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Unravelling Webrooming Behaviour: The Interplay of Affective Commitment, Consumer Empowerment, Attitude, and Product Involvement

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ABSTRACT
This study examines how affective commitment and consumer empowerment influence webrooming behaviour in the multichannel fashion retailing environment, considering attitude as a mediator and product involvement as a moderator. The stimulus–organism–response framework provides the theoretical basis. Using convenience sampling, data were obtained from 307 consumers who had recently purchased fashion products. Structural equation modelling and the PROCESS macro were used to analyse the responses. The findings indicate that affective commitment and consumer empowerment significantly influence consumer attitude and webrooming behaviour. Attitude also positively mediates the relationships linking affective commitment and consumer empowerment with webrooming behaviour. Furthermore, product involvement significantly moderates the relationships of affective commitment and consumer empowerment with attitude, as well as the relationship between attitude and webrooming behaviour.
By examining the increasingly prominent practice of webrooming in multichannel fashion retailing, this study contributes to the existing fashion-marketing literature.
Keywords: Affective commitment; consumer empowerment; product involvement; attitude

1. INTRODUCTION

Webrooming has become an increasingly familiar practice in contemporary retailing. As retailers adopt multichannel and omnichannel strategies, consumers engage in showrooming, in which they examine products in stores before purchasing online, and webrooming, in which online information searches precede offline purchases (Kang, 2018). Several developments have encouraged webrooming within omnichannel retailing (Verhoef et al., 2015). These include the growth of available channels (Kalyanam and Tsay, 2013), consumer demand for combined services, increased smartphone use (Wolny and Charoensuksai, 2014), and greater technological capabilities that allow shoppers to move between channels within a connected purchasing journey (Chiu et al., 2011). The apparel sector has also changed considerably as information technology has developed and internet access has expanded (Martins et al., 2019). Consumers can now select online or physical channels when buying fashion goods (Flavian et al., 2020). The Indian apparel market was projected to reach $96.47 billion in 2023, with an annual growth rate of 3.34% during 2023–2027. As smartphone use becomes more common during purchase decisions, webrooming is expected to expand; nevertheless, research on the practice remains limited, particularly for fashion apparel. Omnichannel commerce provides services across several platforms, enabling consumers to engage across channels while retailers coordinate those channels (Herhausen et al., 2015). Understanding why customers webroom is therefore important for fashion retailers and marketers. Earlier studies have considered free-riding characteristics (Heitz-Spahn et al., 2018), hedonic and utilitarian value (Jain, 2021), and product involvement (Aw, 2019), while webrooming continues to attract research attention (Arora and Sahney, 2019; Aw; Flavian, 2020).
A review of the literature suggests that the particular motives underlying webrooming among fashion consumers have received insufficient attention. Accordingly, this study evaluates affective commitment and consumer empowerment as influences on webrooming in multichannel fashion retailing. Affective commitment can shape channel selection because consumers' commitment to a purchase situation may affect whether they use an online or physical outlet (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2022). Consumer empowerment, meanwhile, concerns the ability to make decisions according to personal preferences. In channel selection, it reflects control over the purchase journey and the freedom to use different channels according to individual needs (Zhang et al., 2018).
The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model is adopted to establish the theoretical basis for examining this behaviour. Within the proposed model, affective commitment (AC) and consumer empowerment (CE) represent

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stimuli, attitude (ATT) represents the organism, and webrooming behaviour (WB) represents the response. Product involvement (PI) is included as a moderating variable.

The overall objective is to examine fashion consumers' webrooming behaviour within a multichannel environment. The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Do affective commitment and consumer empowerment, as stimuli, positively influence attitude and webrooming behaviour?

RQ2: Does attitude mediate the positive relationships between affective commitment and consumer empowerment and webrooming behaviour?

RQ3: Does product involvement positively moderate the relationships among affective commitment, consumer empowerment, attitude and webrooming behaviour?

