



# When showrooming is not a threat: Uncovering opportunities for showrooomer retention

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## ABSTRACT

Showrooming is an increasingly common behavior that challenges the profitability of store-based retailers when the purchase is done at a competing online retailer. However, showrooming can also be a loyal behavior, although few studies differentiate between loyal and competitive showrooming. This study aims to provide multichannel retailers with knowledge about how to retain consumers who enter their stores with the intention to showroom. To this end, the influence of situational variables and loyalty towards the retailer are considered. With information from 466 showrooomers and applying the fsQCA methodology, the results allow us to conclude that online price advantage and salesperson quality play a role in favoring loyal showrooming and preventing competitive showrooming respectively. Additionally, product category and the purchase device influence the transition from competitive showrooming intention to behavior. From these results, several managerial implications are proposed for store-based retailers.

## 1. Introduction

Consumer acceptance of online channels has prompted brick-and-mortar retailers to develop online sales channels, thus becoming multichannel retailers, i.e. retailers that sell both offline and online. Moreover, new digital channels and touchpoints such as smartphones, apps and social media have surged, multiplying the possible interactions between customers and retailers (Timoumi et al., 2022). In this context, consumers are able to cross from one channel to another during their purchase journeys, making cross-shopping behaviours such as webrooming and showrooming a common practice among shoppers. Webrooming means seeking information online and purchasing offline, whereas showrooming means getting information in-store and purchasing online (Flavián et al., 2020). Showrooming seems to be an upward trend; according to a study by Shopify (2022) in relation to purchasing behavior for the coming year, 53% of consumers would engage in this cross-channel behaviour.

Showrooming is, for brick-and-mortar retailers, one of the greatest challenges posed by the present retail environment; in most cases, the buyer visits a physical store, handles the products or requests the attention of a salesperson, but ends up buying online from a competitor (Wang and Wang, 2022). In fact, most studies on the subject equate the term “showrooming” with competitive showrooming and treat it a

threat to brick-and-mortar retailers (Dahana et al., 2018; Daunt and Harris, 2017; Rapp et al., 2015). However, showrooomers can use the same retailer’s physical and online channels; in this case, showrooming would not be detrimental to the retailer performance (Gensler et al., 2017). Accordingly, a distinction should be made between competitive and loyal showrooming depending on whether or not the consumer switches sellers at the time of purchase.

Despite the relevance of showrooming, little is known about how retailers should address this behavior (Fassnacht et al., 2019). Most studies that attempt to explain this phenomenon have focused on the intrinsic characteristics of the individual or on their evaluation of the online and offline channels (e.g. Dahana et al., 2018; Flavián et al., 2019). With the exception of a few authors (e.g. Gensler et al., 2017), research has largely ignored contextual factors, i.e. variables specific to the retailer and the purchase situation. Examining retailer and situational variables is important since they would affect the final decision of the potential showrooomer about where to purchase and are variables actionable by the retailers. Additionally, although some studies have examined how brick-and-mortar retailers can encourage potential showrooomers to buy in-store (Fassnacht et al., 2019; Schneider and Zielke, 2021), literature has practically ignored the investigation of the possibility that showrooomers purchase through the online channels of the retailer they visit. This study considers the possibility that brick-and-

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mortar retailers can retain showroomers who visit their stores, i.e. achieve loyal showroomers among their customers. The fact that a shopper who visits a brick-and-mortar store decides not to buy there but rather through the online channel of the same retailer is an increasingly feasible possibility as retailers offer customers increased opportunities to use online channels and devices in physical stores and provide paths to go from their offline to their online channels, thus, increasing channel integration. Likewise, another aspect that, to the best of our knowledge, the literature has ignored concerns determining whether competitive showrooming behavior is intentional, i.e. has been decided before entering the store, or non-intentional, i.e. it is decided as a result of the store visit. Consequently, there is a research gap concerning the extent to which the intention to engage in competitive showrooming can be reversed and transformed into loyal showrooming behavior.

This study aims to deepen knowledge of the showrooming process and to identify how multichannel retailers can respond to this phenomenon. More specifically we want to analyse to what extent the intention of competitive showrooming can be reverted by identifying the variables that intervene in the transition from intention to behaviour. Our research framework considers variables related to the shopping situation and the consumer-retailer relationship that are actionable by multichannel retailers, providing high managerial relevance to our findings.

To accomplish our research aim, we developed a research framework based on a literature review, and then collected showroomers' data through a survey. As the literature findings are inconclusive and showrooming behaviour is fairly complex, we used an open approach without imposing hypotheses for data analysis. This open approach is consequent with a research method such as a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). This method shows several solutions that allow us to identify the combination of variables that a multichannel retailer can trigger to transform the intention of competitive showrooming into loyal showrooming. These results contribute to the literature as they provide novel insights into the factors affecting a showroomer's decision between buying from a competing online retailer or through the online channels of the retailer visited to gather information. Furthermore, by focusing on the transition from intention to behavior, we provide support for the theory of time-inconsistent preferences as the findings show that shopper intentions can change based on situational variables.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Competitive (vs. loyal) showrooming

Showrooming strictly means looking for information offline and buying online, i.e. changing the channel between the search and purchase stages (Gensler et al., 2017). Many authors assume, when defining showrooming, that the online purchase is always carried out at a competing retailer (Chiou et al., 2012; Kang, 2018; Rapp et al., 2015). On this basis, most literature has treated showrooming as a negative behavior and a threat to brick-and-mortar retailers. However, showrooming does not necessarily have to be a negative behavior, since showroomers may buy online from the same retailer, in other words, they may switch channels but not sellers (Flavián et al., 2020; Gensler et al., 2017). There are several reasons why a consumer visiting a physical store might buy from that retailer's online channel rather than in-store, for example they may want more time to reflect, the store is crowded, or the online channel offers a wider assortment or a better price.

