Webrooming: Digitally Facilitated Offline Shopping

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Abstract: Internet literacy over a while changed the way the customers are shopping and research strategies on multi-channels have been adopted by them before making a product purchase decision. Information and communication technology has amplified the webrooming behaviour of consumers where consumers research regarding the products online on a stationary or mobile device but purchase it from a physical store. Numerous bricks and mortar companies have established their online platform so that customers can go through the product details before purchase. This study focuses on the various determinants which help us to comprehend that what influences the webrooming behaviour of customers.

Keywords: Expensive products, Fear, Buying behaviour, Online search, Shopping, Sensory experience.

1. Introduction:

In consumer Decision-Making Process, information search is one of the initial stages where consumer tries to collect the information from both internal as well as external resources before making a purchase decision. Individuals engage in this behaviour to satisfy their need for information **(Browne et al. (2007).** Prior to buying products or service, buyers look for and gather important data and afterwards differentiate vendors based on this data to make the best purchase decision **(Park, Chung, & Yoo, 2009).** As per the world bank data, The highest number of internet users is in China with over 748 million users, whereas India stood second with over 455 million users followed by America which has 245 million users **(Dillinger, "List Of Countries By Internet Users", 2015**). Consumers are becoming smart and purchase products offline after searching it on an online platform, therefore, have embedded webrooming in their behaviour. Research prior purchase i.e. smart purchase provides consumers more satisfaction. Due to the rise in E-commerce, product purchase becomes easier and is just a few clicks away from the customer. As companies made product purchase easier still many customers prefer to purchase offline, but they collect all necessary information on a mobile or stationary device from various websites by comparing various products based on their specifications, ratings, reviews which are posted by companies or users of the product Despite collecting all the necessary information customers prefer to purchase products from an offline store. This paper aims to examine some of those determinants which lead the customer to purchase the product offline rather than E-commerce platform with ease.

2. Review of Literature:

This study intersects with the literature on research shopping, webrooming behaviour, customer satisfaction, online versus offline shopping and shopping pattern of customers where it has been identified that how their sensory experiences affect the purchase which is not possible in case of online shopping whereas education level also has a huge impact on the shopping pattern.

Choudhary *et al.* (2014) in a study revealed that most of the respondents prefer to shop online and they think that inability to touch and feel the product physically is one of the major reasons if a product is being purchased from an offline store. Listing product price online produce a positive impact on online shopping. Also, no significant relationship has been found between the educational qualification and online shopping whereas it has been found that gender has a significant relation with online shopping. The number of webroomers is more than that of showroomers (**Minh, 2015**). According to the study, companies are promoting their products on their websites and convince customers to visit their stores. It further describes that customers prefer company's website more than other available sources. Most of the customers preferred direct shopping (purchasing from store) in case of food items, electronics items as well as in the case of household products. Statistics of the study indicate that Google and Facebook are the most preferred websites for prices and product information. It is also found that those customers who purchase offline have a more positive feeling regarding product quality and feel comfortable and relaxed. In a study by **Nesar *et al.* (2016),** it is revealed that most of the respondents between 18-25 age are in favour of both offline and online shopping, also webrooming and showrooming behaviour is more frequent in this group. According to the research key driver for online shopping is an experience where some of the participants are those who only check prices of the product on different platforms to get the best deals. Based on ranking Flipkart followed

by Amazon then Snapdeal is the most preferred e-tailers for online shopping whereas, in case of offline shopping in-store discounts, product return policies and the feel of the product are the three major factors.

The shopping pattern of consumers of the U.S. and Korea, as well as their channel preferences for different segments, are revealed by **Park et al. (2018)**. According to their study, U.S. consumers opted for online information search i.e. they are comfortable with both online as well as offline sources whereas Korean consumers still prefer the traditional method. They prefer to visit the store in search of information regarding the product. **Fernández et al. (2018)** in their study found that those consumers having higher education which comprises of graduation, Post-graduation as well as PhD are webroomers and express research shopping behaviour in case of Technical Consumer Goods (TCG). Whereas non-qualified workers, as well as freelancers and Fashion product businessmen, exhibit research shopping behaviour. Middle-class man in case of FMCG sector exhibits different pattern of research shopping. This study also describes that research shopping is positively and significantly influenced by Information and Communications Technology