Primary data were gathered from metropolitan cities in India using a non-probability sampling procedure. The findings offer theoretical and managerial implications that may help researchers, fashion retailers and fashion brands understand consumers' fashion-purchase objectives and formulate marketing strategies in this expanding market.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Stimulus–organism–response (SOR) framework

The SOR model describes behaviour through three consecutive stages. Individuals first encounter environmental or external stimuli (S); these affect their cognitive and emotional condition (O), which subsequently produces conscious or unconscious responses (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Previous research has established the usefulness of this framework for studying consumer behaviour in e-commerce and multichannel settings. Wu et al. (2023), for instance, applied the SOR framework to explain the relationships among channel characteristics, consumer regret, smart-shopping perceptions and continued webrooming intentions. The model is appropriate here for two reasons. First, it has frequently been applied to interactive consumption in online and offline environments (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016). Second, it helps explain how external conditions activate internal cognitive and emotional states that subsequently encourage cross-channel shopping (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2022; Arora et al., 2022). It therefore supports an examination of the sequential relationships among affective commitment, consumer empowerment, attitude and webrooming behaviour (Figure 1).

2.2 Application of the SOR framework to the present study

2.2.1 Consumer empowerment and affective commitment as stimuli

Consumer empowerment has been described in terms of providing individuals with authority to manage others (Cattaneo and Chapman, 2010). Wathieu et al. (2002) instead emphasised individuals' capacity to act according to their own preferences, obtain more information, make choices and exercise greater decision-making control. Within multichannel shopping, empowerment refers specifically to consumers' control over channel decisions and the shopping process (Zhang et al., 2018). Such control may encourage online information searching followed by purchasing in a physical store (Arora, 2022). Chiu et al. (2011) further suggested that cross-channel free-riding becomes possible when shoppers can determine how channels are used (Zhang et al., 2018).

Commitment, similarly, refers to a substantial emotional bond between people or other entities (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). In consumer research, affective commitment has been considered a stimulus (Jebarajakirthy, 2021; Al-kumaim, 2021) and may arise from cognitive evaluation or emotional attachment to a product (Geyskens et al., 1996; Wetzels et al., 1998). Consumer commitment encompasses emotional and continuance elements (Jones et al., 2010). The emotional dimension develops through common values and beliefs, generosity and interpersonal relationships (Fullerton, 2005), and is associated with the feelings underlying relationships (Yik and Russell, 2003). Consequently, consumers' emotional attachment to a fashion purchase may affect their decisions about searching and buying through physical or online channels (Jenkins and Molesworth, 2017; Brakus et al., 2009).

2.2.2 Attitude as the organism

Attitude has been recognised as an organismic condition in consumer research (Kaur et al., 2017) and as an important determinant of behavioural intention (Choi and Park, 2017). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) describe attitude as comprising cognitive, affective and conative or behavioural dimensions. Consumers' cognitive engagement becomes stronger when they are closely involved in a purchase decision (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 1996). Information-seeking shopping motives can likewise prompt consumers to develop product knowledge through online searching before making purchases through physical or digital stores (Aw, 2019). Consumer empowerment

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represents a favourable subjective state arising from greater perceived control over shopping (Zhang et al., 2018). It can therefore affect attitudes toward selecting online channels for information and offline outlets for purchasing in order to obtain shopping benefits (Arora, 2022).