Therefore, it is important to be precise when defining showrooming behavior, and to distinguish between competitive and loyal showrooming. Before the term 'showrooming' were coined, Neslin and Shankar (2009) anticipated the importance of identifying loyal multichannel behaviours and differentiated between loyal research-shoppers and competitive research-shoppers. In the specific realm of

showrooming, we endorse the definition presented by Schneider and Zielke (2020), who defined competitive showrooming as searching for information offline at Retailer A's physical store and purchasing from Retailer B's online channel. In contrast, loyal showrooming, according to the definition postulated by Rejón-Guardia and Luna-Nevarez (2017), consists in obtaining information offline at Retailer A and buying online at Retailer A. The latter type of showrooming is not only not negative, because the sale is not lost, but can even be beneficial to the retailer, as previous research has shown that customers who use more than one channel of the same retailer during the checkout process represent the most valuable customer segment (Kumar et al., 2018; Kushwaha and Shankar, 2013). Based on the idea that showrooming can also be a positive behavior, Sit et al. (2018) carried out a qualitative study through the theoretical lens of customer experience in order to study decision activities and emotions in the development of showrooming behavior, thus identifying opportunities for retailers to retain such buyers.

More specifically, Table 1 summarises the scarce literature that has analyzed consumer decisions to engage in competitive showrooming versus loyal behavior, which may be in-store purchase (Fassnacht et al., 2019; Schneider and Zielke, 2021) or loyal showrooming (Frasquet and Miquel-Romero, 2021; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). The studies that have analyzed showrooming versus buying in store focus on offering the retailer specific tactics that can be used by salespersons to counteract the negative effect of showrooming, such as offering a price-match (Fassnacht et al., 2019), or evaluating the impact of service strategies (Schneider and Zielke, 2021). Literature also identifies distinct psychographic profiles between the loyal and competitive showroomer segments (Schneider and Zielke, 2020), and evidences the role that contextual variables referring to the specific shopping situation and the consumer-retailer relationship can play in a shopper's decision to switch supplier (Frasquet and Miquel-Romero, 2021). However, these studies do not consider whether the buyer entering a store is a convinced showroomer or an unexpected showroomer, in other words, the degree of intentionality of showrooming prior to visiting the store, an aspect that we consider critical when evaluating a retailer's capacity to manage showrooming. Additionally, although the studies reviewed were carried out for product categories such as consumer electronics or clothing, they did not analyze the impact of product category on showrooming. In conclusion, Table 1 shows a research gap related to how competitive showrooming intention translates into competitive or loyal showrooming behavior depending on situational and retailer variables.

### 2.2. Conceptual framework

The reasoning behind the choice of the variables under study in this paper rests on the theory of planned behavior (TPB). According to TPB, consumers' behavior is explained by their intention and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, competitive (vs. loyal) showrooming behavior would be explained by the intention to engage in competitive showrooming prior to visiting the store, as well as by factors that allow the showroomer to control the situation; these factors include smartphone use and interaction with salespersons. Smartphones allow consumers to acquire additional information such as product details and review, and compare prices among multiple retailers, while interaction with salesperson provides a bidirectional flow of information that may reduce purchase uncertainty (Rapp et al., 2015). However, as highlighted by Fassnacht et al. (2019), based on the theory of time-inconsistent preferences (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991), competitive showrooming intention may change due to the buying situation. This theory posits that a consumer's interaction with a salesperson or even just with the product can generate short-term emotional reactions that could modify the individual's initial preference, resulting in time-inconsistent behaviours. Being at the store, the individual's rational cost assessment that initially push him/her to engage in competitive showrooming, can be interfered by the cues provided by the salesperson,

**Table 1**

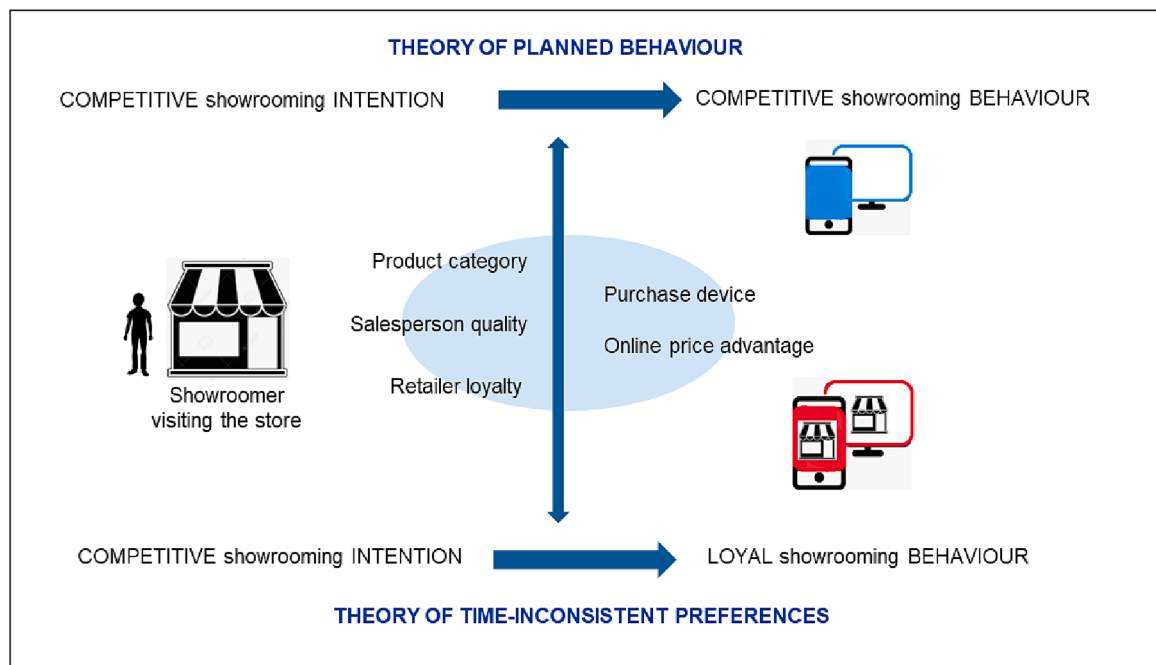
Summary of the related literature and contribution of this study.

