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The Rise of Online Shopping: Could Servicescape Revive the High Street?

Abstract

Against a background of rising online sales and the decline of traditional high street shopping, this study examines factors related to in-store 'atmosphere' and 'servicescape' that may encourage consumers to purchase in-store rather than online in the context of female fashion.

This development paper indicates that fashion shopping is 'experiential' for many female consumers and that consequently store '*atmosphere*' or '*servicescape*' may encourage female consumers to shop instore for fashion rather than online. Furthermore, this paper indicates that different groups of consumers have different preferences for factors contributing to atmosphere or servicescape.

Taken together this suggests that if retailers undertook store improvements that enhanced the shopping experience by meeting these preferences, female fashion shoppers may be more inclined to purchase instore.

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Introduction

The recent increase of online shopping has caused many to question the future of High Street retailing. Several leading brands including Marks and Spencer's have announced store closure programs, some brands including Maplin's have disappeared

altogether whilst others, including House of Fraser have gone into administration with the end result being 2,700 stores closed in the first half of 2018 (BBC, 2018; Mirror, 2018).

Online shopping has been found to be primarily goal-orientated, i.e. motivated by factors including convenience, accessibility and variety, with consumers seeking to avoid socialisation and gain what they need without inconvenience. This suggests that rising online sales may therefore reflect a move away from experiential shopping, i.e. where consumers are motivated by factors including socialising, bargain-hunting and acquiring products, towards goal-orientated shopping (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001; Jepson 2007), meaning that it may therefore be possible for brick and mortar retailers to counter the move online by focussing on factors that enhance consumer shopping experience.

One way this could be achieved would be by changing and adapting the layout and design of stores i.e. the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) to create an in-store 'atmosphere' that closely reflects consumer needs, desires and preferences, particularly as online 'atmospherics' have been found to influence and encourage experiential shoppers (Ha and Stoel, 2011).

This developmental paper therefore aims to investigate store 'atmosphere' and 'servicescape' in the context of the women's fashion sector. This sector has been chosen as it contributed £27 Billion to the UK economy during 2015 (London Fashion Week, 2016) and has experienced the phenomenon of consumers moving towards online shopping. For example, online only retailer ASOS experienced a 26% increase in revenue in 2016, whilst Primark, who primarily trade via 'bricks and mortar' stores, experienced a fall in like for like sales of 2% during 2016 (Sender 2016).

Literature Review

Consumer shopping habits have been profoundly affected by the development of the internet and the introduction of digital technology (Verhoef *et al.,* 2015) with that technology influencing all stages of the traditional consumer decision making process (Solomon *et al.,* 2013). This includes the second '*information search'* stage where online searching is often conducted early in the buying process with previous research indicating that experiential and goal-orientated shoppers conduct online product searches differently (Detlor *et al.,* 2003) and the fourth '*purchasing'* stage where consumers have been found to purchase online for reasons including convenience and cost (Verhoef *et al.,* 2015; Arora *et al., 2017*; Fernandez *et al.,* 2018).

Undertaking information search by visiting physical stores, or '*showrooming*', allows consumers to evaluate products prior to purchase by examining and gathering information about them, including by interaction with salespeople, before completing the purchasing online. This allows the consumer to reduce the uncertainty and risk involved in the purchase whilst retaining the potential benefits of online purchase such as convenience and lower prices (Verhoef *et al.,* 2015; Arora *et al., 2017*; Fernandez *et al.,* 2018).

Consumers who engage in showrooming undertake less complex evaluation of products, place more importance on retailer associated attributes such as price and are more influenced by brands and trends (Fernandez *et al.,* 2018).

Undertaking information search online, or '*webrooming*', allows consumers to gather more information about products enabling them to determine their exact requirements before purchasing in-store thereby reducing uncertainty and mitigate risks associated with online purchasing (Verhoef *et al.,* 2015; Arora *et al., 2017*; Fernandez *et al.,* 2018). Consumers who engage in webrooming often conduct a far more complex evaluation of competing products and are less susceptible to fads and trends (Fernandez *et al.,* 2018).