2.2.3 Webrooming behaviour as the response

In this framework, webrooming behaviour constitutes the response associated with affective commitment to a product and consumers' control over channel selection. Existing literature suggests that webrooming involves a deliberate purchasing process: consumers collect online information before buying in a physical shop, examine the attributes of the products to which they are committed and assess whether prices fall within an acceptable range. Arora and Sahney (2019) explain webrooming as an outcome of balancing the advantages and costs of search and purchase channels. Flavián et al. (2020) examined combinations of channels and customer experiences and suggested that product commitment and control over the shopping journey encourage webrooming. In contrast to exclusively online or offline purchasing, webrooming is characterised by substantial product commitment and involvement. The SOR framework is therefore useful for identifying these characteristics and modelling how affective commitment relates to channel switching.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE HYPOTHESES

3.1 Webrooming behaviour

Webrooming represents a form of channel switching that follows two decision stages (Mukherjee, 2021): shoppers first use digital channels to investigate a product and subsequently complete the transaction in a physical outlet (Verhoef et al., 2007). Research has investigated the channel characteristics and motivations underlying this practice. Arora and Sahney (2019) observed that lower online search costs and higher perceived online purchase risk can encourage webrooming intentions. Physical stores, by comparison, enable immediate possession and direct product inspection, thereby reducing uncertainty and satisfying the desire for instant acquisition (Aw, 2019). Other studies have focused on consumers' shopping motives. Santos and Martins (2019) distinguished three webrooming categories according to the device used and examined information-processing motivations, including information attainment, price comparison and empowerment, together with uncertainty-reduction motives such as the need for touch, risk aversion and choice confidence. Information attainment related to every type of webrooming, whereas price comparison and empowerment were especially relevant to mobile-device use. Kang (2018) identified social interaction as another driver: virtual communities allow shoppers to exchange comments and messages, while physical stores provide the presence of sales personnel and other customers. Webroomers may also reduce uncertainty by reading online evaluations and testing goods in person (Flavián, Gurrea, & Orús, 2016). For multichannel retailers, consumers who interact with online and offline channels during the same purchase journey may represent a particularly valuable customer segment (Fernández, Pérez, & Vázquez-Casielles, 2018).

3.2Affective Commitment (Ac), Attitude (Att) And Webrooming Behaviour (Wb)

Affective commitment emerges from individuals' convictions about a particular context (Fullerton, 2005) and encompasses emotional connection, identification and involvement (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Strong emotional attachment has been associated with purchase intentions for luxury goods (Naderi, 2013) and with favourable attitudes toward searching for or buying products through online and offline channels (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021). The affect heuristics framework (Slovic et al., 2002), elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and exploratory consumer behaviour perspective (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 1996) indicate links among emotional commitment, attitude, the purchase situation and channel choice, including webrooming and showrooming.

Consumers with substantial product involvement often approach purchase decisions with stronger commitment (Damasio, 2005). Such involvement can promote central-route information processing and encourage additional online searches (Viejo-Fernandez et al., 2020). A strong attachment to the intended product may also reinforce a preference for completing the transaction in a store. Therefore, consumers emotionally committed to a purchase may investigate the product online and subsequently buy it in a physical outlet (Viejo-Fernandez et al., 2020). Based on dual-process perspectives, the study expects stronger purchase conviction to encourage this proactive cross-channel pattern. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Affective commitment positively influences consumer attitude toward webrooming behaviour.

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H1b: Affective commitment positively influences consumer webrooming behaviour.

3.3 Consumer empowerment (CE), attitude (ATT) and webrooming behaviour (WB)

Customer commitment comprises emotional and continuance components (Jones et al., 2010), with the emotional component associated with shared beliefs, values, generosity and interpersonal ties (Fullerton, 2005). In multichannel settings, the ability to select shopping channels reflects the degree of control consumers exercise over purchasing (Arora et al., 2022). Consumers who can exert greater influence over channel use tend to experience stronger empowerment (Cheah et al., 2020). Offering several channels allows retailers to provide additional resources and product information, reduce uncertainty and increase consumer control over the purchase process (Zhang et al., 2018). Chiu et al. (2011) argued that cross-channel free-riding occurs when shoppers can decide which channels to use. Hence, consumer channel choice expresses control over the shopping journey (Arora et al., 2022). Greater decision-making influence may reinforce empowerment (Cheah et al., 2020), and the ability to browse and search across retail channels can support more informed purchases and reduce ambiguity (Zhang et al., 2018). This control may encourage consumers to research a product online and buy it offline, or to follow the reverse sequence (Chiu et al., 2011). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H2a: Consumer empowerment positively influences consumer attitude toward webrooming behaviour.