| Authors (year)                    | Operationalisation of behaviour               | Related variables                                                                                                                  | Category studied                                             | Main findings                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fassnacht et al. (2019)           | Competitive showrooming/<br>Offline purchase  | Salesperson interaction quality<br>Price matching<br>Suggest another product<br>Explain return policy                              | Tablet                                                       | High interaction quality, price matching, suggesting a better product, is related to offline purchase                                                                                        |
| Schneider and Zielke (2020)       | Competitive showrooming/<br>Loyal showrooming | Price consciousness<br>Desire for social contact<br>Bad conscience<br>Devices<br>Time of purchase<br>Usage of in-store information | Electronic products                                          | Loyal showrooms use stationary devices to purchase, have high desire for social contact and search for personal information in-store. Competitive showrooms use mobile devices to purchase   |
| Schneider and Zielke (2021)       | Competitive showrooming/<br>Offline purchase  | Price difference<br>Price fairness perception<br>Service usage<br>Service availability<br>Service quality                          | Sport shoes                                                  | (Competitive) showrooming is related to price disadvantage of offline channel. Offline purchase is related to service usage, service quality and service availability (when quality is high) |
| Frasquet and Miquel-Romero (2021) | Competitive showrooming/<br>Loyal showrooming | Salesperson quality<br>Retailer trust<br>Retailer satisfaction<br>Retailer loyalty<br>Value consciousness<br>Store crowding        | Apparel and electronics but no analysis of moderating effect | Competitive (versus loyal) showrooming is related to store crowding, salesperson low quality, and low trust, satisfaction and loyalty                                                        |
| This study                        | Competitive showrooming vs. loyal showrooming | Competitive showrooming intention<br>Purchase device<br>Price advantage<br>Salesperson quality<br>Retailer loyalty                 | Experiential vs search goods                                 | ...                                                                                                                                                                                          |

making the individual change their mind.

Fig. 1 depicts our conceptual framework examining the factors that intervene in the showroomer's decision process. Showroomers, that is, those consumers who visit a store and then purchase online, could buy at the retailer's online channels (i.e. loyal showrooming) or at another

retailer's (i.e. competitive showrooming). The factors that may affect whether an intention of competitive showrooming becomes an actual competitive behaviour or a loyal showrooming behaviour are, as Fig. 1 shows: online price advantage, salesperson quality, device used for the purchase (smartphone or computer), product category and retailer

**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework.

loyalty. Next we discuss how each one of these factors could affect the showrooming process.

Existing literature indicates that showrooms' main motivation is their perception that prices are lower online (Flavián et al., 2020; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). This idea is consistent with Wang and Wang's (2022) recommendation that retailers themselves should choose to lower their prices when they know that their stores are frequented by showrooms. Most studies that have examined the influence of price on showrooming have considered perceptions or expectations regarding savings in online channels (Flavián et al., 2020; Gensler et al., 2017), or consumer price consciousness (Arora et al., 2017; Dahana et al., 2018; Schneider and Zielke, 2020), corroborating the idea that showrooms are price-oriented buyers. However, few studies have considered the final price paid in a specific showrooming situation, which could reveal that showrooms actually pay higher prices on some occasions (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). For this reason, our research considers whether the final price paid by the showroomer was lower, identifying if this lower price was offered at the online channel of the visited retailer or at a competing online retailer.

As argued by Gensler et al. (2017), without ruling out the motivation to obtain a price advantage, other factors such as product quality or salesperson service can influence showroomer behavior. In this sense, Schneider and Zielke (2021) show that low prices are important in the showrooming decision, but also that in-store service can partially offset the price advantage of online channels. Salesperson service in the store is therefore used as a powerful tool for tackling showrooming. However, the results found in the literature seem inconclusive. Gensler et al. (2017) were unable to validate the significant effect of salesperson quality, but they did validate the effect of salesperson availability. More recently, Schneider and Zielke (2021) reported that seller availability only reduces showrooming when good quality service is received. Along these lines, Fassnacht et al. (2019) showed that quality salesperson service can prevent the intention of showrooming from being carried out and encourage the consumer to buy in the visited store. Nevertheless, Frassetto and Miquel-Romero (2021) found that receiving either good quality or poor quality service can be related to competitive showrooming. Similarly, Wang and Wang (2022) conclude that the level of service can benefit both brick-and-mortar and online retailers, depending on travel costs. These apparently contradictory results would lead us to conclude that salesperson service quality can prompt some buyers to behave reciprocally and therefore buy from the retailer they visit, but for others it may increase the degree of perceived control thanks to the information offered by the salesperson, leading them to engage in competitive showrooming.

The convergence of online and offline channels has been favored by the increasing use of smartphones in the purchase process (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The results of the few studies conducted in this field point to a link between smartphone use and showrooming (Sit et al., 2018), with a higher probability of smartphone use leading to competitive showrooming (Schneider and Zielke, 2020). These authors found that the consumer segment that uses mobile devices the most to buy is the one more likely to purchase from another retailer. Punj (2022) evidenced that smartphone use during a visit to a store favors online shopping when the buyer has specific purchase objectives (i.e. save time or money), but favors purchases in the visited store when these objectives are more abstract (i.e. have fun). In fact, in-store smartphone use allows the buyer to not only read other users' opinions but also perform tasks typical of salespersons, being especially useful for consumers who avoid social interaction (Fiestas and Tuzovic, 2021). Of particular interest for the purposes of our research is the study by Viejo-Fernández et al. (2020), who highlighted that smartphone use prompts showrooms to pay higher prices because it stimulates impulse purchases, albeit only in certain product categories. Thus, smartphone use would affect a potential showroomer's decision on where to buy, as this device would facilitate access to additional information.

