Webroomer customer experience in the multichannel retail purchase journey

Experiência do cliente do Webroomer na jornada de compra no varejo multicanal

Gabriela Pastre
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5305-5222
Mestre em Administração. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) – Brasil.
gabriela_pastre@hotmail.com

Martin de La Martiniere Petroll
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7280-9202
Doutor em Administração Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR) – Brasil.
martin.petroll@ufsc.br

João Coelho Soares
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3278-0844
Mestre em Administração. Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina (UNISUL) – Brasil.
joaocsoares88@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims an analysis of webroomer customer experience investigating the stages of the purchase journey and decision making, as well as customer touch points and emotions experienced. This study is based on a qualitative approach and used electronic diaries produced by participants during their purchase journey, and by subsequent in-depth interviews. Data were collected from a sample of eight webroomers who purchased furniture or home decoration items. Thematic analysis revealed that negative experiences were mainly reported at brand-owned touch points. Negative emotions prevailed during the "evaluation of alternatives" stage, due to perceived contrasts between information obtained online and from physical stores. This study analyzed the factors underlying webrooming from a customer experience perspective, as well as holistically by combining cognitive and often neglected affective elements at the different touch points of real purchase journeys. We investigated (to our knowledge for the first time) the webroomer customer experience during the purchase journey in the multichannel context both from a rational (decision-making process stages) and emotional perspectives.

Keywords: webrooming; purchase journey; touch points; emotions; customer experience.

RESUMO

O estudo objetiva investigar a experiência do cliente do webroomer através dos estágios da jornada de compra, bem como dos pontos de contato e emoções vivenciadas pelos clientes. Este estudo se baseia em uma abordagem qualitativa, faz uso de diários eletrônicos alimentados pelos participantes durante a jornada de compra e de entrevistas em profundidade. Os dados foram coletados de uma amostra de oito webroomers que compraram itens da categoria de móveis, decoração ou ferramentas. A análise temática revelou que as experiências negativas foram relatadas principalmente em pontos de contato de propriedade da marca. As emoções negativas prevaleceram durante a fase de "avaliação de alternativas", devido aos contrastes percebidos entre as informações obtidas online e nas lojas físicas. Este estudo analisou os fatores subjacentes ao webrooming de uma perspectiva holística da experiência do cliente, combinando elementos cognitivos e afetivos, muitas vezes negligenciados no estudo das jornadas de compra. Investigamos (até onde sabemos pela primeira vez) a experiência do cliente do webroomer durante a jornada de compra no contexto multicanal, tanto de uma perspectiva racional (estágios do processo de decisão) quanto emocional.

Palavras-chave: *webrooming*; jornada de compra; pontos de contato; emoções; experiência do cliente.

1 INTRODUCTION

The multichannel retail resulted in stiff competition and in a proliferation of touch points between consumers and suppliers (Arora and Sahney, 2017). Consumers can browse through online stores and subsequently buy from physical stores, a process known as webrooming (Flavián, Gurrea, and Orús, 2016).

According to Flavián, Gurrea and Orús (2016), webrooming has become the most frequent form of multichannel consumer behavior. A survey by the National Confederation of Shopkeepers and the Credit Protection Service (2017) revealed that 47% of Brazilian consumers with internet access always research online before shopping at a physical store. Although webrooming is more frequent than showrooming (the reverse process consisting of offline browsing followed by online shopping), it has received less attention by researchers. Kang (2018) specifically identified a lack of research into the factors influencing webrooming behavior.

Joint analyses of customer experience, stages and touch points should therefore produce a better understanding of purchase journeys (Følstad, Kvale, and Halvorsrud, 2013). A report on research priorities for 2018-20 by the Marketing Science Institute (2018) highlighted the need to investigate the entire customer journey as a way of revealing new insights into the paths taken by consumers. In addition, Chen, Cheung and Tan (2018) pointed out that identification and analysis of the complete purchase journey, including all touch points and stages, are potential research targets. Specifically, about the multichannel customers, Viejo-Fernández, Sanzo-Pérez and Vázquez-Casielles (2020) point out the need to understand the touch points used at each of the stages of the purchase journey and how they act in each of it.

Despite the growing importance of webrooming in retail, there are few studies that examine the webroomer consumer behavior in detail (Kleinlercher, Linzmajer, Verhoef and Rudolph, 2020). Flavián, Gurrea and Orús (2016) showed that webrooming improves consumer shopping experience before purchase (purchase intention), during purchase, and after purchase (satisfaction with search process and confidence in product choice). Flavián, Gurrea and Orús (2020a) advance the knowledge of multichannel customer experience by examining the impact of the multichannel behaviors on smart shopping perceptions and feelings. But they still signalize the importance to research about how specific multichannel behaviors affect customer experience. Viejo-Fernández, Sanzo-Pérez and Vázquez-Casielles (2019) found that negative emotions have a stronger negative influence on perceived value and satisfaction during webrooming in comparison to showrooming. However, little is known about the timing of manifestation of positive and negative emotions during the purchase journey, about possible frustrations at some point during the search process, or about how the emotions may improve the shopping experience at the pre-purchase, purchase, or post-purchase stages.