H2b: Consumer empowerment positively influences consumer webrooming behaviour.

3.4 Consumer attitude (ATT) and webrooming behaviour (WB)

The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) proposes that attitude toward an action influences behavioural intention, which in turn precedes behaviour (Choi and Park, 2017). Attitude refers to favourable or unfavourable evaluations of performing a particular action (Ajzen, 1991). Other theoretical perspectives, including TAM and MGB, have also identified relationships between attitude and behavioural intention, including continued consumer intention (Davis, 1989). Access to several retail channels can foster favourable attitudes toward switching channels before purchasing online or offline. Commitment to a purchase and perceived channel attractiveness may further encourage positive attitudes toward buying through online (Park and Lin, 2020) or physical channels (Zhang et al., 2023). In particular, shoppers who view online searching followed by offline purchasing positively are more likely to undertake webrooming (Arora, 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Consumer attitude positively influences webrooming behaviour.

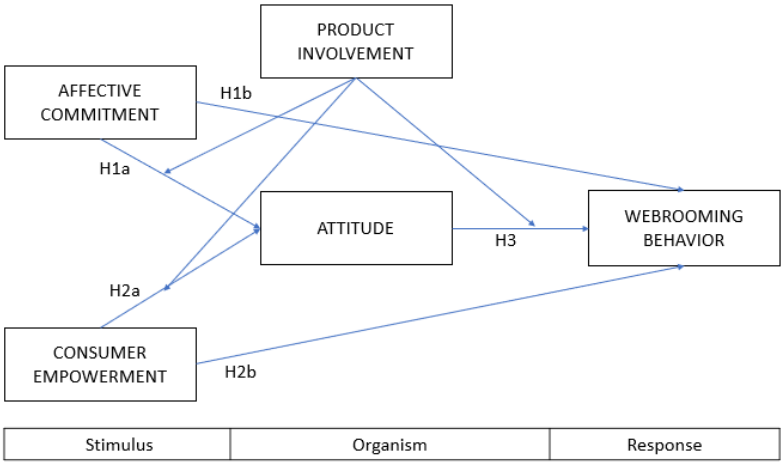
3.5 Product involvement (PI) as a moderator

Product involvement refers to the personal relevance of an object in relation to consumers' needs, interests and values (Zaichkowsky, 1985). When goods are considered important, relevant or costly, consumers generally become more engaged in purchasing decisions (Flavián et al., 2016). Prior studies have indicated that high-involvement purchases can encourage the use of multiple shopping channels (Frasquet et al., 2015). Shoppers may consequently seek further information across channels to enhance their control over purchasing (Flavián et al., 2019). The freedom to combine retail channels according to individual preferences can increase empowerment and lead to webrooming (Zhang et al., 2018). Online research before an offline transaction is particularly relevant to highly involving products (Arora and Sahney, 2019). Santos and Gonçalves (2019) similarly reported that consumers with greater product involvement are more inclined to search extensively across channels and ultimately purchase in a physical store. Product involvement therefore provides a motivation for online information gathering followed by offline purchasing when commitment to the product is high. The following moderation hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Product involvement positively moderates the relationships involving (a) affective commitment, (b) consumer empowerment, (c) attitude and webrooming behaviour.

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Figure 1. Proposed research model



4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data and sample

An exploratory research approach was employed to evaluate the proposed hypotheses concerning webrooming among shoppers in a multichannel retail context. Primary data were collected from Indian consumers through convenience sampling, consistent with previous work by Aw (2020) and Jain (2019). The study focuses on fashion apparel, a product category frequently associated with webrooming and multichannel shopping (Boardman & McCormick, 2018).