The literature suggests that when analyzing online shopping,

consideration should be given to the characteristics of the product, since these condition the usefulness of the channels at each stage of the purchasing process (Balasubramanian et al., 2005; Frassetto et al., 2015). Depending on the degree and ease to which product attributes can be evaluated prior to purchase, a distinction can be established between search or informational goods, which can be evaluated according to objective attributes, and experience goods, which can only be evaluated through the senses (Chocarro et al., 2013). For search goods, individuals can acquire full information on relevant product attributes before the purchase (Nelson, 1981), and verify their quality before buying them and it is cheaper to search for information on relevant product attributes than to sample the product via purchase, making the purchase decision less risky (Klein, 1998). However, for experience goods, individuals cannot really assess most of their relevant attributes until they buy or use the product; for this type of products, it is more costly or difficult to search for information on the relevant product attributes than to experience the product, making the purchase decision riskier. Although the products that require high sensory evaluation or trial before the purchase (i.e. experience goods) are less adequately represented online than those with standardised formats (i.e. search goods) (Grewal et al., 2004) interactive media can lower their information acquisition cost (Klein, 1998). Research on cross-channel behaviours that takes into account the type of product is not very prolific. Gensler et al. (2017) found that showrooming is more positively related to the category of computers (search good) than to the category of clothes (experience good). Guo et al. (2021) concluded that in the purchase of high-risk search goods (e.g. computers), the attitude is more favorable to webrooming, whereas for the purchase of high-risk experience products (e.g. clothing), buyers tend to engage more in showrooming.

To analyze the intentionality of competitive showrooming behavior, retailer loyalty is a factor that should be considered as it determines the costs of changing vendor (Ailawadi et al., 2001). Retailer loyalty captures the strength of the customer-retailer relationship as reflected in positive attitudes and behaviors (Dick and Basu, 1994). In the omnichannel environment, the abundance of stimuli prompts consumers to experience conflicting emotions that challenge their loyalty (Sit et al., 2018). Although Gensler et al. (2017) found no significant effect of loyalty on competitive showrooming, Frassetto and Miquel-Romero (2021) showed that the absence of loyalty is related to the latter. Among the segments of showrooms identified by Schneider and Zielke (2020), those with lower retailer loyalty are more price conscious, and have a lower level of desire for social contact and lower motivation to conform, which is associated with a higher probability of engaging in competitive showrooming.

All in all, the literature findings are inconclusive and evidence that showrooming behavior is highly complex. To investigate the showroomer decision process, we formulate the following research questions:

1. To what extent can multichannel retailers counter competitive showrooming intention and transform it into loyal showrooming behavior?
2. Which contextual factors (product category, purchase device, online price advantage, salesperson quality) determine whether or not competitive showrooming intention is carried out?
3. To what extent does a loyal attitude towards the retailer act as a deterrent to competitive showrooming intention or behavior?

### 3. Methodology

The information necessary to answer the proposed research questions was gathered through an online survey. The population was defined as individuals who, in the last six months, had engaged in showrooming behavior using their smartphone. The sampling procedure was by quotas according to age, gender of the interviewee and category of product purchased, specifically, search goods (appliances, computers, image and sound equipment), and experience goods (clothing, footwear

and sporting goods) were considered.

Field work was carried out through an online panel of consumers in Spain, managed by a market research company, in November 2021. The invitation to answer the questionnaire was sent to 1961 consumers, obtaining a final sample of 466 valid questionnaires. The socio-demographic profile of respondents was as follows: 49.4% were male; respondents were evenly distributed in the age brackets of 18–22 years, 23–35 years, and 36–55 years, while 6.1% were older than 55, being the average age 34.7 years; regarding educational level, 34.8% had completed primary or secondary school, and 65.2% held a university degree. According to the quotas established, each product category had a similar representation in the sample. The information requested from the interviewees referred to their last purchase as a showroomer in one of the categories of interest to the researchers. The scales used were obtained from the reviewed literature and were adapted, when necessary, to the research context. Competitive showrooming intention was measured based on [Schneider and Zielke \(2020\)](#), price advantage and perceived salesperson quality according to [Gensler et al. \(2017\)](#), and retailer loyalty based on [Zeithaml et al. \(1996\)](#). All these variables were measured through multi-item seven-point Likert-type scales. However, nominal scales were used to identify the type of device used to make the purchase (smartphone or computer), as well as where the purchase was finally made (online channel of the same retailer visited, i.e. loyal showrooming, or online channel of another retailer, i.e. competitive showrooming).

As mentioned, the analysis technique used was fsQCA. This technique, based on Boolean algebra and not on regressions, allows each case to be described as a combination of so-called causal conditions (in our study, showrooming behavior - loyal versus competitive, product category, purchase device, real advantage in online price, salesperson quality and loyalty to the visited retailer) and an outcome (intention to engage in competitive showrooming, which was analyzed in presence – having intention, and in absence – having no intention) ([Ragin, 2000](#)). The analysis of information based on logical and non-statistical procedures seeks “to establish logical connections between combinations of causal conditions and an outcome” ([Mendel, 2013, p. 25](#)). Three of the applications of the techniques encompassed within Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) are summarizing data, checking existing theories and testing conjectures formulated by the researcher ([Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009](#)). Through the application of fsQCA and taking as an outcome the intention to engage in competitive showrooming, we sought to “describe more synthetically the relevant empirical universe” ([Berg-Schlosser et al., p. 15](#)), test the two theories mentioned in the field of showrooming, namely if the intention is actually carried out (as the theory of planned behavior would advocate) or if it changes to a different behavior (as postulated by the theory of inconsistent preferences in time), taking into account, in this process, specific variables of the retailer and of the purchase situation which, in the researchers’ opinion, may be of decisive importance in the final decision. Thus, the above-mentioned applications together with the fsQCA assumptions regarding causal complexity, equifinality and causal asymmetry ([Woodside, 2016](#)) made this an appropriate technique to address the objectives of the study.

