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## **An exploration of the relationship between product selection criteria and engagement with ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ in the consumer’s decision-making process**

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**Abstract:** The contemporary consumer’s decision-making processes have been affected by two independent factors. Firstly, the difficult economic climate heightened their level of price sensitivity and, secondly, the emergence of online shopping provided them with a better means of information searching. These two factors have combined to produce new behaviours in the shopping process, involving purchasing across channels through show-rooming (viewing in store and buying online) and web-rooming (viewing online and buying in store). Using a quantitative methodology, this paper tested consumers’ motivation and propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’. It investigated their reasons for acceptance or avoidance of virtual and physical channels, to identify the factors that promote cross-channel behaviour. The results indicated that ‘show-rooming’ behaviour prevailed when efficient price and product comparisons could not be conducted in physical channels; and ‘web-rooming’ was used when the consumer could not predict garment dimensions online. This demonstrates the need for retailers to acquire a deeper understanding of the information consumers require within each selling interface, with an aim to minimise the potential of lost sales that result when consumers switch to more proactive competitor brands.

**Keywords:** fashion; consumer decision-making; show-rooming; web-rooming; selection criteria.

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**Biographical notes:** Louise F. Reid is a President's Doctoral Scholar and Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Manchester. Her career in the fashion sector encompassed both retailing and buying roles, for brands Warehouse and Cotton Traders respectively. Her PhD research, which follows a BA (Hons.) in Consumer Studies and an MSc in Strategic Fashion Buying, investigates the role of psychological and physical determinants of clothing comfort within the consumer's process of garment evaluation within multiple channel retail environments. This research informs her teaching in strategic marketing, retailing and fashion business on both undergraduate and postgraduate fashion courses.

Heather F. Ross (formerly Iwanow) started her career in the industry before joining the university sector, where she has held academic positions at Queen Margaret University, Manchester Metropolitan University and currently at the University of Edinburgh. Combining teaching, research, third-stream funding and consultancy, her role in academia has included initiatives with the Scottish Government, British Council, the EU and acting as an Academic Advisor to the WTO/UN through the International Trade Centre, Geneva. She is also currently undertaking a PhD degree where her research is focused on the communication of corporate social responsibility and sustainability, related to externalities created by the fashion sector.

Gianpaolo Vignali is a graduate from UMIST with his first degree in Mathematics. Later adding a Masters in Strategic Management, his career first started as a part-time Lecturer and Researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University before moving to full-time employment in the Department of Retail at Leeds Metropolitan University. He then became the Program Leader for Fashion Buying and Merchandising at Manchester Metropolitan University until he achieved his PhD degree and moved to Manchester University working in the School of Materials where he delivers on both undergraduate and post graduate programs. He has written over 40 papers and books in the field of marketing and management and presented at numerous international conferences. His current research focuses on the case study technique in the service sector which coincided with his PhD program of study.

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## 1 Introduction

The impact of the economic conditions and introduction of technological innovations within the UK retail market have both induced and facilitated a more extensive consumer decision-making process. The financial downturn resulted in an enhanced price sensitivity, which has led to a more knowledgeable consumer (Hampson and

McGoldrick, 2013). Simultaneously, technological innovations have afforded consumers the opportunity to extensively evaluate fashion items via a range of electronic communication methods used to support their lifestyles (including mobile, online and social media) (Mintel, 2014a, 2014b). These methods of communication helped to boost the market for textiles, clothing and footwear, which, according to The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reached £46bn by 2014 (ONS, 2015). This was an increase of 15.2% since 2008 (*ibid*).

Technological connections between virtual and physical channels are activating cross-channel purchasing. Consumers now have the opportunity to browse in physical stores and then purchase online ('show-rooming'), or browse in an online environment and then purchase within the physical stores ('web-rooming'). This has emerged as a growing trend (Machavolu and Raju, 2014), because one channel does not always allow a comparative evaluation of the consumer's essential selection criteria, which is needed to form a purchase decision (Blackwell et al., 2006). Such selection criteria are identified by Machavolu and Raju (2014), who indicated that price is the principle motivation for 'show-rooming'; whilst, conversely, Mintel, (2014a, 2014b) found that consumers engage in 'web-rooming' due to the importance of tactile dimensions of clothing garments.