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered face to face at retail locations in five Indian metropolitan cities: Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi. Screening questions were used to identify eligible respondents, and participation was voluntary. Strict inclusion criteria were applied to select relevant and capable participants. More than 552 questionnaires were distributed; 307 usable responses were included in the analysis, representing a 55.6% response rate. This exceeds the 20% benchmark cited by Hair et al. (2015). Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (n = 307)

Masure	Items	Frequency	Per cent
Age in years	18-22	66	21.5
	23-26	55	17.9
	27-36	117	38.1
	37-46	59	19.2
	47 and above	10	3.3
Gender	Female	145	47.2
	Male	162	52.8
Education profile	Above Post graduate	79	25.7
	Below Graduate	56	18.2
	Graduate	73	23.8
	Post graduate	99	32.2
Occupation status	Govt. employee	54	17.6
	House wives	70	22.8
	Owned Business	21	6.8
	Private Employee	138	45.0
	Students	24	7.8
Family annual Income status	Below 5,00,000	10	3.3
	5,00,001- 6,00,000	60	19.5
	6,00,001- 7,00,000	144	46.9
	7,00,001-8,00,000	49	16.0
	8,00,001-9,00,000	20	6.5

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4.2 Measurement

The structured questionnaire incorporated previously validated measurement scales to assess the study hypotheses. To establish content validity, two marketing professors and two experienced senior marketers from the fashion apparel industry reviewed the instrument. Minor amendments were introduced in response to their suggestions. A pilot survey involving 37 respondents was then undertaken to examine validity and reliability. Following this test, additional small adjustments were made to address concerns relating to the respondent group, and the questionnaire was retained for the main analysis.

The instrument consisted of three sections. The first contained screening items, the second measured the study constructs—AC, CE, ATT, WB and PI—and the third gathered respondents' demographic information. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This commonly used format is straightforward to administer and interpret and can support response quantity and quality (Hair et al., 2015).

Affective commitment was measured with three items adapted from Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021), while the three consumer empowerment items were drawn from Santos and Gonçalves (2019). Four items measuring attitude were adapted from Arora and Sahney (2018). The three webrooming-behaviour items followed Goraya et al. (2022), and the four product-involvement items were adapted from Dahana et al. (2018). Structural equation modelling was used to examine the hypotheses, and moderation was assessed using the PROCESS macro (Hair et al., 2015).

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Common method bias

Harman's single-factor test was applied to assess common method bias (CMB). A single factor explained 40.703% of the total variance, which is below the 50% cut-off (Lavuri et al., 2022). Data normality was evaluated through skewness and kurtosis, with results falling within the recommended ±1 range. Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors; all predictor VIF values were below 3. These tests indicated no multicollinearity and did not identify a common method bias concern.

5.3 Measurement-model findings

The data were analysed using a two-stage procedure comprising assessment of the measurement and structural models. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) examined the correspondence between observed indicators and their constructs, as well as discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2015). The CFA showed satisfactory model fit: χ^2/df = 2.110, RMSEA = .044, TLI = .952, IFI = .962, NFI = .931, RFI = .913 and CFI = .962. These values met the recommended criteria (Hair et al., 2015), supporting validation with AMOS version 26.

Construct reliability and convergent and discriminant validity are reported in Tables 2 and 3. Convergent validity was assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Loadings ranged from .777 to .888, exceeding .70. Cronbach's alpha values were between .818 and .887, also above .70. Composite reliability ranged from .827 to .888, surpassing .60, while AVE values of .614–.727 exceeded .50. Together, these values met the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2015). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with its interconstruct correlations; the reported comparisons supported discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha

Measurement items/ Constructs	Mean	Std.Deviation	Factor loading	CA (>.07)
Affective Commitment (AC)				
I feel strong sense of belonging with purchased products drives me to search online before buy at store.	3.59	1.299	.871	.877
Purchasing product in store after searching online has a lot of meaning for me.	3.62	1.214	.875	
I buy emotionally attached products through webrooming.	3.54	1.360	.774	
Consumer Empowerment (CE)				