#### 4. Results

Before answering the research questions using fsQCA, and taking into account that the causal conditions considered included multi-item scales, we first analyzed their psychometric properties using the EQS 6.2 software. After verifying their validity and reliability (see annex), we calculated the mean value of each multi-item scale using SPSS Statistics 26, since fsQCA only allows causal conditions and outcomes measured on a single item. Then, we recoded the dichotomous variables (showrooming behavior - loyal versus competitive; purchased product - experience good versus search good; and purchase device - smartphone versus computer) to values one and zero. Finally, using the fsQCA

software, we calibrated the metric variables using the direct method. With calibration, the values of the variables were translated into fuzzy set membership scores, ranging from 0 (representing no set membership) to 1 (representing full set membership). The three cut-off points used for the calibration of each variable, shown in [Table 2](#), were the 95% percentile value for membership, the 5% percentile for non-membership, and the median for the point of maximum ambiguity.

In accordance with the recommendations for this technique ([Schneider and Wagemann, 2012](#)), the necessary conditions for the intention to engage in competitive showrooming were first calculated, considering both the presence of the outcome and its absence ([Table 3](#)). “A condition is necessary for an outcome if it is always present when the outcome occurs”, in other words, “the outcome cannot occur in the absence of the condition” ([Rihoux and Ragin, 2009, p. xix](#)). Taking into consideration the coverage and consistency levels of each causal condition considered, we concluded that the variables analyzed were not necessary conditions for either the presence (intention to engage in competitive showrooming) or absence (no intention) of the outcome. In no causal condition were the required consistency (0.90) and coverage (0.75) values achieved ([Ragin, 2006](#)).

Sufficient conditions were then calculated. “A condition is sufficient for an outcome if the outcome always occurs when the condition is present” ([Rihoux and Ragin, 2009, p. xix](#)). In line with the usual procedure, we based the results on the intermediate solution, which is obtained from the parsimonious and complex solutions through counterfactual analysis and is considered superior to both of them ([Ragin, 2008](#)). The intermediate solution shown in [Tables 4 and 5](#) shows the set of solutions – causal configurations – that were supported by a high number of cases in each outcome analysis (presence and absence of the outcome). As the complexity theory posits, a simple causal condition is rarely sufficient for the outcome to occur; sufficiency generally involves several causal conditions at the same time, i.e. causal configurations ([Woodside, 2014](#)). Each of the aforementioned causal configurations represents different patterns or situations associated with the specific outcome. Likewise, both tables also identify the core and peripheral conditions, obtained by comparing the intermediate solution with the parsimonious solution (which includes the most important causal configurations which cannot be left out from any solution) ([Pappas and Woodside, 2021](#)). The core conditions are causal conditions that are strongly related to the outcome and cannot be left out of the solution, whereas the peripheral conditions show a weaker relationship with the outcome.

[Table 4](#) shows the results for the presence of the outcome, i.e. for the intention to engage in competitive showrooming (results that together explained 60% of the cases). In this case, the seven solutions shown are core conditions, prompting us to conclude that all the identified patterns are especially relevant with respect to the intention to engage in competitive showrooming. [Table 5](#) shows the results for the absence of the outcome, i.e. not having the intention to engage in competitive showrooming (results that together explained 68% of the cases). In this case, of the five solutions shown, two – solutions 2 and 4 – are core, revealing their importance with respect to the phenomenon studied. For the set of solutions shown, in the case of both the presence and absence of the outcome, the levels of coverage and global consistency were adequate, exceeding 60% and 75% respectively ([Ragin, 2000](#)).

**Table 2**  
Thresholds used for calibration.

| Construct                            | 0.05<br>Full non-<br>membership | 0.5<br>Maximum<br>ambiguity | 0.95<br>Full<br>membership |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Competitive<br>showrooming intention | 1                               | 4                           | 7                          |
| Online price advantage               | 1                               | 5.5                         | 7                          |
| Salesperson quality                  | 3.66                            | 5.66                        | 7                          |
| Retailer loyalty                     | 3.25                            | 5.25                        | 7                          |

**Table 3**  
Necessary conditions for the outcome.

| Intention to engage in competitive showrooming |             |          | Non-intention to engage in competitive showrooming |             |          |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|
|                                                | Consistency | Coverage |                                                    | Consistency | Coverage |
| Experience product                             | 0.48        | 0.43     | Experience product                                 | 0.56        | 0.57     |
| Search product                                 | 0.52        | 0.51     | Search product                                     | 0.44        | 0.49     |
| Purchase device: smartphone                    | 0.52        | 0.49     | Purchase device: smartphone                        | 0.48        | 0.51     |
| Purchase device: computer                      | 0.48        | 0.44     | Purchase device: computer                          | 0.52        | 0.56     |
| Online price advantage                         | 0.79        | 0.65     | No online price advantage                          | 0.63        | 0.77     |
| No salesperson quality                         | 0.62        | 0.62     | Salesperson quality                                | 0.67        | 0.67     |
| No retailer loyalty                            | 0.61        | 0.63     | Retailer loyalty                                   | 0.69        | 0.66     |