The study by **Hulta et al. (2018)** explains that the experience and expectations of customers are the key factors of customer satisfaction and play a major role when customer purchase products from an offline store. There is also a difference between the behaviour of customers having lower education and higher education. Customers with lower education are less comfortable with technology and are in favour of the traditional way of shopping by visiting an offline store. Whereas the majority of customers are comfortable with offline as well as online shopping channels. For males, when they purchase electronics products from an offline store, they are more positive for the overall quality of the product. **Jiang et al. (2019)** found that regional conditions of the offline stores affect online purchases. Offline product launch weakens the online purchase as the number of offline stores increases. Digital purchase of the product can be enhanced by launching the product in the region having the low intensity of offline stores

Flavián et al. (2019) focus on the factors that determine the satisfaction of the search process of consumers with webrooming. For purchasing a product money saving is also one of the key drivers for cross-channel shopping and satisfaction. Showrooming is being preferred when consumers want to purchase the product at a low price. In a further study by **Flavián et al. (2020),** it is confirmed webrooming is mostly preferred by participants over showrooming. It also has been found that internet search for accessing the information of the product is mostly preferred that visiting the offline store where in case of purchase it is the offline store which is preferred over the online purchase. In the case of webrooming, the perception of participants for making the right purchase is more than that of showrooming. But, in case of achieving a low price, the perception of making the right purchase is high for the participants who preferred showrooming.

3. Research Methodology:

To determine the webrooming behaviour of consumers well-structured questionnaire on the online form has been prepared. Initially, various research papers were discussed with the research guide. On that basis, the questionnaire has been prepared and after making appropriate modifications it has been shared with the target respondents. Purposive sampling method has been used. To filter the respondents a question was asked that whether they opt for both online and offline channels while shopping. The target respondents selected were those who buy products from both e-tailers and retailers.

Sample Size: Sample size comprises of 100 respondents and constitutes of both male and female consumers. 100 responses could be collected in 5 months due to the reluctance of people to give responses. As per **Roscoe (1975)** and **Sekaran (2003)** the rule of thumb states that sample size which is more than 30 and less than 500 is most appropriate for most research whereas larger sample size results in committing type II error.

Collection of Data: This study is based on primary data for which the well-structured questionnaire was prepared and then the URL link was shared with the respondents. In the questionnaire, there were total 18 questions out of which 6 were demographic variables and the rest 12 questions were asked to understand the webrooming behaviour. 5 point Likert's scale has been used to obtain the responses where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree. Respondents belong to the northern region of India.

4. Objectives of the Study:

1. To ascertain the reasons for webrooming.
2. To explore the variations in levels of webrooming product-wise.
3. To analyze the relationship between webrooming expensive products and sensory experience.
4. To analyze the association between webrooming expensive products and webroomers' occupation.

5. Hypotheses:

1. H_0.There is no significant relation between webrooming of Expensive Products and Sensory Experience.
2. H_0.There is no difference between webrooming behaviour of males and females in case of expensive products.
3. H_0.There is no relation between fear of receiving damaged product and webrooming for electronic products.
4. H_0.There is no significant association between webroomers' occupation and webrooming expensive products.

6. Scope of the Study:

People may search online but it is not necessary that they buy the products explored online from e-tailer as they have the options to go to the market and 'experience' the product in shops, stores or showrooms.

This study helps E-Commerce players to build strategies to compete with the retailers that 'what' - like Expensive Items, Electronic Items, fear of receiving damaged products and Sensory experience (**Choudhary et al. (2014),** brings the customer to the retail shop or store rather than purchasing it online even at a cheaper price.