This study adopts a customer experience perspective and aims to investigate the stages of the purchase journey, analyzing touch points and emotions experienced by the consumer in the multichannel context of webrooming and provides an understanding of how webroomers behave and feel along the process of buying furniture, home decoration and tools, which stand out as webrooming targets in Brazil (Nielsen, 2016).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although new, the literature related to webrooming is already showing significant results. The first study of webrooming (Chiu, Hsieh, Roan, Tseng and Hsieh, 2011) revealed that webrooming intention is associated with the level of confidence of customers in their ability to process information from different channels, and with a positive perception of the physical store (better service quality and lower risks) compared to online shopping. Reid, Ross and Vignali (2016) found that webrooming is selected when the consumer is unable to perform a full product evaluation (clothing in their study) exclusively online. In addition, difficulty to estimate product dimensions and financial implications of the purchase (shipping, product returns, refunds, high online prices, and late refunding) were the main reasons for consumers to avoid online channels. Arora and Sahney (2019) results suggest that perceived search benefits online significantly determine consumers'

webrooming behavior. Flavián, Gurrea and Orús (2020b) observed the influence of mobile word of mouth (m-WOM), finding that that kind of WOM, when received at the physical store, was perceived as helpful by webroomers and affected their preferences and choices.

Viejo-Fernández et al. (2019) investigated the emotional aspects of the shopping experience and found that positive emotions have a greater effect on perceived value and satisfaction with the retailer when the purchase journey relies on two channels compared to a single one. They also showed that negative emotions during webrooming have a more negative effect on perceived value and satisfaction than showrooming, indicating the importance of their identification especially in the context of webrooming. Kleinlercher et al. (2020) study shows that the customers to engage in webrooming propensity is associated with their online versus offline shopping experience, where the increase in online store shopping experiences is negatively associated with the decision to use the webroom, while the increase in shopping experiences in the physical store is positively associated with webrooming.

Interest in customer experience grew due the increasing complexity of purchase journeys, number of available channels and multiplicity of interactions between consumer and company (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Although there is no consensus on the definition of customer experience (Jain, Aagja and Bagdare, 2017), here we adopt the proposal by Verhoef et al. (2009, p. 32) highlighting the interconnections among experience, purchase journey and emotions:

> The customer experience construct is holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer. This experience is created not only by those elements which the retailer can control (e.g., service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price), but also by elements that are outside of the retailer's control (e.g., influence of others, purpose of shopping). Additionally, we submit that the customer experience encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience, and may involve multiple retail channels (Verhoef et al., 2009, p. 32).

Our study also adopts the definition of customer purchase journey as "the process a customer goes through, across all stages and touch points, that makes up the customer experience" (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 71). The customer journey is a non-linear structure expected to "reflect cognitive, emotional, and behavioral drives" (Wolny and Charoensuksai, 2014, p. 319). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) classified the purchase journey into three stages: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. The pre-purchase stage covers all interactions with the brand, product and environment prior to the purchase. The purchase stage includes product choice, ordering and payment, involving interactions with the brand, product and environment. The post-purchase stage includes product consumption and use, engagement and possible service requests, covering the interactions after the purchase transaction itself.

About the model of consumer decision-making, an influential one is the five-step model (Engel, Kollat and Blackwell, 1978) postulating the stages of 1) problem recognition; 2) information search; 3) evaluation of alternatives; 4) purchase; and 5) post-purchase. It was the theoretical framework adopted in this study as it provides an appropriate account of consumer decision making in contemporary shopping environments (Ashman, Solomon and Wolny, 2015). The EKB model has been applied to online and multichannel purchase contexts (Wolny and Charoensuksai, 2014) and to showrooming behavior (Sit, Hoang and Inversini, 2018).

We also follow Lemon and Verhoef (2016) who defined touch points as places of interaction between customers and companies during the shopping process. They can be classified into the ownership categories of 1) brand (aspects of the marketing mix created and managed by the company itself); 2) partner (aspects of the marketing mix jointly created or managed by the company and partners); 3) customer (choice of payment method, creation of videos on products, etc.); and 4) social or external (third-party sources of information such as review sites and social media). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argued that the typology is useful for companies to identify relevant touch points and improve customer experience.