**Table 4**  
Sufficient causal configurations for intention to engage competitive showrooming (outcome presence).

| Conditions (frequency cut-off: 1; consistency cut-off: 0.79) | Solutions <sup>a</sup> |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                              | 1                      | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    |
| Loyal (vs. competitive) showrooming behavior                 | ∅                      | ∅    | ●    | ∅    |      | ●    |      |
| Experience (vs. search) product category                     | ∅                      | ∅    | ∅    | ●    |      |      | ●    |
| Purchase device: smartphone (vs. computer)                   | ●                      |      |      | ●    | ●    | ∅    | ●    |
| Online price advantage                                       |                        |      | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    | ●    |
| Salesperson quality                                          |                        | ∅    | ∅    |      | ∅    | ∅    | ●    |
| Retailer loyalty                                             | ∅                      | ●    |      |      | ●    | ∅    | ∅    |
| Raw coverage                                                 | 0.13                   | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.20 | 0.08 | 0.10 |
| Unique coverage                                              | 0.06                   | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.05 | 0.01 |
| Consistency                                                  | 0.75                   | 0.83 | 0.81 | 0.72 | 0.85 | 0.85 | 0.85 |
| Overall solution coverage: 0.60                              |                        |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Overall solution consistency: 0.76                           |                        |      |      |      |      |      |      |

Note: All the solutions are core conditions.

<sup>a</sup> Black circles ● indicate the presence of a condition. Circles with “/” ∅ indicate its absence. Blank space means “do not care”.

**Table 5**  
Sufficient causal configurations for non-intention to engage in competitive showrooming (outcome absence).

| Conditions (frequency cut-off: 1; consistency cut-off: 0.82) | Solutions <sup>a</sup> |      |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                              | 1                      | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |
| Loyal (vs. competitive) showrooming behavior                 | ∅                      |      | ∅    | ●    | ●    |
| Experience (vs. informational) product category              |                        | ●    |      | ●    | ●    |
| Purchase device: smartphone (vs. computer)                   |                        | ●    | ∅    |      |      |
| Online price advantage                                       | ∅                      | ∅    |      |      | ∅    |
| Salesperson quality                                          |                        |      | ●    | ∅    |      |
| Retailer loyalty                                             | ●                      |      | ∅    | ∅    |      |
| Raw coverage                                                 | 0.19                   | 0.21 | 0.11 | 0.15 | 0.26 |
| Unique coverage                                              | 0.03                   | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| Consistency                                                  | 0.83                   | 0.81 | 0.86 | 0.81 | 0.79 |
| Overall solution coverage: 0.68                              |                        |      |      |      |      |
| Overall solution consistency: 0.78                           |                        |      |      |      |      |

Note: Solutions 2 and 4 are core conditions, and the rest are peripheral.

<sup>a</sup> Black circles ● indicate the presence of a condition. Circles with “/” ∅ indicate its absence. Blank space means “do not care”.

The first research question considered the extent to which multi-channel retailers can counter competitive showrooming intention and transform this into loyal showrooming behavior. For this purpose, it is first important to consider the data in Table 4, focusing on those solutions in which loyal showrooming behavior appeared (solutions 3 and

6). These results show that, although the individual initially intends to engage in competitive showrooming before visiting the store, they do not necessarily end up behaving as they intended. Therefore, we can affirm that the retailer of the visited store would have certain room for maneuver to act against showroomers who intend to purchase from other sellers. Secondly, and to complement these results, it is necessary to consider the solutions in Table 5 referring to the absence of the intention to engage in competitive showrooming. Solutions 4 and 5 in this table indicate that retailers can get showroomers with no clear intention to buy from one place or another, to eventually buy on their online channel (loyal showrooming). However, as evidenced in solutions 1 and 3, even when the individual does not have a clear intention to engage in competitive showrooming, visiting the store does not guarantee loyal showrooming.

The second research question sought to identify the situational factors (product category, purchase device, online price advantage, salesperson quality) that determine whether or not competitive showrooming intention is carried out. From the data in Table 4, we concluded that the intention to engage in competitive showrooming results in competitive behavior to a greater extent in the case of search goods (solutions 1 and 2) than in the case of experience goods (solution 4). Additionally, when there is an intention to carry out competitive showrooming, smartphone use is associated with competitive showrooming behavior (solutions 1 and 4 in Table 4), while computer use is linked to loyal showrooming (solution 6 in Table 4). An interesting aspect to note, beyond showrooming intention and behavior, is that the device mostly used to purchase experience goods is the smartphone (solutions 4 and 7 in Table 4, and solution 2 in Table 5), and no clear association was identified between the purchase of search goods and the purchase device used by the showroomer. The advantage in online price is undoubtedly an aspect that, when combined with other causal conditions, helps transform the intention to engage in competitive showrooming into loyal showrooming behavior; solutions 3 and 6 in Table 4 show that despite the fact that the individual intended to engage in competitive showrooming and salesperson quality was poor, the online price advantage could have prompted them to buy online from the visited distributor. Solution 2 in Table 4 also shows that, for loyal customers purchasing search goods, poor salesperson quality favors the development of the intention to engage in competitive showrooming. Moreover, the data in Table 5 allowed us to complete these results, providing information regarding the association of the situational and retailer variables with the non-intention to engage in competitive showrooming. The category of product to be purchased also plays a role when the individual does not intend to engage in competitive showrooming prior to visiting the store, with loyal showrooming behavior being associated with experience products (solutions 4 and 5). In terms of price, it is surprising to note that in three of the five solutions the consumers did not pay a lower online price. The lack of intention to engage in competitive showrooming together with the absence of an online price advantage is associated, in solution 1, with competitive showrooming behavior, and in solution 5, with loyal showrooming behavior. Furthermore, salesperson quality is not a factor that, in itself, determines behavior in the presence of an intention, since good service

at the point of sale leads to competitive showrooming behavior (solution 3 in Table 5), and poor service can lead to loyal showrooming behavior (solution 4). Finally, in the absence of intentionality, the data show that the use of a computer for purchasing is linked to competitive showrooming behavior (solution 3 in Table 5).