7. Data Analysis:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

			Total
Gender	Male	66	100
	Female	34	
Age	18-24	3	100
	25-30	73	
	31-40	16	
	41-50	2	
	Above 55	6	
Occupation	Student	60	100
	Private Employee	23	
	Government Employee	6	
	Businessman	4	
	Others	4	
Monthly Household Income	Less than 50,000	32	100
	50,000-1,00,000	42	
	1,00,000-2,00,000	16	
	2,00,000-3,00,000	5	
	More than 3,00,000	5	

Interpretation: From the above data, it is evident that most of the respondents are in the age between 25-30 years i.e. 73 respondents, so many young respondents are shouldering the research whereas 66% of the respondents were male and out of 100, 60 of them are students and 23 of them are working as private employees and 42 % of the respondents belong to the group having a monthly household income of Rs 50,000-1,00,000.

Table 2: The Relation between Sensory Experiences and Webrooming Expensive Products

Correlations

		Sensory Experience	Research Online Shop Offline for Expensive Products
Sensory Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.433**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Research Online Shop Offline for Expensive Products	Pearson Correlation	.433**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation: Value of correlation is 0.433 which depicts that there is a positive correlation between sensory experiences and Webrooming behaviour. As the p-value is 0 at a significant level of 0.01. When the p-value is less than α-value i.e. $0.000 < 0.01$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. So, there is a significant positive correlation between Sensory experiences and Webrooming behaviour in case of expensive Products. A study conducted by **Choudhary et al. (2014)** has also

substantiated that most people prefer online shopping but if the product is being purchased offline it is because of the inability to touch and feel. Therefore, some customers prefer sensory experience before purchase. **Aw (2019)** has also confirmed in his study that customers seeking experience prefer to buy from shops or offline mode.

1. **To Explore the variations in levels of webrooming based on gender.**

Table 3: Relation between Sensory Experiences and Webrooming Expensive Products.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Research Online Shop Offline for Expensive Products	Males	66	3.58	1.290	.159
	Females	34	3.53	1.398	.240

Interpretation: Here out of 100 respondents, 66 were males and 34 were females. Mean of the responses for both the gender is close to 4 which is denoted as agree. So most of the respondents prefer to research online for an expensive product before purchasing it from an offline store. As the standard deviation of the responses of both male and female respondents are close to each other hence it can be assumed that it has equal variances.

Table 4 Webrooming Expensive Products

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	9	9.0	9.0	9.0
	Disagree	13	13.0	13.0	22.0
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	25	25.0	25.0	47.0
	Agree	19	19.0	19.0	66.0
	Strongly Agree	34	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Interpretation: Out of 100 respondents, 34% strongly agree whereas 19 % of customers agree that they research about expensive products online but prefer to purchase from an offline store. So most of the respondents prefer to research for information in case of expensive products. From the study of **Haas & Kenning (2014),** it can be ascertained that buyers while purchasing expensive products prefer to discuss with the salesperson.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test - Gender-Wise Webrooming Of Expensive Products

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Research Online Shop Offline for Expensive Products	Equal variances assumed	.995	.321	.165	98	.869	.046	.280	-.510	.602
	Equal variances not assumed			.161	62.2	.872	.046	.288	-.528	.621

Interpretation: From the independent T-test, the p-value is 0.869 because we have assumed that our variances are equal (refer table 4) and when it compared with the level of significance which is 0.05 at 95% confidence level. Here, the p-value is greater than α-value i.e. 0.869>0.05, we accept the null hypothesis. As we were trying to find out whether webrooming behaviour of males and females in case of expensive products is different or not. Hence, from

the test, it is clear that there is no significant difference between the webrooming behaviour of males and females in case of expensive products. Therefore, no variation has been found.

Table 6: Preferred Online Information Sources

Source	Percentage	Total Respondents
Company's Website	10	
Search Engine	28	
Customers Reviews & Rating on E-Commerce Websites	30	100
Youtube Videos	28	
Others	4	

Interpretation: From the above data customers reviews and ratings on E-Commerce websites is the most preferred source of gathering information regarding the product. Followed by Youtube - largest video sharing website and search engine which lists down the websites as per the search query and customers can select those which satisfies their need.