Studies on the purchase journey revealed valuable insights for both academia and companies. Wolny and Charoensuksai (2014) showed that a channel (online or physical) may appear during several purchase stages of the same journey, and be used in parallel with other channels. Another study (Vilppula, 2016) showed

that some consumers research products exclusively as a hobby or habit, while others purposely browse shops to obtain a full picture of prices and products. Purchase journeys can also go back and forth between decision-making stages, be interrupted and later reinitiated as a function of customer motivation, and not necessarily result in purchase.

Finally, a review of emotions during the purchase journey (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir, and Stewart, 2009) showed that affection, humor and feelings play important roles during all five stages of the consumer decision-making process. Sit et al. (2018) addressed emotions in a context of multiple channels (England participants in an consumer electronics context) and identified positive emotions (excitement and curiosity) mainly in the "problem recognition" and "information search" stages; negative emotions (confusion, overload, stress, disappointment and mistrust) mainly in the "evaluation of alternatives" stage, due to the variety of choices offered online and offline and price differences between them; mixed emotions (happiness, hesitation and confidence) in the "purchase" stage; and finally positive emotions (satisfaction) in the "post-purchase" stage.

The studies above suggest connections among customer experience, purchase journey and emotions experienced by customers. Here we investigate (to our knowledge for the first time) the webroomer customer experience during the purchase journey in the multichannel context both from a rational (decision process stages) and emotional perspectives.

3 METHODS

We performed a qualitative study, with data based on participants diaries and in-depth interviews. The study relied on intentional or purposeful sampling (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry Jr, 1989), as well as snowball sampling. Participants were selected based on pre-established criteria, that is, they were over 18, and planning to purchase furniture, home decoration or tools within a month, and Brazilians, since no previous webrooming study had been performed in the country, and culture is a possible influence on results (Kang, 2018). The final sample consists of eight participants, that were in the pre-purchase stage (thus allowing observation of the entire purchase journey), intending to buy a product within the stipulated value (R$100 funded by the authors), and practicing webrooming.

Personal diaries were created with the ExperienceFellow, a smartphone app already used in previous studies (Stickdorn and Frischhut, 2012; Muskat, Muskat, Zehrer and Johnswamy, 2013; Bosio, Rainer, and Stickdorn, 2017), where participants describe touch points, with the option of including photos, videos, and location regarding each touch point with retailers, and evaluation of the experience as positive, neutral, or negative. Prior to data collection, selected participants received a tutorial on using the ExperienceFellow app so that everyone was able to use it correctly. Participants were instructed to register all touch points with retailers and products throughout the purchase journey, as well as emotions they experienced.

At the end of the journey (about two weeks after the purchase, to allow for post-purchase activities), subjects were interviewed in-depth, using a semi-structured script, with items based on the literature, and refined in a pre-test with the same target audience. The purpose of interviews was to understand in more detail the information acquired through the electronic diaries. Seven interviews were conducted in person and one online (via Skype), with audio recorded with prior participant consent (participants were informed that audios would be used only for transcription and subsequent data analysis). Transcribed interviews were sent to participants to delete, modify, or add information via online messaging, such as missing emotions.

Thematic analysis was applied (Bazeley, 2013) with the diaries and transcribed interviews data, following the steps of open coding, axial coding, and framework development. The first stage codes transcripts into macro-questions (stages of the journey, decision-making process, and emotions); the second manually codes transcriptions as pre-defined by the literature into decision-making process (Ashman et al., 2015) and touch points (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016); and the third stage cross-tabulates decision-making activities with emotions. Emotions were classified as positive or negative according to the participants own narrative, i.e., whether they used a certain emotion to explain negative or positive moments.

4 RESULTS

Profiles of the eight anonymized respondents are shown in Table 1.

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Income	Education	Academic field	Main occupation
"I need to touch the product and compare online and in-store prices"	Flávia	25	Female	Married	R$2994,01-3992,00	Postgraduate	Public management	Work
	Luiza	24	Female	Single	R$1996,01-2994,00	Unfinished postgraduate	Innovation	Work
	Paulo	29	Male	Single	R$1996,01-2994,00	Postgraduate	Business	Study
"Warming up online, purchasing at the physical shop"	Caroline	21	Female	Single	Up to R$998,00	Unfinished graduate	Public administration	Study
	Bárbara	24	Female	Single	R$2994,01-3992,00	Graduate	Architecture	Work
"Online shopping is disappointing"	Natália	26	Female	Single	R$1996,01-2994,00	Graduate	Business	Work
	Juliana	25	Female	Single	R$2994,01-3992,00	Graduate	Business	Work
	Fabrício	19	Male	Single	Up to R$ 998,00	Unfinished graduate	Economics	Study

Table 1. **Participant profiles**
Fonte: Prepared by the authors (2021)