To conclude, the third research question focused on the role of attitudinal loyalty and whether this acts as a deterrent on competitive showrooming intention or behavior. From the data in Table 4, we observed that attitudinal loyalty does not curb the intention to engage in competitive showrooming, as reflected in solutions 2 and 5. Nor is loyalty associated with loyal showrooming behavior (solution 2). However, if an individual intends to engage in competitive showrooming and does not feel loyal to the distributor, they will end up engaging in competitive showrooming (solution 1, Table 4), unless the visited distributor offers an online price advantage, which will prompt them to buy on their online channel (loyal showrooming) (solution 6). The results of the analysis of the lack of intention to engage in competitive showrooming (Table 5), also point in the same direction: the lack of intentionality can come from both individuals loyal to the retailer (solution 1 of Table 5) and non-loyal individuals (solutions 3 and 4). Likewise, whether or not an individual ends up engaging in competitive or loyal showrooming behavior is not determined exclusively by whether or not they are loyal to the retailer, but rather by the combination of such behavior with other situational and/or retailer variables.

## 5. Conclusions

Showrooming, namely, using a physical store to obtain information about a product that will then be purchased online, has become one of the main threats for brick-and-mortar retailers. Very often, a showroomer who visits a store engages in competitive showrooming, i.e. purchases online from another retailer. Given that showrooming is here to stay, retailers would do better if, instead of rejecting it, they harnessed the opportunity offered by customers who walk into their stores seeking information (Viejo-Fernández et al., 2020). The showroomer can also decide to buy online from the same retailer if a series of conditions are met. Our study considered this approach and, as a novel line of research, sought to determine how, in the transition between the intentionality of showrooming and behavior, certain variables related to the purchasing conditions and prior links with the retailer can have an influence, driving consumers to purchase from one retailer or another. Thus, our study aimed to fill a gap in research on showrooming since previous studies have not taken into account the correspondence between intentionality and competitive vs. loyal showrooming behavior, as well as to provide conclusions of interest so that brick-and-mortar retailers can take advantage of the opportunity that showrooming represents.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes several significant contributions to literature on online and multichannel retailing by investigating showrooming behavior. Previous studies have mostly conceptualised showrooming as competitive, thus considering such behavior to be negative for retailers (Dahana et al., 2018; Daunt and Harris, 2017). However, showrooming can also be a loyal behavior if the consumer buys through the online channels of the same retailer they visit. Our research distinguished between competitive showrooming and loyal showrooming, which is an interesting contribution to the literature since few studies have made this distinction. Consequently, there is little empirical evidence on the variables that influence showroomers' decisions to engage in disloyal or loyal behavior. As shown in Table 1, some authors (Fassnacht et al., 2019; Schneider and Zielke, 2021) have analyzed competitive showrooming vs. in-store buying, but fewer have examined the decision to engage in competitive vs. loyal showrooming (Frasquet and Miquel-Romero, 2021; Gensler et al., 2017; Schneider and Zielke, 2020). This research focus is relevant since more and more buyers prefer to purchase

online even when they visit a commercial establishment, and it is of interest to know the opportunities that showroomers present for multi-channel retailers.

Our study makes a significant contribution to existing literature by considering the association between intentionality and actual behavior; only Fassnacht et al. (2019) have taken into account intentionality and behavior, but they did not consider the decision to engage in either competitive or loyal showrooming, but rather the decision to engage in competitive showrooming or buying in-store; hence, our study represents a novel line of research in this field. In this sense, our research would further support the theory of time-inconsistent preferences (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991) rather than the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) because our results show that the intention to engage in competitive showrooming can be influenced by situational factors, and result in loyal rather than competitive showrooming behavior.

Within this line of research, our study helps broaden existing knowledge on the impact of retailer-based and situational variables on showrooming, which have been scarcely considered in the literature, such as attitudinal loyalty towards the retailer, the purchasing device used, or the role of product category, among others. Thus, our results reveal the complexity of this behavior and show that retailer loyalty on its own does not have a deterrent effect on competitive showrooming intention or behavior. Similarly, however, the absence of loyalty can favor competitive showrooming behavior.

Likewise, we confirmed the importance of the online price advantage in showrooming reported in previous studies, but our results indicate that this price advantage can also be associated with loyal showrooming. We may also conclude that online price advantage is not such a determining factor for individuals who do not initially intend to engage in competitive showrooming.

We also know that the possibility of providing in-store services is one of the competitive advantages of brick-and-mortar retailers (Gensler et al., 2017; Wang and Wang, 2022) and according to our results, poor salesperson service will result in competitive showrooming behavior in individuals who intend to engage in such behavior if the visited retailer does not offer an online price advantage. We also confirmed the hypotheses presented in previous studies, namely that competitive showrooming is associated with smartphone use (Fiestas and Tuzovic, 2021), adding that loyal showrooming would be a more calculated decision since it is associated with buying on a computer. Finally, our research extends the findings of Gensler et al. (2017) to loyal vs. competitive behavior regarding the importance of considering the effect of product category, since we found that experience goods are more associated with loyal showrooming and informational goods with competitive showrooming.

### 5.2. Practical implications

Our results provide evidence that showrooming does not necessarily have to be perceived as a negative behavior. Retailers should focus on the opportunity that the showroomer offers when visiting the store because even when the individual intends to engage in competitive showrooming, the showroomer does not always end up buying online from another retailer. The findings allow to propose several lines of action for multichannel retailers to influence competitive showrooming intention and convert potentially disloyal showroomers into loyal ones. In most cases, offering a lower online price seems to be decisive for turning the showroomer into a loyal showroomer. In this sense, the online pricing strategy should be as attractive as possible to attract these showroomers. Although this may not always be feasible for the retailer's entire product assortment, special online price promotions could be offered for specific products, and salespersons could also offer showroomers a price match. If price match is avoided, retailers could offer exclusive packages whose price is not easily comparable with that of competitors. The role of salespeople in brick-and-mortar retailers could be critical in this issue. Salespeople should approach physical store