This cross-channel evaluative process presents potential disadvantages for retailers, especially in sectors where products are branded, or sold by a variety of providers; an example of which is the electronics market (Machavolu and Raju, 2014). This is because, as consumers switch channels, they may lose interest in the original offering, or be enticed by competitor alternatives, resulting in lost sales for clothing retailers (Blackwell et al., 2006). It is therefore imperative to identify the criteria triggering 'show-rooming' or 'web-rooming' to address any limitations at the individual retailer level.

### 1.1 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this paper is to establish if a relationship exists between the importance of product selection criteria and consumers' propensity to engage in 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' activity. It is designed to identify potential motivations for clothing consumers' adoption, or avoidance, of online channels. As clothing purchase can vary from other industries (Blazquez, 2014), the aim is to corroborate and explain the findings through hypothesis testing (as identified in Table 2) based on the following objectives

- Objective 1 To identify if a relationship exists between product selection criteria and consumers propensity to engage in show-rooming and web-rooming.
- Objective 2 To establish the key motivations behind engagement in 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' behaviour.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Changing consumer behaviour

The impact of the global economic downturn, which was triggered by the financial crisis in 2007–2008, has transformed consumer behaviour in UK high street market. This was evident in Hampson and McGoldrick (2013), whose empirical study of 1211 UK

consumers revealed that, in response to the economic crisis, consumers' purchase behaviour had evolved; leading to a more price sensitive and knowledgeable consumer. This was supported by Machavolu and Raju (2014) who found that the way consumers in the UK research and ultimately purchase goods is changing, with Hugo and Van-Aardt (2012) and Mintel (2014a, 2014b) indicating that consumers purchasing clothing place greater emphasis on the quality and durability of the products they buy. The influence of the economic downturn has, therefore, resulted in a more specific and extensive decision-making process (Hampson and McGoldrick, 2013), due to perceived risks influencing the purchase decision (Solomon and Rabolt, 2009). Consequently, when risk increases, consumers spend more time in the information search and evaluation of alternatives section of the decision-making process (Blackwell et al., 2006).

To facilitate these changes, retailers have introduced multiple selling platforms (i.e., mobile commerce, electronic commerce or physical outlets), allowing consumers to conduct efficient price and product comparisons within virtual channels (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015). However, this means that the appraisal of the garment's tactile dimensions does not happen until the product has arrived at a home address, or within a physical retail outlet (Mintel, 2014a, 2014b) when using Click and Collect (ordering online and collecting in store).

## 2.2 *Consumer decision-making process*

Purchase behaviours influence the consumer's decision-making process, which Blackwell et al. (2006) conceptualises into a seven stage model, ranging from identifying a need through to the post-purchase evaluation. During the pre-purchase investigative stages of this model, consumers apply salient or comparable (i.e., price) and determinant (i.e., fit) selection criteria to distinguish between alternative products based upon perceived product risk (*ibid*). However, information discrepancies between virtual and physical channels have given rise to 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' trends. This is because, for example, the presentation of a garment on a screen reduces the ability to assess fit as a criterion. Likewise, this environment does not provide sufficient information to facilitate the prediction of garment quality and can distort the visual appearance of clothing products (Mintel, 2014b). Conversely, despite the full evaluation of garment criteria being limited by virtual channels, some consumers prefer the efficiency and convenience of the online environment (Euromonitor, 2014a, 2014b). For example, price comparisons between brands can be quickly conducted in virtual platforms (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015). Cross-channel evaluation of clothing, using both virtual and physical mediums, is supported by Barnes (2013), who indicated that consumers interact with up to 56 touch points in a multiple, or omni-channel, retail environment. These trends have emerged because consumers can now switch channels to complete their evaluation and form a purchase decision. Therefore, the importance of garment selection criteria can be related to the consumer's preference as to whether they engage with 'show-rooming' or 'web-rooming' within their decision-making process.