Table7: Reasons for Webrooming Explored

	Reasons for Webrooming	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Respondents
1	Online Reviews	2	2	11	42	43	
2	Ease of Collecting Information	2	1	14	42	41	
3	Fear of damaged receiving	14	22	16	22	26	
4	Quality issues	0	2	20	32	46	100
5	Post purchase Services	6	16	24	27	27	
6	Sensory Experience	7	6	25	29	33	
7	Payment phobia	25	28	19	17	11	

Interpretation: In the above table first two factors are related to search for information regarding the product. For which 85% of the population states that online reviews help them to make a purchase decision for offline shopping and in case of ease of collecting information, 83% of the respondents agreed that the online platform is the easy way to collect information regarding the product. But when questioned about the shopping 48% of the population opted that they shop offline because of the fear of receiving damaged products from the online store and when quality is taken as a factor 78% of the respondents have quality issues. They find it difficult to determine the quality of a product online whereas only 2% of the population have no almost negligible quality issue. After purchasing the product, some products require post-purchase services which hinder 54% of the total population and they prefer to purchase the product from the offline market. So that post-purchase services can be availed easily. One of the most important factors is Sensory experience which plays an important role while purchasing online and from the above data 62% of total population preferred sensory experiences before purchasing the product and sensory experiences are not possible in online shopping. This acts as one of the driving factors that bring customers from the online platform to offline and last but not the least is payment phobia. Some products require online payment and many E-tailers don't support cash on delivery which also leads customers to purchase a product from an offline store after searching it on an online platform.

Table 8: Webrooming Product Wise

Type of product	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Respondents
Apparel	6	9	18	26	41	
Electronics	10	21	20	23	26	100
Medicinal	6	9	13	26	46	

Interpretation: From the data 67% of the total population webroom in case of apparel whereas 15% disagree. There may be several reasons for webrooming (like sensory experiences, Quality issues etc.) mentioned in the table number 8. In the case of Electronic products the population who agreed to research online and shop offline is 49% whereas 31% disagree for the same. In the case of medicinal products, the rate of webrooming is quite high i.e. 72% while 15% of the population disagree. So, the level of webrooming is high in the case of medicinal products.

Table 9: The Relation between Webrooming and Fear

Correlations

		Wbrooming for Electronic Products	Damaged Product
Webrooming for Electronic Products	Pearson Correlation	1	.614**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Webroom because of the fear of Receiving Damaged Product	Pearson Correlation	.614**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation: From the obtained data, the value of correlation is 0.614 which represents a positive correlation and significant value i.e. α is 0.000. Here, the p-value < α-value (0.000<0.01). Which means we reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. So there is a significant correlation between the webrooming behaviour of customers i.e. searching online and shopping offline for electronic products and fear of receiving damaged products. From the study **(Aw, 2019)** it has been concluded that customers prefer to webroom when they want to purchase a product that requires high involvement such as electronic products and also where the expertise of salespeople is required to understand the technicalities and way of using the products.

Table 10: Webrooming Expensive Products * Occupation - Crosstabulation

			Occupation					Total
			Student	Private Employee	Govt. Employee	Businessman	Others	
Webrooming Expensive Products	Strongly Disagree	Count	6	1	0	1	1	9
		Expected Count	5.7	2.1	.5	.4	.4	9.0
		% of Total	6.0%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	9.0%
	Disagree	Count	7	5	1	0	0	13
		Expected Count	8.2	3.0	.8	.5	.5	13.0
		% of Total	7.0%	5.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.0%

	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	16	8	1	0	0	25
		Expected Count	15.8	5.8	1.5	1.0	1.0	25.0
		% of Total	16.0%	8.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%
	Agree	Count	12	4	1	1	1	19
		Expected Count	12.0	4.4	1.1	.8	.8	19.0
		% of Total	12.0%	4.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	19.0%
	Strongly Agree	Count	22	5	3	2	2	34
		Expected Count	21.4	7.8	2.0	1.4	1.4	34.0
		% of Total	22.0%	5.0%	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%	34.0%
Total		Count	63	23	6	4	4	100
		Expected Count	63.0	23.0	6.0	4.0	4.0	100.0
		% of Total	63.0%	23.0%	6.0%	4.0%	4.0%	100.0%

table 11 chi-square tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.352[a]	16	.787
Likelihood Ratio	14.018	16	.597
Linear-by-Linear Association	.119	1	.730
N of Valid Cases	100		

a. 18 cells (72.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36.

