Consumer Intention towards Webrooming Behavior in Emerging Economies: A Conceptual Framework based on Behavioral Reasoning Theory

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** Recent research about consumer webrooming behavior has conferred the importance and wide prevalence of this behavior and indicates the impelling need for the exploration of this emerging phenomenon in the omni-channel retail environment. The purpose of this study is to understand consumers’ reasons related to channel attributes, acting as determinants and resistance factors for the consumers’ intention towards webrooming behavior, based on the framework of the Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT).

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Using the framework of BRT, postulations related to webrooming behavior have been proposed. The postulations are based on the literature review on webrooming conduct in the omnichannel shopping scenario.

**Findings:** The proposed model imparts understanding about webrooming behavior on the basis of consumers’ reasoning and values underlying their attitude and intention towards webrooming behavior to provide a comprehensive view for understanding webrooming behavior in omni-channel retail environment.

**Implications/Originality/Value:** This study contributes to the literature on the important research area of changing consumer buying behavior due to transforming retail structure, herein, the webrooming behavior, in the context of omni-channel retailing, in emerging economies.

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**Introduction**

With the digitalization of traditional retailing structure, retailing trends have shown a drastic transformation from single channel to multi-channel and omni-channel retail structure (Flavián, Gurrea, and Orús, 2020). Due to this shift, the purchasing behavior of consumers has also converted from single channel shopping to cross-channel shopping behavior where the consumers use combinations of online and offline channels to get better knowledge about products for smart decision making and purchase experience (Flavián et al., 2020). Currently, the widely practiced
webrooming behavior has a significant impact on individuals’ purchase patterns (Flavián et al., 2019; Aw et al., 2021). In webrooming behavior consumers search and evaluate products at online channels but later move to physical stores for final purchase. With omnichannel retailing at global level, consumers are increasingly demanding impeccable shopping experiences across digital and physical channels, according to Sebald and Jacob (2020). Due to this, many challenges and pressures have arisen for purely online and offline retailers. To overcome these challenges and to align with the omni-channel retail landscape and changing consumer purchasing behaviors like webrooming in the market, many retailers are converting from single-channel strategy to multi-channel and omni-channel retail strategies in their businesses (Aw, 2019; Arora & Sahney, 2017; Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman, 2015). According to a consumer research report by JRNI (2019), 74% of consumers prefer to shop through webrooming behavior.

It has been shown that many Asian consumers follow webrooming behavior in their purchases (Aw et al., 2021). Pakistan is among the fastest-growing Asian e-commerce markets in the world. Alibaba Group is a giant online business in Pakistan. This trend has tremendously changed the purchasing behavior of Pakistani consumers as well. In Pakistan, about 89% of consumers search for women’s fashion wear, and 82% of consumers search for smartphones before closing the final purchase, according to www.brandsyanrio.com (2019). The ubiquity of webrooming behavior has greatly affected the dominance of e-commerce at global level. The giant online retailer Amazon has shifted to multi-channel strategy to overcome considerable losses in its sales (Aw et al., 2021). It has been found that 69 percent of smartphone-using Millennial consumers prefer webrooming behavior in their purchase process. Research has shown that consumer purchase behavior is influenced by attributes of shopping channels at different stages of decision-making process (Verhoef et al., 2015; Kang, 2018), such as unwanted free-riding behavior of consumers which is created by webrooming behavior as they may switch shopping channels and retailers during their purchase process (Heitz-Spahn, 2013). Despite an emerging phenomenon, there exists a paucity of literature on the important concept of webrooming with a consistent call for studies to explore and examine the determinants of webrooming behavior (Arora & Sahney, 2019; Aw et al., 2021). Existing studies have revealed valuable findings about webrooming in a single channel context but very little is known about “reasons” and values underlying consumer webrooming behavior in omnichannel shopping context.