Atmosphere and Servicescape

Consumers have been found to value a pleasant atmosphere and less likely to search for alternative brands when they encounter such an atmosphere (Kotler, 1974; D'Astous, 2000; Solomon *et al.,* 2013). This suggests that 'atmosphere' affects consumer shopping behaviour and could therefore also affect a decision to shop online or in-store. This argument is supported by findings that show online 'atmospherics' influence and encourage experiential shoppers (Ha and Stoel, 2011) and that atmospherics are of particular importance where product and price differentials are small. Factors that influence consumer perceptions of atmosphere include lighting, smell and decor (Kotler, 1974).

'Servicescape' is effectively a development of this concept that takes into account factors in the store or shop environment where a transaction is conducted that effect a consumers physiological, cognitive and emotional responses thereby driving behaviour (Bitner, 1992) with factors being broken down into three groups:

i   Ambient conditions including temperature, air quality, noise, music and odour,
ii   Space and function including layout, equipment and furnishings,
iii   Signs, symbols and artefacts including signage, personal artefacts and décor.

The way these factors are combined impacts consumer perceptions of a store with even the smallest factor having the potential to have a significant impact (Bitner, 1992; Schiffman and Wisenbilt, 2015). Consumers evaluate these factors the moment they enter a store with servicescape having either a positive or negative impact upon perception. (D'Astous, 2000; Lin, 2004).

However, whilst the importance of servicescape has been established, little attention has been paid to which factors are important to different audiences and much of the literature relating to servicescape is dated. The literature may therefore may not reflect changes in consumer preferences and behaviour resulting from the rise of online shopping, including steps to counter that rise, such as the introduction of in-store technology (Blythe, 2014).

Summary

The introduction of online shopping has had a profound effect upon consumer behaviour as demonstrated by the rise of phenomena such as showrooming and webrooming in recent years with each appealing to different groups of consumers in different ways. As factors such as online atmospherics have been found to influence and encourage experiential consumers, different aspects of in-store atmosphere and servicescape may also appeal to different

consumers in different ways, and feasibly affect their decision to shop online or in-store. This study will therefore investigate how different aspects of atmosphere and servicescape affect those who prefer to shop online compared to those who prefer to shop in-store.

Methodology

A mixed methods research design was undertaken with a qualitative phase of research (focus groups) being used to inform the second quantitative phase (an online questionnaire). This approach is common in academic marketing (Harrison and Reilly 2011).

Two focus groups were held (FG1; n=5; FG2; n=6) primarily to assist with the design of the quantitative research instrument. Participants were recruited on a purposive convenience basis which is typical of qualitative research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The data was subsequently transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis as this allows a complex, detailed rich account of data that is independent of any particular ontological or epistemological perspective (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

An online questionnaire, developed from this analysis and the literature review, was distributed via online shopping forums using Qualtrics software. The sampling method was therefore self-selection, although filtering questions were added to ensure respondents were females who shopped for fashion on a regular basis. Care was taken to maintain research rigour in several ways including the use of appropriate wording, avoiding leading questions, and pilot testing. 755 individuals started the questionnaire with 636 completing it (84.23%). Given the high completion rate, incomplete responses were removed. The data was analysed using SPSS.

Analysis and Findings

In addition to assisting with the design of the quantitative research instrument, several themes of interest and relevance to this study emerged during qualitative data analysis that add valuable background and insight to this study.

Webrooming and Showrooming

Examination of our data indicated that our participants engaged in both webrooming and showrooming. However, several participants indicated that they preferred to purchase fashion instore and were reluctant to purchase online indicating that they would usually only do so for a specific reason as demonstrated by participant three of FG1:

'I might buy online if they don't have what I want or the size instore.'

Our data therefore indicates that female consumers are more likely to engage in webrooming rather than showrooming as they are reluctant to purchase fashion items online and that they will often only do so when there is a specific reason as suggested by Flavian *et al.,* (2016).

Price and Convenience

Examination of our data indicated that both price and convenience could drive online purchasing with agreement amongst participants that it was usually possible to obtain better prices online. This indicates online shoppers are often goal orientated as suggested by

Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001). However, whilst convenience was considered a motivating factor for online by some, as demonstrated by participant two of FG2:

'*You're not rooting through to find your size, you just click a filter*',

others saw online purchases as inconvenient, as demonstrated by participant three of FG1:

'*waiting for it to arrive, trying it on, and then maybe sending it back*'.