Interpretation: When the Chi-square test has been applied for webrooming expensive products and occupation. It has been found that p-value is 0.787 which is less than 0.05, This means there is no significant association between Webrooming expensive products and occupation. The reason for no association found can be because 60% of the respondents are students. They may not be buying expensive products because of less disposable income available to them.

8. Findings:
1. Sensory experiences influence the webrooming behaviour of customers. Hence customers prefer to touch, feel, sense the product before purchasing and thus may have adopted the webrooming behaviour.
2. Webrooming behaviour of males and females is the same in the case of expensive products. From the above-mentioned data, 53% of the respondents like to research about expensive products online and prefer to purchase the products from the offline store.
3. From the data, it has been identified that webrooming is highly influenced by the fear of receiving a damaged product. Feeling of receiving a damaged product may lead customers to purchase products from the offline store.
4. Occupation has no association with research shopping in case of expensive products.
5. Customers prefer to webroom in case of medicinal products as India is one of the largest producers of counterfeit medicine as per the report **Special 301 Report (2019)** released by **Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).** So this may be one of the reasons for searching medicinal products online and purchasing from an online store.
6. Reviews and ratings on E-Commerce websites are the most preferred source of gathering information regarding the product followed by search engine and Youtube.

9. Managerial Implications:
This study helps both online and offline retailers to build strategies to tap a segment who prefers to research about the product before purchase. After the lockdown phase, people will prefer online shopping. The e-tailers can enhance the range of their offerings and services. The scope of sensory experience may reduce post lockdown so e-tailers have big opportunity to widen the range of products. Shops, stores and showrooms can change the way they sell by also opting for providing online ways of informing the people about their offerings so that people can decide before visiting the retailers. Home delivery and other services need to be adopted by retailers for the convenience of customers. E-tailers need to focus on delivering expensive and electronic products with care and should make them

aware of the returning procedures and policies if they received a damaged product. They should make customers familiar with the process that how they pack expensive items and how much care has been taken to deliver the products. So that customer feels relaxed while ordering the products from an online store. Local distribution strategy can help to lower down the transportation risks of E-Commerce i.e. lower risk of receiving a damaged product. In case of offline stores and retailers who are into electronic products need to focus on the availability of salesperson who has requisite technical knowledge of the products as it can be adjudged from the various studies that many customers prefer to purchase electronic products offline where they want to seek advice from the salesman. From the study, it has been identified that customers prefer to webroom in case of expensive products and also prefer sensory experience, so retailers can tap such customers who likely to touch and feel the product which is not possible while purchasing a product online.

10. Limitations:

1. The data from only 100 respondents could be used in this study as people were reluctant to spare time to fill the online survey.
2. This study has not covered all the factors that result in webrooming behaviour of respondents.
3. The period of the study included lockdown from March 2020 hence lacks some major aspects which require interaction with people to understand the webrooming behaviour.
4. There may be chances that respondents are not filling responses properly because the study is being done during the period when the world is suffering from the global pandemic. **(World Health Organization (Regional Office for Europe), "Mental health and COVID-19", 2020)**

11. Scope for future research:

Further studies to understand the webrooming behaviour can be conducted on a large sample from different regions and different product categories. Quantitative exploration can be conducted along with qualitative exploration to understand the webrooming behaviour in depth. Webrooming behaviour pre and post lockdown can also be compared to ascertain the changes in the decision making process and preference for buying online or offline. Large sample size may also help in drawing better inferences.

12. Conclusion:

This study contributed to the segment who prefer to purchase a product from the offline store after researching it on an online platform. Where gender has no impact on the behaviour but the factors like senses (desire to touch, look and feel the product) and those which are not in control of the customers influenced this behaviour. Customers are sensitive towards making a purchase decision for electronic products from E-Commerce platform due to the fear of receiving a damaged product which is uncontrolled variable for customers and may result in a bad experience with the online shopping. Also, retailers can tap the segment who prefer physical experience with products prior purchase, as well as many customers, are interested to discuss with the salesperson before purchasing an expensive product as well as electronic products.

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