Thus, the objectives of the present study are to (i) address the gaps discussed above by investigating and proposing consumers’ reasons that influence consumer webrooming behavior, utilizing theoretical model of the Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT) by Westaby (2005). BRT is extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). The concept of “reasons” gives unique understanding of underlying motivations behind specific behaviors of individuals but has not been addressed by behavioral theories other than BRT (Westaby, 2005). This gives rise to an important theoretical question because the concept of “reasons” has shown predictive validity in various contexts of judgment and decision-making (Pennington & Hastie, 1988; Westaby et al., 2005) (ii) What strategies the retailers can use to provide seamless shopping experience to the customers? Within the single framework of BRT, the study will examine how consumer ‘reasons for’ or drivers, ‘reasons against’ or barriers influence webrooming intention in omni-channel retail context. BRT has been recently utilized in various studies to examine behaviors in specific contexts, however, Behavioral Reasoning Theory has not been applied in extant literature on consumers’ webrooming behavior so far. This study is a pioneer study in utilizing BRT to address the theoretical gap in the literature on Webrooming Behavior. Hence, the theoretical and practical contributions of the present study are enhanced.

Rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, literature review related to webrooming is presented. Next, the conceptual model for this study, is proposed. After the proposed model, research methodology will be suggested, and anticipated results will be presented. Next to it,
discussion and implications will be presented. The paper will end with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

**Literature Review**

**Webrooming**

Webrooming has been claimed to be the most prevailing shopping behavior in this era of omni-channel retailing (Aw, 2019), and is anticipated to increase with passing time. Latest research has indicated that consumers use digital channels mostly for information search but switch to offline channels for final purchases. (Chou et al., 2016). The concept of ‘Research shopping behavior”, described as “the propensity of consumers to research about the product in one channel and then purchase it through another channel” is associated with webrooming (Verhoef, Neslin, and Vroomen, 2007).

Despite being a widely exhibited behavior, webrooming has been given relatively less attention in the research literature. A literature review on webrooming behavior is summarized in table 1 below, which presents different factors that influence webrooming behavior. It has been shown that need for immediate possession positively affect webrooming intention while motivation for efficient shopping, perceived cost of webrooming and bargain hunting negatively influence consumers’ webrooming intention (Aw, 2019). Perceived risks associated with online shopping motivate consumers towards webrooming behavior (Reid, Ross, and Vignali, 2016). Usefulness of online search has a negative impact on consumer webrooming intention. On the other hand, socialization and need for touch positively influence consumer intention towards webrooming. Other studies have also revealed different factors that influence webrooming behavior. However, the factors explored are not comprehensive in elucidating webrooming phenomenon. Hence, this study intents to examine antecedents of webrooming behavior based on the framework of behavioral reasoning theory (BRT), thus contributing to the existent sparse literature on webrooming in the omni-channel context.

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<td>Verhoef, Neslin, and Vroomen (2007)</td>
<td>Research-shopping phenomenon</td>
<td>Research-shopping behavior characterized by search online-buy offline phenomenon, is greatly prevailing cross-channel shopping behavior. Significantly influenced by channel benefits, consumers search product information at online channels but move to offline stores for final purchase.</td>
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<td>Chiu et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Cross-channel free riding conduct</td>
<td>Increase in consumer perception of multichannel self-efficacy leads to increase in free-riding behavior across channels. Consumers search for product information at digital channels because of lower costs but the competitors’ better offline service quality and lesser risk in purchasing at physical stores positively affect their cross-channel free-riding behavior.</td>
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<td>Heitz-Spahn (2013)</td>
<td>Cross-channel free riding behavior in a multichannel context</td>
<td>Customers’ need of product comparison, flexibility and convenience leads to cross-channel free riding behavior. Increased free-riding behavior results in negative consequences of multichannel retailing. Moreover, the cross-channel free riding behavior varies across different product categories but has no influence on sociodemographic variables.</td>
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<td>Wang, Malthouse, and Krishnamurthi (2015)</td>
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<td>Murillo (2016)</td>
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<td>Consumers motivated by price efficiency and product (clothing) comparison prefer showrooiming behavior, while consumer motivated by tactile judgement of the product (clothing) prefer to make purchases performing webrooiming sequence.</td>
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<td>Reid, Ross, and Vignali (2016)</td>
<td>Understanding webrooiming behavior based on Theory of Planned Behavior</td>
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<td>Aw (2019)</td>
<td>Impact of consumer motivations on webrooiming phenomenon</td>
<td>Negative association of consumer motivation for efficient shopping and bargain hunting, with webrooiming intention, has been reported. Moreover, webrooiming intention was positively affected by consumers’ need of immediate possession of the product and negatively affected by perceived cost of webrooiming.</td>
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<td>Flavián, Gurrea, and Orus (2019)</td>
<td>Influence of webrooiming behavior on consumer’s search process satisfaction.</td>
<td>Consumers feel more satisfied by performing webrooiming behavior instead of showrooiming behavior. Perception of money saving has significant influence on consumer satisfaction while time/effort saving has no effect on consumer satisfaction.</td>
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<td>Aw et al. (2021)</td>
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(Source: Authors’ compilation)

**Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT) as Underpinning Theory**

BRT explains that intentions towards behaviors in different contexts are extensively influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, described as global motives. An individual’s intentions and global motives are influenced by an individual’s reasoning, defined as “specific subjective factors people use to explain their anticipated behavior” (Westaby, 2005). An individual’s reasoning is influenced by his values and beliefs. Thus, the reasons create an important association between values, beliefs, global motives, and intentions for specific behaviors.
BRT dominates alternative behavioral theories like Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) because researchers have posited that theories like TAM, TRA and TPB cannot independently anticipate individuals’ behavior in effective manner (Calisir, Gumussoy, and Bayram, 2009). The concept of “reasons” gives unique understanding of underlying motivations behind specific behaviors of individuals but has not been addressed by behavioral theories other than BRT (Westaby, 2005). Research based on BRT has endorsed that conceptually distinct antecedents i.e., reasons for and reasons against a particular behavior can be examined within a single framework (Claudy, Garcia and O’Driscoll, 2015; Tudor et al., 2007). Secondly, theories, such as TAM and TPB can examine general beliefs of individuals about a specific phenomenon, or behavior, whereas BRT examines the antecedents of specific behaviors in specific contexts (Tudor et al., 2007; Westaby et al., 2010). BRT has been used to understand consumer behavior in varied contexts (Claudy et al., 2015; Gupta & Arora, 2017), which justifies and supports the logical application of BRT as underpinning theory to examine consumer webrooming behavior in this study.

The following section elucidates the theoretical rationale for the proposed linkages between constructs of the research model of the study.

**Postulated Research Model and Hypotheses Development**

**Attitudes and Intentions**

Attitude is defined as an individual’s judgement expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Intentions account for 28% variance in an individual’s behavior (Sheeran, 2002). BRT as well as other behavioral theories have affirmed that attitude significantly predicts intention (Basha & Lal, 2019; Tandon et al., 2020).

H1: Consumer’s attitude towards webrooming behavior will have a positive influence over webrooming intention.

**Reasons**

Reasoning is the process that individuals utilize to determine their actions and behaviors (Myyry et al., 2009).

**Reasons for Attitude and Intention for Webrooming**

‘Reasons for’ are the motivating factors which individuals can use in developing positive perceptions about a particular behavior. Extant literature has shown that haptic evaluation and sales staff assistance positively influence attitude towards webrooming (Aw, 2019; Arora & Sahney, 2018; Gensler, Neslin, and Verhoef, 2017).

**Haptic Evaluation**

Haptic evaluation is the active examination of product with hands to gather information about the product’s texture, weight, and other features (Peck & Childers, 2003). Haptic information required for product evaluation varies among consumers as well as product categories because of different tangible and evaluative attributes (Peck & Childers, 2003). Haptic evaluation helps consumers feel confident and at lesser risk about product selection and motivates consumers to switch from virtual channels after information search, to offline channel for final purchase (Mehra, Kumar, and Raju, 2018; Aw et al., 2021). Physical channels have advantage over digital channels as they offer haptic assessment of the products (Balasubramanian et al., 2005; Mehra et al., 2018).

**Sales-Staff Assistance**

Studies have shown that consumers prefer to be assisted by sales personnel during their buying process (Sharma & Stafford, 2000). In addition to family and friends, sales personnel are an
important source of product information and recommendations for customers in choosing better-fit products, mostly available only at offline stores (Mehra et al., 2018). Interaction with salespeople helps reduce consumers’ uncertainty and perceived risk in purchase activity. In-store sales staff assistance is a competitive advantage of offline stores over online stores and constitutes an important determinant of consumers’ positive attitude towards webrooming (Arora & Sahney, 2019).