Overall our qualitative data therefore shows that whilst online shopping can be driven by price, it is sometimes driven by an inability to acquire the required garment instore and is not always perceived as convenient by female fashion shoppers.

Online Survey

With 244 (38.4%) of our respondents indicating that they purchase fashion in-store only and 250 (39.3%) indicating they purchase both online and in-store, our data shows most female consumers undertake at least some fashion shopping instore. This, coupled with data showing 71.9% of respondents enjoyed fashion shopping instore and only 17.2% shop for fashion alone, indicates that female fashion shopping is usually undertaken instore and socially, and can therefore be largely categorised as 'experiential'. 218 (34.3%) of our 636 respondents indicated they would be more likely to shop in a store with 'atmosphere' indicating the importance of atmosphere and servicescape.

Respondents were asked to rate factors identified from the literature review and qualitative data as contributing to both atmosphere and servicescape on a scale ranging from Not Important (1) to Important (5). Means for each of these factors were then calculated on an overall basis and also for those who shop for fashion online, in-store and for those who purchase both online and instore. The results of these calculations (along with standard deviation) are shown in the table below.

	Overall		Online		In-store		Online & Instore	
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev
Bright Lighting	2.85	0.90	2.69	0.89	2.92	0.91	2.86	0.89
Appropriate Music	2.29	1.13	2.28	1.11	2.02	1.17	2.55	1.06
Nice Smell	3.12	0.92	3.08	0.98	3.02	0.93	3.23	0.87
In Store Ordering Points	2.15	1.19	2.23	1.14	2.02	1.18	2.24	1.22
Enough Tills to prevent queuing	3.51	0.71	3.52	0.77	3.47	0.66	3.54	0.72
Clean and Tidy	3.70	0.59	3.67	0.66	3.68	0.56	3.75	0.58
Temperature not too hot or cold	3.31	0.82	3.28	0.85	3.25	0.84	3.40	0.77
Mirros	3.58	0.71	3.44	0.85	3.60	0.69	3.66	0.63
Not too crowded with people	3.16	0.89	3.35	0.82	3.01	0.87	3.19	0.92
Store is easy to navigate	3.50	0.72	3.49	0.71	3.45	0.70	3.56	0.74
Products ranged in an orderly fashion	3.53	0.68	3.46	0.66	3.50	0.71	3.59	0.65
Large range fo sizes	3.57	0.76	3.43	0.82	3.60	0.69	3.62	0.78
Range of different products	3.61	0.63	3.60	0.70	3.62	0.60	3.62	0.62
Helpful Staff	3.60	0.68	3.49	0.81	3.59	0.67	3.68	0.60
Clear Promotional Posters	2.80	1.14	2.62	1.18	2.80	1.16	2.90	1.08
Price of items clearly displayed	3.72	0.61	3.63	0.71	3.75	0.55	3.75	0.60
Somewhere to sit down	2.57	1.17	2.49	1.18	2.59	1.19	2.58	1.13
Modern Décor	2.19	0.99	2.15	0.97	2.10	0.96	2.30	1.03

The mean for most factors across all groups was more than 2.5 which indicates that most of the factors are of at least some importance to all consumers.

The exceptions were modern décor and in-store ordering points across all groups, appropriate music for those who shop both online and in-store and somewhere to sit down for those who shop online.

Interestingly the same three factors had the highest score for those that shop online and those who shop instore, specifically, a clean and tidy store (online: mean=3.67, SD=0.66; in-store: mean=3.68,SD=0.56), the price of items being clearly displayed (online: mean=3.63, SD=0.71; in-store: mean=3.75,SD=0.55), and the range of products on offer (online: mean=3.60, SD=0.70; in-store: mean=3.62,SD=0.60).

For those that shop both online and in-store there the three highest scores were for a clean and tidy store (mean=3.75, SD=0.58), the price of items being clearly displayed (mean=3.75, SD=0.60) and helpful staff (mean=3.68, SD=0.60).

Prices being clearly displayed, and the store being kept clean and tidy can therefore be seen as the most important factors with Modern décor and in-store ordering points being least important.