Most participants were female, single and completed higher education. Ages range from 19 to 29 years, and average age was 24 years. All participants had made purchases online at least once before. All participants except for Caroline and Paulo had a credit card. Grouping was based on the similarity of reasons for webrooming: (1) "I need to touch the product and compare online and in-store prices": subjects who left the online shopping environment after initial evaluations of alternatives, and decided to physically inspect products in at least one physical store and compare online and in-store prices; (2) "Warming up online, action at the physical shop": subjects who intended to research but not purchase online, and only wanted to know products offered in the physical store to prepare for the purchase (being afraid of being tricked by shop assistants at the physical store); and (3) "Online shopping is disappointing": respondents who migrated to physical stores after online search, as they experienced unhappiness in the online environment (distrust regarding delivery, delivery costs, and lack of products and models).

4.1 Decision-making process analysis

Touch points were analyzed for each stage of the decision-making process, as well as the emotions described in each stage.

4.1.1 Pre-purchase stage

Problem recognition: The two mentioned touch points are described in decreasing order of citations. All respondents internally assessed the possibilities of needs that could be satisfied by participating in this research, that is, satisfying the conditions of being an item of furniture, decoration or tools and under R$100.00. This touch point is classified as being owned by the client (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As exemplified by Flavia (who bought a throw blanket):

Question: How did you decide to buy this product?
Choice was based on the options you gave me, right? It had to be something for my home. And price had to be more or less the amount I wanted to spend. And I had been planning to buy a throw blanket for a while.

Two participants had help from peers (friends, spouses, and family members; social/external touch point) to identify a desired product. At this stage, only positive feelings were reported such as motivation (in conversation with peers and internal evaluation of the possibilities of product search and purchase), and confidence that they would find the desired product at the stipulated price.

Information search: Eight touch points were mentioned in this step. The most frequent was visiting online stores (confirming the first step of the webrooming sequence). This touch point was classified both as owned by partners (in the case of Google searches not managed only by the store) and by brand (online store itself). Natalia searched for online stores to seek information on whether prices of the desired product would be within the stipulated range. Participants also talked to peers (friends, spouses, and family; social touch point) to seek information about desired products.

Social networks kept by stores (touch points owned by brand) were visited for an initial appraisal of products. Paulo commented that he missed information on product prices on online store profiles. In addition to Google searches to find online stores, Google Maps was also used (touch point owned by partners). Flavia searched for stores discarding those too distant from her preferred location. Natalia mentioned her frustration with the lack of information on stores (photos, websites, etc.) from Google searches.

Store websites (touch points owned by brands) were also visited (website without e-commerce). Caroline was confused as to whether the website had a catalogue of available items in-store:

I found the site very elegant and beautiful. However, I did not find any catalogue. And then I thought "I'm going to click on the shopping basket icon". I clicked and it showed and empty basket. Then I was like, "Okay, where are the items?" (Caroline, bought a statuette).

Online ads (touch point owned by brand) in social networks were also used to search for information. They were seen as positive for as long as they provided new information and were not excessively displayed, otherwise subjects evaluated ads negatively. One of the participants visited blogs (social touch point, independent information source) only to seek information about the handling of the product. Fabricio used Google Images search (touch point owned by partners) to collect information on visually attractive products.

In this step a mix of positive and negative feelings were reported, including happiness (when finding the store location using search engines), excitement (when reading information about the product on blogs and social networks or through peers), disappointment (due to scarce returns from online searches, high shipping costs and limited information on the store website) and confusion (lack of understanding of product specifications online, and excessive number of products and models offered on social networks).

Evaluation of alternatives: Eight touch points were mentioned in this step. All respondents visited at least one online store (touch point owned by brand) to evaluate product alternatives. The reasons were diverse. A participant did not examine shipping terms and conditions due to having no intention of proceeding with a purchase, as she did not have a credit card and could not assess the product based on images alone. Another participant (Barbara) also made online searches as preparation work for purchases at the physical rather than the online store. Paulo also looked for products online to prepare for the visit to the physical store, as he thinks he is unsure about which products and models to select. Caroline likes to research online before visiting a physical store to avoid shops assistants' tactics:

Although I prefer to shop physically, I am a little shy. That's why I like to learn about the product on the internet, so that I'm already sure about it and make no mistakes. I am bad at saying no, I feel like I'm being disrespectful [to shop assistants] (Caroline bought a statuette).

The online environment was unpopular with some participants for various reasons. Flavia and Luiza did not purchase their products online and preferred to physically inspect the fabric items they planned to

buy, as they found online specifications hard to understand. When asked about how product description could be improved, Luiza said companies should use simpler terms:

> […] perhaps an easier description, such as "fluffy cushion, suede fabric, not so long nap", something like that (Luiza bought pillows).