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I feel more empowered while using online channel for search and offline channel for purchase.	3.54	1.126	.786	.818
I can select product freely during the online channel for search and offline channel for purchase.	3.53	1.121	.789	
My leverage of online channel for search and offline channel for purchase has increased relative to the past.	3.37	1.180	.777	
Attitude towards webrooming (ATT)				
I have a positive attitude to use webrooming.	3.36	1.000	.799	.868
I think it is good to use webrooming.	3.56	.855	.786	
I think it is intelligent to use webrooming.	3.39	.958	.822	
I think it is beneficial to use webrooming.	3.46	.893	.760	
Webrooming behaviour (WB)				
I search/view products in online and then purchase products purchase at physical store.	3.49	1.184	.828	.887
I often browse online channels to investigate similar products before purchase at physical store.	3.67	1.160	.888	
I use a mobile device to compare prices of products online before purchase at physical store.	3.71	1.251	.841	

Table 3. Discriminant validity summary

S.No	Study Constructs	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4
1	Affective commitment	.707	.878	.841			
2	Consumer empowerment	.614	.827	.628	.784		
3	Attitude	.627	.87	.267	.276	.792	
4	Webrooming behaviour	.727	.888	.655	.691	.477	.852

Note: AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability.

5.4 Structural path analysis

Structural equation modelling was employed to test the proposed relationships. The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit, with $\chi^2/df = 2.576$, RMSEA = .031, IFI = .933, GFI = .915, RFI = .882, NFI = .909, TLI = .913 and CFI = .933, in line with the criteria of Hair et al. (2015). The study reported support for hypotheses H1 through H4. Affective commitment had significant positive associations with attitude (H1a: $\beta = .113$, $t = 2.782$, $p < .05$) and webrooming behaviour (H1b: $\beta = .380$, $t = 7.971$, $p < .05$). Consumer empowerment likewise positively influenced attitude (H2a: $\beta = .152$, $t = 2.698$, $p < .001$) and webrooming behaviour (H2b: $\beta = .543$, $t = 7.750$, $p < .05$). These findings indicate significant direct relationships between both antecedents and fashion-apparel webrooming (Table 4).

5.5 Mediation and moderation analyses

The mediating role of attitude in the relationships among AC, CE and WB was examined through bootstrapping in AMOS version 23.0 (Hayes, 2018). A total of 5,000 bootstrap samples were used to estimate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects. The reported findings indicated positive mediation by attitude between affective commitment and consumer empowerment and webrooming behaviour (H3: $\beta = .149$, $t = 2.842$, $p < .001$), as summarised in Table 4.

For moderation, PROCESS macro Model 14 was used to evaluate product involvement in the relationships involving affective commitment, consumer empowerment, attitude and webrooming behaviour. Standardised values were assigned to AC, CE, ATT and WB, followed by calculation and verification of the interaction terms

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(Butcher et al., 2017). Product involvement was reported to moderate the examined relationships: AC (H4a: β = .192, t = 3.260, p < .001), CE (H4b: β = .138, t = 2.511, p < .05) and ATT (H4c: β = .164, t = 3.713, p < .001) in relation to webrooming behaviour (Table 4).