In addition to calculating the means for the atmosphere and servicescape factors reported above, one-way ANOVA tests were also carried out to highlight potential differences between those who shopped online, instore and those who used both channels. The results (see appendix for full results including post-hoc tests) showed statistically significant differences between those who shopped online and those who shopped instore with 'Lighting' ($F_{(2, 633)}=2.96$, $p=.05$) and 'Not being too Crowded' ($F_{(2,633)}=6.98$, $p=0$) being more important for the 'instore' group, between those who shopped instore and those who shopped both online and offline 'Music' ($F_{(2,633)}=14.33$, $p=0$) and 'Smell' ($F_{(2,633)}=3.31$, $p=.04$) were found to be more important for the 'both' group, and between those who shopped online and those who shopped both online and offline 'Mirrors' ($F_{(2,633)}=4.47$, $p=.01$) and 'Helpful Staff' ($F_{(2,633)}=3.55$, $p=.03$) were found to be more important for the 'both' group.

Conclusion

This study finds that atmosphere and servicescape are of importance to female fashion consumers with a clean and tidy store and clearly displayed prices being of most importance to all consumers irrelevant of their channel preferences. The range of products on offer and helpful staff are also shown to be of importance to consumers dependent upon their channel preference. The results of ANOVA tests also indicate that for some of factors examined there are statistically significant differences in the importance of those factors dependant upon channel preference, with, for example, good lighting and less crowded stores being significantly more important to those who shop primarily in-store. Taken together, this indicates that in addition to ensuring a clean and tidy environment with clearly displayed prices, managers of fashion retailers also need to be aware of the preferences of their specific customers and adapt their stores accordingly. Doing so would encourage instore shopping as this study also found that shopping for fashion is experiential for many female consumers and that online fashion shopping is not necessarily perceived to be convenient.

Further Development

In addition to examining and establishing what female fashion consumers perceive as being 'convenient', further work will be undertaken to identify the effects of different demographic factors such as age and income on preferences (both channel preference and preference for the identified factors). The impact of these factors upon actual purchasing behaviour will also be examined including the effects of different combinations of the identified factors.

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ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Bright Lighting	Between Groups	4.797	2	2.398	2.964	0.052
	Within Groups	512.103	633	0.809		
	Total	516.899	635			
Appropriate Music	Between Groups	35.427	2	17.714	14.330	0.000
	Within Groups	782.491	633	1.236		
	Total	817.918	635			
Nice Smell	Between Groups	5.611	2	2.806	3.310	0.037
	Within Groups	536.544	633	0.848		
	Total	542.156	635			
In Store Ordering Points	Between Groups	7.071	2	3.535	2.493	0.084
	Within Groups	897.829	633	1.418		
	Total	904.899	635			
Enough Tills to prevent queuing	Between Groups	0.625	2	0.312	0.621	0.538
	Within Groups	318.350	633	0.503		
	Total	318.975	635			
Clean and Tidy	Between Groups	0.845	2	0.423	1.216	0.297
	Within Groups	219.990	633	0.348		
	Total	220.835	635			
Temperature not too hot or cold	Between Groups	2.829	2	1.414	2.130	0.120
	Within Groups	420.278	633	0.664		
	Total	423.107	635			
Mirros	Between Groups	4.430	2	2.215	4.466	0.012
	Within Groups	313.985	633	0.496		
	Total	318.415	635			
Not too crowded with people	Between Groups	10.730	2	5.365	6.976	0.001
	Within Groups	486.859	633	0.769		
	Total	497.590	635			
Store is easy to navigate	Between Groups	1.636	2	0.818	1.582	0.206
	Within Groups	327.358	633	0.517		
	Total	328.994	635			
Products ranged in an orderly fashion	Between Groups	1.783	2	0.891	1.941	0.144
	Within Groups	290.708	633	0.459		
	Total	292.491	635			
Large range fo	Between Groups	3.586	2	1.793	3.132	0.044