## 2.3 *'Show-rooming' and price*

Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) frame 'show-rooming' as a problem for retailers, which is caused by the availability of mobile platforms allowing consumers to scan products in physical retail outlets and conduct price comparisons to identify a cheaper product

elsewhere. This is supported by Machavolu and Raju (2014) who indicated that, using electronics industry as an example, one fifth of consumers are 'show-rooming'. This results in one-third of respondents converting to competitor alternatives during price comparisons (*ibid*). Furthermore, these authors attribute the collapse of electronics retailer Jessops to 'show-rooming', as well as competition from pure players such as Amazon offering cheaper alternatives.

Euromonitor (2014a) and Fitsme (2014) report that the core drivers of e-commerce are value and convenience; and that this trend could present potential detriment to the high street market. This is supported by Mintel (2014c), who reported that the most important factors when shopping for clothing online were the cost of delivery (63%) and, conversely, special offers (41%). Thus, this would suggest that the main factor motivating 'show-rooming' is the attainment of a preferred price.

However, Mintel (2013) indicated that consumers consider a wide range of criteria to build perceptions of value, not pricing alone. This is supported by May-Plumlee and Little (2006) who report that there are 13 universal criteria that consumers apply within their decision-process. Price may, therefore, be a principle motivator; however, other factors, like service variables, can also influence consumers to switch to virtual channels. Examples of this are 24 hour access, product and size availability, and convenience, which are reported as key motivators by Euromonitor (2014b). Furthermore, as Mintel (2013) suggests that online price benefits may only relate to discounting within the high street market. This is especially the case where there are limited variations between the price of own-brand merchandise in multiple channel retailers, or when products across competing retailers are not identical. Adding to that, the additional costs associated with delivery and returns in virtual platforms increase the price of the final product for the consumer (Mintel, 2014b). Hence, as price importance increases, consumers may avoid virtual channels due to these additional financial implications.

#### 2.4 'Web-rooming' and tactile garment dimensions

The converse of 'show-rooming' is 'web-rooming', where customers explore websites for products and visit stores to make a purchase (Maschavolu and Raju, 2014). This has the potential to cause concern for retailers, because the switch between channels creates a risk that consumers may be enticed by other marketing sources; leading to them buying from competitors (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006). As a result, their initial motivations to buy are questioned (Vignali and Reid, 2014).

The prevalence of 'web-rooming' is supported by Mintel (2014b) who indicated that mobile devices are being used predominantly for browsing activity and the majority of consumers prefer to purchase in physical stores. This was confirmed by Reid and Ross (2015), who found that, whilst consumers demonstrated a distinct preference in their choice of virtual or physical environments, they were prepared to switch if their preferred channel failed to deliver. This is supported by the ONS who indicate that the value of online sales of textiles, clothing and footwear (seasonally adjusted) accounted for only 11.5% of sales within the market sector, with this trend being consistent with other retail sectors (Table 1).

**Table 1** Online sales

<i>Internet sales index: value seasonally adjusted internet sales as a proportion of all retailing</i>							
<i>Annual average</i>	<i>All retailing excluding automotive fuel</i>	<i>Predominantly food stores</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Predominantly non-food stores</i>			<i>Non-store retailing</i>
				<i>Non-specialised stores</i>	<i>Textile, clothing and footwear stores</i>	<i>Household goods stores</i>	
2012	9.4	3.1	7.7	7.7	9.3	5.8	66.5
2013	10.4	3.4	8.4	9.5	10.1	5.7	67.8
2014	11.3	3.7	8.8	10.1	11.5	5.9	69.6

*Source:* ONS (2014)

Mintel (2014c) reports that 60% of consumers indicate that not being able to see and feel a clothing item before purchase is a core barrier to online purchase. This is detrimental for consumers as garment fit (and size) (Zhang et al., 2002; Hsu and Burns, 2002; Rahman et al., 2008), visual appearance (design and style) (Ko et al., 2012) and quality (Hugo and Van-Aardt, 2012) were deemed the most important criteria for purchasing clothing items, which cannot be fully appraised within current online interfaces. Thus, the virtual environment presents limitations for judging garment size and fit, visual appearance, and quality prior to purchasing clothing online (Mintel, 2014b). Furthermore, predicting the correct size to order from a specific brand can present difficulties due to the variability of size provision in the clothing market. Hence, the inability to appraise and engage with these tactile dimensions may therefore encourage ‘web-rooming’ within the clothing market.