In line with past literature, this study considers haptic evaluation and sales staff assistance as components of ‘reasons for’. Positive impact of ‘reasons for’ on consumers’ attitude and intention towards specific behaviors has been found in various domains (Claudy et al., 2015; Tandon et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be expected that ‘reasons for’ webrooming will positively influence attitude and subsequent intention towards webrooming behavior. Hence, it is proposed that:

H2a: Consumers’ ‘reasons for’ will positively influence their attitude towards webrooming behavior
H3a: Consumers’ ‘reasons for’ will positively influence their webrooming intention

Reasons Against Attitude and Intentions
‘Reasons against’ represent the constraint factors that can negatively influence an individual’s perception towards a certain behavior (Sahu, Khan, and Gupta, 2021). In the present study, factors of cost-saving and offline purchase effort, are taken as ‘reasons against’ attitude and intention towards webrooming behavior.

Cost-saving
Studies have shown that consumers search and compare prices on digital channels to find the best prices available for cost saving, before finally purchasing the product from offline store (Kim & Park, 2019; Bodur et al., 2015). Whereas, it has also been found that consumers first search for information about the products and their prices at offline stores and then switch to online channels for final purchase to avail price benefits available on digital channels (Gensler et al., 2017). Digital retailers can save the cost of store rent and other expenses incurred to run offline stores. Moreover, they can provide price benefits like offers, deals and discounts, which cannot be offered by offline channels, so consumers get inclined towards showrooming for greater financial benefits (Aw, 2019). The value barrier is generally related to the perceived financial loss suffered by the customer (Kushwah et al., 2019). Price differences between digital and physical channels in terms of cost-saving, can be a value barrier for consumers’ attitude and intention towards webrooming. Hence, consumer may prefer to purchase from digital channels if they expect cost-saving at digital channels as compared to offline channels.

Offline Purchase Effort
In this study, offline purchase effort comprises of perceived effort, time, and cost incurred by the consumers when shopping from offline channels. Consumers need to put more effort and time to purchase from a physical store as compared to purchasing from online channels (Lala & Chakraborty, 2015). For consumers who are motivated by shopping convenience, the nuisance of time and effort would act as constraints and would incur costs in an offline shopping tour, thus decreasing consumer attraction for offline buying (Wagner & Rudolph, 2010). Moreover, Boardman and McCormick (2018) found that young shoppers perceive purchasing from offline stores as tedious. Digital channels provide more enjoyable, and convenient shopping experience round the clock, 7 days of week, regardless of place or weather (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). It can be expected that if consumers perceive offline purchase effort to be high and a usage barrier towards offline buying, they may prefer shopping from online channels. Thus, offline purchase effort is considered an important component of the ‘reasons against’ webrooming behavior.

Studies have affirmed a negative relationship between ‘reasons against’ and consumer attitude and
behavioral intention (Claudy et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be set forth that ‘reasons against’ will have negative influence over attitude and intention for webrooming behavior. It is proposed that:
H2b: ‘Reasons against’ will have negative influence over attitude towards webrooming behavior. H3b: ‘Reasons against’ will have negative influence over webrooming intention.

Values and Reasoning
Values are cognitive patterns utilized by individuals to evaluate and respond to people, matters, and phenomenon (Schwartz, Sagiv, and Boehnke, 2000). Research has demonstrated that consumers justify adoption of a certain behavior based on reasons which are influenced by deep-rooted values they hold (Baker et al., 2004). Research has shown that shopping values influence consumer purchase behavior (Babin et al., 1994). Consumers prefer to make purchases from the shopping channel that is compatible with their values for shopping (Avnet & Higgins, 2006). For consumers who possess utilitarian values, shopping is an activity which they want to accomplish efficiently (Büttner, Florack, and Göritz, 2013).

Nonetheless, consumers can also experience smart shopping by integrating multi shopping channels in their purchase process (Aw, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to understand the association between values and the ‘reasons for’ and ‘reasons against’ the webrooming behavior. It is postulated that:
H4a: Utilitarian values will have a positive influence on consumers’ reasons for webrooming behavior
H4b: Utilitarian values will have a negative influence on consumers’ reasons against webrooming behavior.