Table 4. Structural paths, mediation and moderation results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Estimate	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1a	AC----> ATT	.113	2.782	p<.05	Yes
H1b	AC ----> WB	.380	7.971	p<.05	Yes
H2a	CE----> ATT	.152	2.698	p<.001	Yes
H2b	CE ----> WB	.543	7.750	p<.05	Yes
Mediation role of Attitude					
H3	AC, CE--->ATT ----> WB	.149	2.842	p<.001	Yes
Moderation role of Product involvement					
H4a	AC ---> PI ----> ATT	.192	3.260	p<.001	Yes
H4b	CE ---> PI ----> ATT	.138	2.511	p<.05	Yes
H4c	ATT ---> PI ----> WB	.164	3.713	p<.05	Yes

6. Discussion

Webrooming is an important form of cross-channel purchasing that has received attention from both researchers and retail practitioners. Understanding this behaviour is relevant to online-only, store-based and multichannel retailers seeking to respond to shopping patterns and improve business performance. The present findings carry implications for both research and practice.

6.1 Affective commitment, attitude and webrooming behaviour

The findings show that affective commitment significantly influences fashion-apparel consumers' attitudes (H1a) and webrooming behaviour (H1b), consistent with Naderi (2013) and Viejo-Fernandez et al. (2020). Emotional attachment to fashion products is associated with favourable attitudes toward a purchase and with decisions about which shopping channels to use. Consumers with high involvement may display greater commitment to product purchasing. Emotional attachment can also increase the preference for an in-store transaction because such shoppers seek tactile information unavailable through online channels. Accordingly, commitment to a fashion product may lead consumers to gather information online before purchasing it in a physical store.

6.2 Consumer empowerment, attitude and webrooming behaviour

Consumer empowerment also significantly affects attitude (H2a) and webrooming behaviour (H2b), in agreement with Cheah et al. (2020) and Arora et al. (2022). Fashion shoppers who are able to control channel selection during their purchasing journey tend to experience greater empowerment (Heitz-Spahn et al., 2013). Their ability to influence channel use reinforces this sense of control (Zhang et al., 2018). Such consumers may be more inclined to engage in cross-channel free-riding, including online browsing followed by offline purchasing or the reverse sequence (Arora et al., 2022).

6.3 Consumer attitude and webrooming behaviour

Attitude was reported to have a significant positive mediating role in the relationships between affective commitment, consumer empowerment and webrooming behaviour (H3), consistent with Park and Lin (2020) and Zhang et al. (2023). In multichannel fashion-apparel retailing, favourable attitudes can encourage consumers to use more than one channel before completing a transaction. Emotional commitment to the product and the attractiveness of available channels can foster favourable evaluations of purchasing online (Park and Lin, 2020) or in a physical outlet (Zhang et al., 2023).

6.4 Moderating role of product involvement

The moderation findings indicate that product involvement strengthens the examined relationships involving affective commitment (H4a), consumer empowerment (H4b) and attitude. It is also positively associated with the attitude–webrooming relationship (H4c). When shoppers attach greater importance to a product, they tend to explore several channels before selecting one for the transaction. This information-processing engagement is

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especially relevant to fashion apparel, where product characteristics and tactile evaluation matter. Consumers with strong product involvement may research online to reduce uncertainty before purchasing in a store (Shankar and Jain, 2021). Thus, involvement is considered to reinforce the connection between intentions and actual webrooming behaviour.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to knowledge of webrooming, multichannel fashion retailing and channel switching in several respects. First, webrooming intention presents a developing challenge for multichannel fashion marketers. Although prior research has examined the benefits and costs associated with different channels, investigations of webrooming intentions remain at an early stage (Aw et al., 2020; Flavian et al., 2020). It is therefore useful to examine psychological characteristics and consumers' inherent abilities as influences on webrooming in multichannel settings. By applying the SOR model, the present work investigates these psychological influences on cross-channel shopping behaviour.

Second, affective commitment represents a psychological process that can influence customers' selection of retail channels (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021). To the authors' knowledge, previous research has not specifically addressed emotional commitment to a fashion purchase as an explanation for webrooming intentions. The study responds by considering affective commitment alongside consumer empowerment and examining the moderating role of product involvement.