visitors, interact with them, and having been trained to identify the precise moment in which the customer is going to defect, inform him/her of a price advantage available on the retailer's own website or about an exclusive promotional package. Salespeople must be trained to offer a good shopping experience at the store because a poor customer service will lead to competitive showrooming if other retailer variables do not retain the showroomer, especially in the presence of showrooming intention. Salesperson quality together with other actions implemented by the retailer could also help strengthen customer loyalty, which is a key factor when it is absent; the retailer has to be aware that, although loyal customers will not ensure loyal showrooming, disloyal customers are more likely to be competitive showroomers, especially if they visit the store with the intention to just inspect and ask for information about the product. Offering a good shopping experience, a good in-store atmosphere, with personalised promotions or offering a gift card, could favor attitudinal loyalty. Smartphones can also play a role in that shopping experience. Considering that smartphones are linked to engaging in competitive showrooming intention, responsiveness, personalization and ease of use are three characteristics that should be properly performed by the brick-and-mortar retailer's website or app. According to [Zhang et al. \(2023\)](#) these are the three mobile-shopping service quality dimensions that have a direct influence on customer loyalty. Also the use of artificial intelligence chatbots offering a good service quality, and even presenting the previously mentioned price advantage or offer exclusive packages, could be considered.

Focusing on the type of product, retailers of experience product categories should pay special attention to smartphones, as their use is more related with this product category. Showroomers buying experience products will probably use their smartphones during the purchase process, which can be a threat for the retailer if the online price does not offer an advantage to the showroomer. Accordingly, if the online price does not offer the retailer a competitive advantage, smartphone use should enrich the showroomer shopping experience at the point of purchase. Particularly, retailers should work on offline-to-online integration, providing showroomers with inputs for their decision-making at the store that direct them towards the online channels of the firm. By facilitating within-firm cross-shopping, the multichannel retailer would enhance the shopper experience and increase the chances of customer retention. When using a smartphone at the store, consumers can achieve informational and entertainment benefits. The retailer should facilitate access to their online channels so that the showroomer can conveniently get additional product information on the website or app, to product reviews, and interact with a virtual assistant. As well, more advanced solutions like using augmented reality for a 3D vision of the product, gaming, and virtual reality would contribute to a more enjoyable shopping experience, to retain the shopper at the store and thus, increase the chances of conversion. For retailers selling search products, the device used, smartphone or computer, does not have a very decisive influence on showrooming behavior (competitive versus loyal) in the case of individuals with or without competitive showrooming intention. That said, as loyal showrooming is more related to the use of the computer, and information is more readily comparable when purchasing these product categories, we suggest that retailers offer clear and detailed information on their websites, links to comments on social networks, and virtual assistants to help consumers make more thoughtful decisions that can be made thanks to the use of a computer. For both types of products, retailers should be proactive to invite those indecisive shoppers to access a wider range online where they may find a suitable solution, and train their staff to detect when a shopper is not finding the specific product, size or model in the store to offer an online order from a hand-held device.

These proposals represent a significant effort of planning and managing the distributor's sales and pricing policy, paired with an adequate integration of new technologies into the business strategy. However, their consideration is crucial because they would allow to take advantage of the opportunity represented by the showroomer's visit to the

store. Showrooming is an increasingly common behavior and a change of the perspective in its analysis would allow the brick-and-mortar retailer to reap the benefits of showrooming instead of being damaged by it.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

This study is not without its limitations. Showrooming is a rather recent and complex behavior which can be impacted by many variables. A first limitation of our study regards to the choice of variables affecting showrooming. We deliberately focused on retailer-related and situational variables as our main aim was to provide retailers with evidence on actionable variables that help turn competitive showrooming intentions into loyal showrooming behavior. However, other variables should be considered in order to achieve a complete understanding of showrooming. Within retailer and situational-related variables, the retailer type or format could affect showrooming behavior, as shoppers will behave differently if they visit a large store carrying the full product ranges, or a smaller one with a more limited assortment. Our study was carried out in a developed country where shoppers have access to modern retail formats in every mid-sized town and online channels such as websites and apps are being used with increased confidence by a large consumer base. In developing economies, where the use of technological solutions is more recent, consumers are not that tech-savvy, so other variables than the ones considered in this study may be significant to understand showrooming. Although e-commerce is spreading fast in developing regions, consumers still perceive many uncertainties around online shopping; future research aiming to understand showrooming in developing economies should consider perceived risks associated with misuse of financial data or identity theft over the Internet, risks related to the product quality, or to the delivery process.

A second limitation of our study relates to the measurement of showrooming intentionality and behavior. We measured competitive showrooming intention and competitive (vs. loyal) showrooming behavior, as our aim was providing retailers with insights on how to convert potential competitive showroomer into loyal ones. However, considering loyal showrooming intention as well would have provided a more complete view of the phenomenon. Additionally, we did not consider other possible behaviors of shoppers such as purchasing in-store or not purchasing at all. Future studies should consider a wider set of behavioral responses of potential showroomers. Similarly, the impact on showrooming of other retailer-related and situational variables could be examined, such as the breadth of product displays or offline-to-online channel integration services.

Our findings suggest that product category characteristics (experience vs. search product attributes) affect showrooming intentions and behavior. Future research should look into more specific product categories, i.e. TV sets or phone chargers rather than consumer electronics as a broader category, to better identify the differences in search effort that products require.

Finally, academics could use other research methods to understand showrooming, such as in-depth interviews to uncover complex consumer motivations and reactions towards retailers' tactics, or experimental methods to explore the impact of retailer actions. In particular, the mixed findings regarding the influence of salesperson quality require further attention: investing in improving salesperson service in store entails high retailer costs whose benefits for counteracting showrooming require further investigation.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Alejandro Molla Descals reports financial support was provided by Generalitat Valenciana Presidencia. Alejandro Molla Descals reports financial support was provided by University of Valencia.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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