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
sizes	Within Groups	362.370	633	0.572		
	Total	365.956	635			
Range of different products	Between Groups	0.040	2	0.020	0.051	0.951
	Within Groups	250.809	633	0.396		
	Total	250.849	635			
Helpful Staff	Between Groups	3.242	2	1.621	3.551	0.029
	Within Groups	288.909	633	0.456		
	Total	292.151	635			
Clear Promotional Posters	Between Groups	6.914	2	3.457	2.689	0.069
	Within Groups	813.921	633	1.286		
	Total	820.835	635			
Price of items clearly displayed	Between Groups	1.652	2	0.826	2.215	0.110
	Within Groups	236.088	633	0.373		
	Total	237.741	635			
Somewhere to sit down	Between Groups	1.001	2	0.501	0.368	0.692
	Within Groups	861.225	633	1.361		
	Total	862.226	635			
Modern Décor	Between Groups	5.032	2	2.516	2.567	0.078
	Within Groups	620.327	633	0.980		
	Total	625.358	635			

Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Bright Lighting	online	store	-.228[*]	0.095	0.044	-0.45	0.00
		equal	-0.174	0.095	0.158	-0.40	0.05
	store	online	.228[*]	0.095	0.044	0.00	0.45
		equal	0.054	0.081	0.782	-0.14	0.24
	equal	online	0.174	0.095	0.158	-0.05	0.40
		store	-0.054	0.081	0.782	-0.24	0.14
Appropriate Music	online	store	0.265	0.117	0.062	-0.01	0.54
		equal	-0.270	0.117	0.055	-0.54	0.00
	store	online	-0.265	0.117	0.062	-0.54	0.01
		equal	-.536[*]	0.100	0.000	-0.77	-0.30
	equal	online	0.270	0.117	0.055	0.00	0.54
		store	.536[*]	0.100	0.000	0.30	0.77
Nice Smell	online	store	0.053	0.097	0.850	-0.18	0.28
		equal	-0.155	0.097	0.248	-0.38	0.07
	store	online	-0.053	0.097	0.850	-0.28	0.18
		equal	-.207[*]	0.083	0.034	-0.40	-0.01
	equal	online	0.155	0.097	0.248	-0.07	0.38
		store	.207[*]	0.083	0.034	0.01	0.40
In Store Ordering Points	online	store	0.212	0.126	0.211	-0.08	0.51
		equal	-0.008	0.125	0.998	-0.30	0.29
	store	online	-0.212	0.126	0.211	-0.51	0.08
		equal	-0.220	0.107	0.102	-0.47	0.03
	equal	online	0.008	0.125	0.998	-0.29	0.30
		store	0.220	0.107	0.102	-0.03	0.47
Enough Tills to prevent queuing	online	store	0.054	0.075	0.752	-0.12	0.23
		equal	-0.015	0.075	0.978	-0.19	0.16
	store	online	-0.054	0.075	0.752	-0.23	0.12
		equal	-0.069	0.064	0.528	-0.22	0.08
	equal	online	0.015	0.075	0.978	-0.16	0.19
		store	0.069	0.064	0.528	-0.08	0.22
Clean and Tidy	online	store	-0.007	0.062	0.993	-0.15	0.14
		equal	-0.079	0.062	0.410	-0.22	0.07
	store	online	0.007	0.062	0.993	-0.14	0.15
		equal	-0.072	0.053	0.367	-0.20	0.05
	equal	online	0.079	0.062	0.410	-0.07	0.22
		store	0.072	0.053	0.367	-0.05	0.20
Temperature not too hot or cold	online	store	0.032	0.086	0.928	-0.17	0.23
		equal	-0.114	0.086	0.376	-0.32	0.09
	store	online	-0.032	0.086	0.928	-0.23	0.17
		equal	-0.146	0.073	0.115	-0.32	0.03
	equal	online	0.114	0.086	0.376	-0.09	0.32
		store	0.146	0.073	0.115	-0.03	0.32
Mirros	online	store	-0.162	0.074	0.076	-0.34	0.01
		equal	-.219[*]	0.074	0.009	-0.39	-0.05
	store	online	0.162	0.074	0.076	-0.01	0.34

			Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
		equal	-0.058	0.063	0.635	-0.21	0.09
	equal	online	.219*	0.074	0.009	0.05	0.39
		store	0.058	0.063	0.635	-0.09	0.21
Not too crowded with people	online	store	.337*	0.093	0.001	0.12	0.55
		equal	0.153	0.092	0.221	-0.06	0.37
	store	online	-.337*	0.093	0.001	-0.55	-0.12
		equal	-0.184	0.079	0.053	-0.37	0.00
	equal	online	-0.153	0.092	0.221	-0.37	0.06
		store	0.184	0.079	0.053	0.00	0.37
Store is easy to navigate	online	store	0.035	0.076	0.889	-0.14	0.21
		equal	-0.078	0.076	0.556	-0.26	0.10
	store	online	-0.035	0.076	0.889	-0.21	0.14
		equal	-0.113	0.065	0.188	-0.27	0.04
	equal	online	0.078	0.076	0.556	-0.10	0.26
		store	0.113	0.065	0.188	-0.04	0.27
Products ranged in an orderly fashion	online	store	-0.035	0.072	0.875	-0.20	0.13
		equal	-0.127	0.071	0.175	-0.29	0.04
	store	online	0.035	0.072	0.875	-0.13	0.20
		equal	-0.092	0.061	0.288	-0.24	0.05
	equal	online	0.127	0.071	0.175	-0.04	0.29
		store	0.092	0.061	0.288	-0.05	0.24
Large range fo sizes	online	store	-0.173	0.080	0.078	-0.36	0.01
		equal	-0.186	0.080	0.051	-0.37	0.00
	store	online	0.173	0.080	0.078	-0.01	0.36
		equal	-0.014	0.068	0.978	-0.17	0.15
	equal	online	0.186	0.080	0.051	0.00	0.37
		store	0.014	0.068	0.978	-0.15	0.17
Range of different products	online	store	-0.020	0.066	0.950	-0.18	0.14
		equal	-0.017	0.066	0.963	-0.17	0.14
	store	online	0.020	0.066	0.950	-0.14	0.18
		equal	0.003	0.057	0.999	-0.13	0.14
	equal	online	0.017	0.066	0.963	-0.14	0.17
		store	-0.003	0.057	0.999	-0.14	0.13
Helpful Staff	online	store	-0.097	0.071	0.361	-0.26	0.07
		equal	-.187*	0.071	0.023	-0.35	-0.02
	store	online	0.097	0.071	0.361	-0.07	0.26
		equal	-0.090	0.061	0.302	-0.23	0.05
	equal	online	.187*	0.071	0.023	0.02	0.35
		store	0.090	0.061	0.302	-0.05	0.23
Clear Promotional Posters	online	store	-0.179	0.120	0.292	-0.46	0.10
		equal	-0.276	0.119	0.054	-0.56	0.00
	store	online	0.179	0.120	0.292	-0.10	0.46
		equal	-0.097	0.102	0.610	-0.34	0.14
	equal	online	0.276	0.119	0.054	0.00	0.56
		store	0.097	0.102	0.610	-0.14	0.34
Price of items clearly displayed	online	store	-0.119	0.064	0.155	-0.27	0.03
		equal	-0.125	0.064	0.125	-0.28	0.03
	store	online	0.119	0.064	0.155	-0.03	0.27
		equal	-0.006	0.055	0.993	-0.14	0.12
	equal	online	0.125	0.064	0.125	-0.03	0.28

						95% CI	
		store	0.006	0.055	0.993	-0.12	0.14
Somewhere to sit down	online	store	-0.101	0.123	0.689	-0.39	0.19
		equal	-0.087	0.123	0.758	-0.37	0.20
	store	online	0.101	0.123	0.689	-0.19	0.39
		equal	0.014	0.105	0.990	-0.23	0.26
	equal	online	0.087	0.123	0.758	-0.20	0.37
		store	-0.014	0.105	0.990	-0.26	0.23
Modern Décor	online	store	0.057	0.104	0.851	-0.19	0.30
		equal	-0.141	0.104	0.365	-0.39	0.10
	store	online	-0.057	0.104	0.851	-0.30	0.19
		equal	-0.198	0.089	0.069	-0.41	0.01
	equal	online	0.141	0.104	0.365	-0.10	0.39
		store	0.198	0.089	0.069	-0.01	0.41

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.