	There were a lot of customers in the store	.90 (23.65)				
	The store was a little too busy	.88 (24.62)				
Value consciousness (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2014)	When shopping, both price and product quality are important to me	.75 (13.56)	.77	.85	.85	.59
	When shopping, I compare prices to be sure I get the best value for my money	.70 (11.63)				
	When shopping, I try to maximize the quality I get for the money I spend	.80 (14.98)				
	When shopping, I try to get my money's worth	.82 (16.78)				
Perceived quality of in-store salesperson (Gensler et al., 2017)	The salesperson gave me useful information of the product I wanted to buy	.71 (11.99)	.80	.84	.85	.65
	The salesperson provided friendly and responsive service	.84 (16.07)				
	I could trust the salesperson I talked to	.86 (14.32)				
Retailer trust (Lee et al., 2007)	I trust [XYZ]	.83 (17.81)	.83	.87	.87	.69
	I rely on [XYZ] retailer	.85 (19.03)				
	[XYZ] is an honest retailer	.81 (15.12)				
Retailer satisfaction (Lee et al., 2007)	I am satisfied with [XYZ] assortment	.77 (13.61)	.82	.86	.86	.67
	I am pleased with [XYZ] overall service	.84 (16.11)				
	In general, visiting [XYZ] is a satisfying experience	.85 (15.99)				
Retailer loyalty (Lee et al., 2007)	[XYZ] is my first choice to get information about this type of products	.75 (13.62)		.85	.86	.66
	I will visit [XYZ] next time I need a product of this type	.84 (17.90)				
	I will continue to be a loyal customer of [XYZ]	.85 (17.00)				

S–B χ^2 (137 df) = 191.34 (p < .00); BBNFI = .939; BBNNFI = .977; CFI = .982; IFI = .982; MFI = .934; RMSEA = .031

Note: CR=Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Discriminant validity of scales-correlations and AVE.

	VALCO	CROWD	SALESP	TRUST	SATIS	LOYAL
VALCO	.59	.01	.30	.34	.40	.39
CROWD	[-.00; .22]	.75	.01	.03	.02	.06
SALESP	[.46; .64]	[.00; .22]	.65	.49	.52	.38
TRUST	[.50; .67]	[.07; .29]	[.63; .76]	.69	.80	.69
SATIS	[.55; .71]	[.04; .26]	[.67; .80]	[.86; .93]	.67	.79
LOYAL	[.54; .70]	[.14; .35]	[.53; .69]	[.78; .88]	[.85; .93]	.66

Notes: Values in the diagonal are AVE; values above the diagonal are shared variances (squared correlations); values below the diagonal are 95% confidence intervals. VALCO = Value consciousness; CROWD= Perceived crowding; SALESP = Perceived quality of in-store salesperson; TRUST = Retailer trust; SATIS = Retailer satisfaction; LOYAL = Retailer loyalty.

Discriminant validity of scales-chi-square difference test.

	S–B χ2 covariance model equal to 1 (d.f.)	S–B χ2 difference (d.f.)
Satisfaction-Trust	219.82 (138)	28.48 (1)
Loyalty-Trust	250.86 (138)	59.52 (1)
Satisfaction-Loyalty	219.78 (138)	28.44 (1)

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