Delivery was an additional concern about online shopping, as Luiza works and no one is available at home to sign for deliveries. Juliana reported that shipping costs were a major factor discouraging her from online shopping even when she was interested in a product, as they could be up to five times the price of the product itself. Caroline stated that she feels anxious about waiting for product delivery and with the possibility of getting something different from the expected, and thus, she avoids online shopping.

Another negative point was the inadequate information on product dimension in the online environment. Luiza suggested that products should be displayed in their context of use to facilitate understanding of their dimensions. By contrast, for Barbara the fact that online stores display products in isolation is a positive point: "Sometimes it is good to see the product on itself, independently. Sometimes a nice product is overshadowed by other items you don't want to buy" (Barbara bought mini statues). Paulo had to pause his online research due to the overwhelming number of available products:

> I saw a nice print, for example one with a bar scene, I thought it was great. Then suddenly I see another one with a Netflix theme and I thought that one is the best. […] And then I felt that the more I researched, the more doubts I was left with (Paulo bought a popcorn bucket and glass cushion).

Physical stores (touch point owned by brand) were also visited to evaluate alternatives. Flavia and Juliana went to various high street shops at this stage. Natalia and Luiza said they searched for physical stores to compare prices and options with online shops: "I wanted to look at the cushion, its size and so on. And price difference as well, which is important. Sometimes we think it's cheaper online, but it's not when shipping cost is included" (Luiza bought cushions). Paulo and Flavia were surprised by the difference between online and in-store products:

> I thought I would find it in almost any store I went, the product I wanted and as it was shown on the internet […] The blanket on the internet is very different from the one at the physical store. This shocked me (Flavia bought a sofa blanket).

Another interesting finding was from comparisons between online and in-store prices by the same retailer. Two participants were frustrated by not finding a product offered online in the physical store (since the website is a marketplace, participants did not verify whether the online product was sold by the retailer itself or a partner):

> I was frustrated because she [the mother] said she had found nice things at good prices. But I didn't see any of that. Perhaps the site said that it was only for shipping, but it was my mother who saw the product and I didn't even feel like getting back to them (Caroline bought a statuette).

Peers (friends, spouses and family members; social touch point) assisted in the assessment of alternatives. Store profiles on social networks (touch point owned by brand) were also visited by participants. Barbara reported that Instagram timelines influenced her choice of store and product.

Google Maps (touch point owned by partners) was used with different objectives. Caroline used it to find the name of a specific store, and Barbara to estimate the distance between the physical store and her office.

Ads on social networks and websites (touch point owned by brand) were used to evaluate alternatives. Fabricio received an ad and then decided where and which product model to buy. Store websites (without e-commerce) were also used (touch point owned by brand). Barbara comments on her negative experience and unhelpful research:

But on the website it was like this, just one page with "we sell this decoration item, or that one", and there was an armchair and something like that. But it didn't help me at all. That website is as useful as none (Barbara bought mini statues).

Google Images (touch point owned by partner) search was used by one participant (mentioned above in the description of the information search step).

At this step, there was a stronger indication of negative feelings mainly due to contrasts between virtual and physical product: disappointment (due to limited information available on website, contrast between virtual and real product, limited product range at physical store compared to online catalogue, online product or product model not being available at the physical store from the same retailer), frustration (with available models and reduced range both online and in-store, online product not being available at the physical from the same retailer), uncertainty (due to the excessive number of products and models on social networks and online stores) and irritation (due to the large number of online ads and difficulty to find the desired product online).

4.1.2 Purchase stage

All eight survey participants reported purchases at physical stores (touch point owned by brand), confirming the second step of the webrooming sequence (search online and purchase in-store). At this stage, comparisons between information from online and physical stores were reported. Fabricio was concerned that the website would be out of date regarding stocks. In addition, he compared products and prices from the same online and physical store but found no differences. At the purchase stage, buying intentions developed online were the basis for product selection at the physical store:

And then I already discarded the two glasses. Like it or not, having done all these online surveys, I had already decided what I wanted (Paulo bought a cushioned popcorn bucket and glass).

Juliana, Natalia and Caroline visited their selected store twice on the purchase day, as they wanted to collect initial information on products. Likewise, Barbara visited the store more than once, and took advantage of other trips to the store to browse for options. She only made the purchase when her sister joined her:

Because when I went to the shop, I kind of encouraged my sister to come along [...] So much so that the day I went to the shop without her I didn't buy anything, as I wanted to be with her. [...] But it was really nice when my sister joined me, as we spent a lot of time in the store choosing, thinking (Barbara bought mini statues).