Values and Attitudes
Values are the guidelines that influence individuals’ attitude which ultimately influence individuals’ distinct behaviors (de Barcellos et al., 2015). In BRT, Westaby (2005) described that attitude substantially determine intentions and behaviors across distinct disciplines. It has been validated that hedonic and utilitarian shopping values influence consumer purchase behavior (Babin et al., 1994). Importance of individuals’ values in determining their attitudes has also been endorsed by other behavioral theories, such as the TPB and TAM. Hence, it can be proposed that consumer values influence attitude towards webrooming. The following statement is hypothesized:

H5: Utilitarian values will have direct positive influence over attitude towards webrooming behavior.

Research Framework
Proposed Methodology
The model proposed in the present study needs to be tested for empirical validity. For this purpose, quantitative research based on survey should be conducted. A qualitative study can also be carried using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore deeper insights about the reasons acting as antecedents towards the webrooming behavior in omni-channel environment.

Discussion and Implications
This study contributes theoretically to the existing literature about webrooming behavior by examining consumers’ reasons influencing consumers’ webrooming intention in omni-channel environment. Utilizing BRT framework, this study has proposed hypotheses based on previous literature and calls for empirical verification of the proposed model. There has been a call for research to investigate and examine critical determinants of webrooming conduct (Aw et al., 2021). Existing studies have revealed valuable findings about webrooming behavior but there has been no study so far about consumer reasons that influence consumer webrooming intention in omni-channel context. This study is the pioneer study to utilize theory of BRT to examine webrooming conduct. The study accentuates that consumers’ “reasons” significantly influence attitude and intention towards webrooming behavior. The study reports that haptic evaluation of the products significantly motivates consumers towards webrooming behavior because it helps consumers to be confident about their purchase (Flavián, Gurrea, and Orus, 2016). The sales staff assistance helps consumers in better fit selection of the product by providing information about the products (Arora & Sahney, 2018). However, the impact of sales staff assistance on webrooming behavior needs to be explored and examined further as the relationship has limited and different findings (Aw et al., 2021). In line with previous literature (Juaneda-Ayensa, Mosquera, and Murillo, 2016), it is proposed that offline purchase effort negatively effects consumer webrooming intention. Similarly, conforming with past studies (Aw, 2019), it is proposed that perceived cost-saving has a negative influence on consumer webrooming intention have shown that digital channels offer greater price benefits, which impel consumers towards showrooming instead of webrooming behavior. However, the relationship between cost-saving and webrooming intention needs further investigation as studies have different findings.
The findings of this study are useful for the single and multi-channel retailers dealing with cross-channel purchase behavior of consumers, to devise and implement omni-channel retail strategies, in order to retain their customers. Webrooming behavior erodes the sales of online retailers (Chiu et al., 2011), so the online retailers need to implement strategies to create positive consumer attitude towards online buying, for instance, use of advance technologies like 3D videos, flexible zoom-in options and augmented reality could replace the tactile evaluation of the products and would make the purchase experience entertaining (Duarte & e Silva, 2018). Similarly, by providing instant digital customer assistance to provide product information and answers to queries of customers, online retailers can overcome lack of physical sales personnel assistance which motivates consumers towards webrooming. On the other hand, offline retailers can offer competitive price deals, discounts, and promotional offers to counter consumer perception of cost-saving available on digital channels. Moreover, offline retailers can make use of advanced technologies like mobile apps to help consumers locate retailers offering their desired products (Dekimpe, Geyskens, and Gielens, 2020) thus offering consumers a quick, convenient and efficient shopping experience.

Limitations and Future Research.
The present conceptual study lacks empirical evidence. The findings of the empirical study may vary from the expected results. The future studies can investigate the influence of other consumer reasons for/against attitude and intention towards webrooming. Besides consumer reasons, impact of other factors such as online customer reviews, product assortment and constructs related to latest technologies, can also be examined. Hence, the limitations in the present study offer many opportunities for future research to gain deeper understanding about webrooming behavior in omni-channel context.

Disclosure Statement
The authors report no potential conflict of interest.

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https://www.jrni.com/blog/webrooming-vs-showrooming