Third, the antecedents of webrooming have been investigated in other retail contexts (Arora and Sahney, 2019; Flavián et al., 2020), but fashion-purchase webrooming has received comparatively limited attention. Fashion shopping may involve extensive information searches and a high degree of product involvement, encouraging consumers to use digital sources to reduce uncertainty before purchasing in physical outlets. Examining webrooming through emotional commitment to a product therefore extends the fashion-retailing literature.

Finally, the control consumers gain from using multiple shopping channels may generate a sense of empowerment (Goraya et al., 2022). Empowered shoppers can combine channels to satisfy their preferences and engage in switching behaviour (Arora, 2022). Previous research has examined empowerment in relation to channel integration (Goraya et al., 2020), whereas the inherent consumer capabilities associated with webrooming have been less extensively considered. The study finds a significant influence of consumer empowerment on webrooming, strengthened by product involvement. It consequently develops understanding of multichannel shopping through the perspectives of empowerment and product involvement.

7.2 Managerial implications

Technological progress and growing competition have encouraged retailers to offer consumers multiple channels through which to complete purchases (Liu et al., 2018). Fashion retailers operating across channels therefore benefit from understanding when consumers prefer to combine online information searching with offline purchasing.

The findings are relevant to online-only businesses, physical retailers and omnichannel firms seeking to manage webrooming amid competition between digital and store-based retail. Consumers with strong emotional commitment to a product may search for information online and ultimately buy in a physical shop. For example, purchasing fashion items for an engagement, celebration or other special occasion may produce a strong emotional connection (Jebarajakirthy, 2022). Shoppers may first examine current styles and product alternatives online and then buy in-store if their expectations are satisfied. Physical and multichannel retailers should therefore recognise the needs of consumers strongly interested in particular products, provide digital facilities for accessing seasonal product-category information and train sales personnel to respond to customer value expectations (Rapp et al., 2009). Online-only and multichannel retailers should also make product details accessible, support authenticity checks and secure transactions, and use advanced chatbots to answer customer questions promptly (Shankar et al., 2021).

The results further suggest that highly empowered customers are more likely than less empowered customers to search online to maintain control of the purchase process before buying in a physical store. Accordingly, physical and multichannel retailers may adopt augmented- and virtual-reality technologies in stores to enrich the shopping experience. Online and multichannel retailers may also integrate personalised recommendation systems into their websites to offer tailored product suggestions, promotions and content to consumers who choose customised shopping experiences through data analytics.

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The findings additionally indicate that product involvement positively moderates the relationships of affective commitment and empowerment with attitude and webrooming behaviour. Retailers should therefore distinguish consumers with strong emotional product attachment from those with weaker attachment when considering the value of online reviews. Physical stores may offer fewer opportunities to access other shoppers' opinions, making online evaluations particularly useful. Offline and omnichannel retailers wishing to encourage webrooming can incorporate customer reviews into digital platforms and direct shoppers toward stores (Li et al., 2019). Conversely, online-only and omnichannel retailers aiming to complete transactions digitally can strengthen the usefulness of reviews, which may reduce the perceived need for physical inspection by making experiential products easier to evaluate before purchase (Park and Lee, 2009). Retail channel strategies should thus consider emotional commitment, consumer empowerment and product involvement.

8. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined affective commitment and consumer empowerment as determinants of webrooming behaviour, with attitude assessed as a mediator and product involvement as a moderator. Future work may consider consumer orientation, situational conditions, time perspectives and the integration of mobile channels and consumer touchpoints, including brand advertising. Because the data were collected only from Indian consumers, the research approach could also be applied in other countries to assess the wider applicability of the findings. Longitudinal or experimental studies may provide additional insight into fashion consumers' webrooming. Beyond product involvement, future investigations could examine consumer innovativeness, emotional attachment, perceived risk and product category as potential moderators. Whereas attitude was the mediating factor here, other candidates include trust, accessibility, perceived value and customer engagement. Researchers could also investigate the purchase patterns of specific consumer groups for particular categories of fashion goods.

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