The reasons participants chose a specific physical store were multiple: Barbara visited a store because its social network caught her attention. Flavia remembered a past shopping experience of her mother. Luiza and Paulo selected stores due to their location.

At this stage, only positive feelings were reported, including enthusiasm for the shopping experience at the physical store, and happiness and satisfaction with a good purchase. No participant reported negative emotions. All claimed to be very satisfied or satisfied with the product and store.

4.1.3 Post-purchase stage

Five touch points are described below. All respondents talked to their peers (friends, spouses and family; social/external touch point) about the selected store, purchased product and purchase process. Some participants also recommended their selected physical shops to peers. In addition, participants who had been sent online advertisements (touch point owned by brand) reported that they continued to be received even after the purchase at the physical shop.

Natalia returned to the physical store (touch point owned by brand) to browse for new products as her shopping experience was positive:

Then you get attached to the store when your experience is very positive. As in "I want to get back". But when I came back after the purchase, it was a much stronger feeling. "I want to go back to that shop just to take a look". It feels good when you see the store and go inside (Natalia bought a vase and a plant).

As for the online environment, only one participant (Caroline) posted online content (a photo of the product on her Instagram timeline; touch point owned by customer) after the purchase, without mentioning the store name. Juliana on the other hand explained the reason for not posting comments: "I didn't comment on anything, and I didn't post any comments on the shop website. I didn't do any research on the site and then I think I ended up forgetting to post something" (Juliana bought a shoe rack). As for social networks, Barbara continues to check for posts by the store (touch point owned by brand) to keep up to date with new releases.

At this stage the reported feelings were predominantly positive, all during conversation with peers, such as excitement (to use the product with friends), and confidence, satisfaction and happiness (approval of product by peers). The only negative emotion (discontent) resulted from the frequent online advertisements even after the purchase at the physical store (Luiza). No participant was completely satisfied with the shopping process. One case of dissatisfaction was the difficulty of finding the product at the physical store (Flavia), while the other mentioned online prices (Fabricio). The others were either satisfied or indifferent. Figure 1 shows that at the pre-purchase stage all participants internally assessed their needs and considered possible products for purchase. Except for Paulo, they searched for stores and products on Google, which was also used to evaluate alternatives. Purchases took place at the physical store, and the post-purchase stage mostly involved conversations with peers about products and purchase processes.

| Group | Subject | Pre-purchase | | | Purchase | Post-purchase |
| | | Problem recognition | Information search | Evaluation of alternatives | | |
		Internal assessment of alternatives	Online Google Stores	Online Google Stores	Physical Store	Conversation with peers
I need to touch the product and compare prices	Flavia	X	X	X	X	X
	Natalia	X	X	X	X	X
	Luiza	X	X	X	X	X
Warming up online, purchasing at the physical shop	Caroline	X	X	X	X	X
	Barbara	X	X	X	X	X
Online shopping is disappointing	Paulo	X		X	X	X
	Juliana	X	X	X	X	X
	Fabricio	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 1. **Summary of most used touch points at each stage of the decision process**
Fonte: Prepared by the authors (2021)

4.2 Discussion

Reid et al. (2016) proposed that the main reason customers avoid online channels at the purchase stage is the difficulty to evaluate product attributes in a virtual environment. In our study, a group of participants also practiced webrooming in order to physically inspect products ("I need to touch the product and compare online and in-store prices"). Reid et al. (2016) also pointed out that financial factors were another reason for avoiding online channels. In the narratives above, the only reason explicitly mentioned was the high shipping cost.

As Harris (2017), that pointed significant costs associated with online search (frustration and fatigue), this study also found negative emotions on information search and evaluation of alternatives online. Fabricio and Caroline faced difficulty in finding the product they wanted on the internet. Contrarily, but corroborating, Paulo experienced negative feelings as he was overwhelmed by the many possibilities of products online.

We suggest that companies should facilitate the online evaluation process. The participants in our sample were asked about possible changes to improve their online experience. They suggested short videos with products in their context of use to reveal their specifications more clearly. Natalia suggested online content describing how to use the advertised product, videos on product processing and delivery (how product is packaged and transported, as she was worried about the product being damaged), and shopping via messaging apps. Participants also expected integration of company channels, as well as a better match between online and in-store shops regarding product offer.

For this reason, physical stores should try to match online stores in terms of product selection, since the pre-purchase stage mostly takes place online. Hossain, Akter, Kattiyapornpong, and Dwivedi (2019) point out several dimensions to ensure multichannel integration quality (MCIQ), one of them is the Channel-Service Configuration (which includes make the customers aware of the other channels and ensure that all the channels provide some useful service). In the present research it was verified that positive emotions occurred from the discovery of physical channel browsing on the online store and negative emotions appeared when the customer did not see any value at the store website.

As previously shown by Ashman et al. (2015), Wolny and Charoensuksai (2014), Vilppula (2016) and Sit et al. (2018), we corroborated the five-stage decision model in the current multichannel purchase journey by webroomers. However, two stages happen simultaneously: "information search" and "evaluation of alternatives" in the pre-purchase stage.

Vilppula (2016) argued that the purchase journey can go back and forth between stages, take breaks, and resume when the customer finds something exciting. Accordingly, the "information search" and "evaluation of alternatives" steps swapped order several times. Pauses were also observed due to lack of participant motivation. For example, Caroline was frustrated by many unsuccessful searches, and only resumed active research after she identified an interesting physical store.

The analysis of touch points during the purchase journey identified the four types proposed by Lemon and Verhoef (2016). The touch points reported as inducing negative emotions were almost entirely owned by the brand, which highlights a great opportunity for retailers to improve costumer experience. As for the analysis of emotions, Sit et al. (2018) analyzed showrooming to reveal that respondents cited positive, negative and mixed emotions depending on the stage of the purchase journey and decision-making.

In our study on webrooming, positive emotions were reported more frequently during problem recognition, mixed emotions during information search, and negative emotions during evaluation of alternatives, and positive emotions also during the purchase and post-purchase stages. It is relevant that for both between-channels behaviors (showrooming and webrooming) negative feelings during evaluation of alternatives result in change of channel (and sometimes retailer) at the purchase stage. As proposed by Viejo-Fernández et al. (2019), positive emotions have a greater impact on perceived value and satisfaction with retailer when shopping requires more than one channel (research shopping). Therefore, it is important to identify areas of improvement (as causes of negative emotions) and points associated with positive emotions, which we identified predominantly at the problem recognition, purchase and post-purchase stages.

5 CONCLUSION

Our aim was to understand the webroomer customer experience in a multichannel context, based on a holistic perspective including all the stages of the purchase journey and decision-making process, touch points and experienced emotions. Qualitative analysis provided an understanding of customers' underlying reasoning for choosing a sequence of channels, in addition to providing an examination of symbolic and subjective elements of the consumption experience (emotions, perceptions and meanings).

This work brings as an academic contribution into the most frequent multichannel behavior in Brazil, webrooming. The qualitative analysis of this behavior can provide new insights to understand the customers' underlying reasoning for choosing the sequence of channels adopted, in addition to providing the exploration of symbolic and subjective elements of the consumption experience – emotions, perceptions and meanings attributed to the experiences.

At a managerial level, this study proposes a way for online retailers to turn visitors into customers. By identifying the touch points mostly associated with negative feelings, retailers can develop strategies to avoid online free-riders who only collect information about products without purchasing. It was seen that negative emotions predominate in the evaluation of alternatives stage. For strictly physical retailers, the identification of the exact location where negative feelings experienced by customers occur, and of their expectations, may facilitate the review or creation of strategies to avoid free-riding.

As for the study limitations, it was found during the in-depth interviews that participants showed a reduced vocabulary of emotions. Future studies should present a list of positive and negative emotions to assist participants. Regarding the sample, there was no differentiation between participants who frequently purchased the analyzed or similar products and might be more knowledgeable than others. Research contrasting high experience versus low experience groups may produce relevant findings on webrooming behavior. The sample is biased towards graduate people/higher education. Future studies should collect a more representative sample of the population. As only the webrooming behavior was investigated, a comparison between the emotions experienced and steps used by webroomers and showroomers can be carried out, in order to identify the particularities of each group, serving as a source of insights to increase knowledge of both multichannel behaviors.

REFERENCES

Arora, S., & Sahney, S. (2017). Webrooming behaviour: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, 45*, 762-781. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-09-2016-0158

Arora, S., & Sahney, S. (2019). Examining consumers' webrooming behavior: an integrated approach. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(3).

Ashman, R., Solomon, M. R., & Wolny, J. (2015). An old model for a new age: Consumer decision making in participatory digital culture. *Journal of Customer Behaviour, 14*, 127-146. https://doi.org/10.1362/147539215X14373846805743

Bazeley, P. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: Practical strategies.* London: SAGE Publications.

Belk, R. W., Wallendorf, M., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (1989). The sacred and the profane in consumer behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey. *Journal of consumer research, 16*, 1-38. https://doi.org/10.1086/209191

Bosio, B., Rainer, K., & Stickdorn, M. (2017). Customer experience research with mobile ethnography: A case study of the alpine destination serfaus-fiss-ladis. *Qualitative Consumer Research, 14,* 111-137. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1548-643520170000014009

Chen, Y., Cheung, C. M., & Tan, C. W. (2018). Omnichannel business research: Opportunities and challenges. *Decision Support Systems, 109*, 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2018.03.007

Chiu, H. C., Hsieh, Y. C., Roan, J., Tseng, K. J., & Hsieh, J. K. (2011). The challenge for multichannel services: Cross-channel free-riding behavior. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 10*, 268-277. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2010.07.002

Engel, J., Kollat, D., & Blackwell, R. (1978). *Consumer Behaviour* (3rd ed.). Hinsdale, Illinois: The Dryden Press, p. 665.

Flavián, C., Gurrea, R., & Orús, C. (2016). Choice confidence in the webrooming purchase process: The impact of online positive reviews and the motivation to touch. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 15*, 459-476. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cb.1585

Flavián, C., Gurrea, R., & Orús, C. (2020a). Combining channels to make smart purchases: The role of webrooming and showrooming. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 52,* 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101923

Flavian, C., Gurrea, R., & Orús, C. (2020b). Mobile word of mouth (m-WOM): analysing its negative impact on webrooming in omnichannel retailing. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management.*

Følstad, A., Kvale, K., & Halvorsrud, R. (2013). *Customer journey measures: State of the art research and best practices* (Research Report No. A24488). Oslo, Norway: SINTEF.

Harris, P. (2017). Multichannel shopping well-being: a narrative-based examination. *Qualitative Market Research*, 20, 354-369. https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0055

Hossain, T. M. T., Akter, S., Kattiyapornpong, U., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2019). Multichannel integration quality: A systematic review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 49*, 154-163. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.03.019

Jain, R., Aagja, J., & Bagdare, S. (2017). Customer experience: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice, 27,* 642-662. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-03-2015-0064

Kang, J. Y. M. (2018). Showrooming, Webrooming, and User-Generated Content Creation in the Omnichannel Era. *Journal of Internet Commerce, 17*, 145-169. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2018.1433907

Kleinlercher, K., Linzmajer, M., Verhoef, P. C., & Rudolph, T. (2020). Antecedents of webrooming in omnichannel retailing. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 3342.

Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of marketing, 80*, 69-96. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420

Marketing Science Institute. (2018). *Research priorities 2018-2020*. In. Cambridge.

Muskat, M., Muskat, B., Zehrer, A., & Johns, R. (2013). Generation Y: evaluating services experiences through mobile ethnography. *Tourism Review.*

National Confederation of Shopkeepers, and Credit Protection Service (2017). 47% dos internautas sempre buscam informações online antes de comprarem em lojas físicas, mostra levantamento do SPC Brasil e CNDL. Retrieved April 04, 2019, from https://www.cndl.org.br/noticia/47-dos-internautas-sempre-buscam-informacoes-online-antes-de-comprarem-em-lojas-fisicas-mostra-levantamento-da-cndl-e-spc-brasil/

Nielsen (2016). E-commerce cresce no Brasil principalmente para bens duráveis. Retrieved December 01, 2019, from https://www.nielsen.com/br/pt/insights/news/2016/E-commerce-cresce-no-Brasil-principalmente-para-bens-duraveis.html

Puccinelli, N. M., Goodstein, R. C., Grewal, D., Price, R., Raghubir, P., & Stewart, D. (2009). Customer experience management in retailing: Understanding the buying process. *Journal of retailing, 85*, 15-30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2008.11.003

Reid, L. F., Ross, H. F., & Vignali, G. (2016). An exploration of the relationship between product selection criteria and engagement with 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' in the consumer's decision-making process. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation, 17*, 364-383. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBG.2016.078851

Sit, J. K., Hoang, A., & Inversini, A. (2018). Showrooming and retail opportunities: A qualitative investigation via a consumer-experience lens. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 40*, 163-174. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.10.004

Stickdorn, M., & Frischhut, B. (2012). *Service design and tourism: Case studies of applied research projects on mobile ethnography for tourism destinations*. BoD–Books on Demand.

Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K. N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M., & Schlesinger, L. A. (2009). Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics and management strategies. *Journal of retailing, 85*, 31-41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2008.11.001

Viejo-Fernández, N., Sanzo-Pérez, M. J., & Vázquez-Casielles, R. (2019). Different kinds of research shoppers, different cognitive-affective consequences. *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC, 23*, 45-68. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-09-2018-0040

Viejo-Fernández, N., Sanzo-Pérez, M., J., & Vázquez-Casielles, R. (2020). Is showrooming really so terrible? Start understanding showroomers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 54*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102048

Vilppula, M. (2016). *Consumer purchase journeys in multiple channels: A consumer-centric approach*. Master Thesis, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland.

Wolny, J., & Charoensuksai, N. (2014). Mapping customer journeys in multichannel decision-making. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice, 15*, 317-326. https://doi.org/10.1057/dddmp.2014.24