Fan and Miao (2012) indicate, however, that trusting a retailer encourages online purchases. This can help to address the negative impact of size limitations, as can the availability of visual functions on websites provided to help develop more accurate product expectations for the consumer (Mintel, 2014a, 2014b). Furthermore, 27% of consumers prefer to have garments delivered to store, using a Click and Collect service, to allow immediate garment evaluation and return if the product does not meet the consumer’s expectation (Mintel, 2014b; Fitsme, 2014). These added service variables may facilitate online purchase and enhance the propensity to engage with ‘web-rooming’.

In contrast, Euromonitor (2014b) indicates consumers prefer to purchase within physical stores, whilst Mintel (2014b) found that 34% of women preferred to return garments to stores for an assurance that a refund will be authorised promptly. This indicates that consumers, who require a tactile evaluation, with the possibility of immediately rejecting the item purchased, may avoid an online channel. Hence, a negative relationship may exist between these variables and ‘web-rooming’.

Both ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ trends therefore present potential difficulties for clothing retailers. Thus, it is of paramount importance to investigate whether or not selection criteria importance is related to a consumer’s propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ or ‘web-rooming’ in a clothing context. This will illustrate the core motivation for related behaviours and identify if enhanced information provision in specific channels is required to reduce the disadvantages a fashion brands could incur due to their channel choice. The reason to adopt or avoid virtual channels was also investigated to corroborate and explain the results of the hypothesis tests.

### **3 Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research purpose*

The study was designed to establish if a relationship exists between the importance of product selection criteria and consumers propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ and to establish other variables that contribute to consumers propensity to adopt or avoid virtual channels. This was achieved through the above named objectives

Through evaluation of the ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ and clothing purchase literature, two hypotheses were identified and outlined in Table 2.



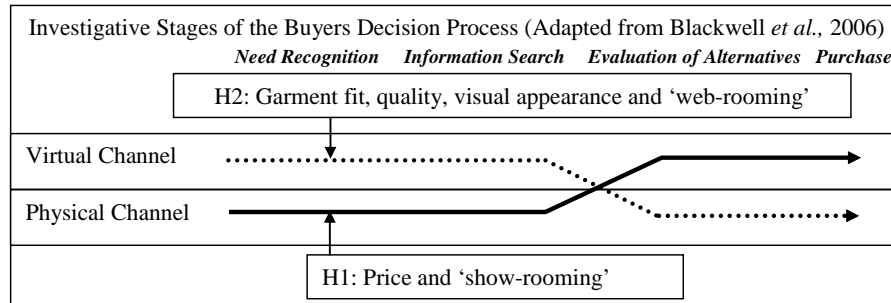
**Table 2** Research hypotheses

<i>Hypotheses to be tested</i>	
H1	A significant relationship exists between the importance of price as a selection criteria and consumer intention to engage with show-rooming.
H2	A significant relationship exists between the importance of tactile selection criteria and consumer intention to engage with web-rooming.

### 3.2 Method

The research design involved the development of a conceptual framework through an evaluation of extant literature for ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ and clothing purchase (Figure 1). A previous qualitative stage had been conducted, using focus groups, to develop the survey constructs and initial hypotheses within the consumers’ decision process (Reid and Ross, 2015); with this stage of the research using a quantitative survey methodology. A self-completion questionnaire was adopted to gain an overview of the phenomena and determine the statistical significance of the correlation between variables (Coolidge, 2013). These hypotheses were corroborated by a literature search to enhance the external validity of constructs tested (Bryman, 2008).

The hypotheses were tested using an online survey and analysis through correlation coefficients to establish if a relationship existed between product selection criteria and consumers propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ or ‘web-rooming’. Additional free response questions were included to establish consumers’ reasons for adoption or avoidance of online channels and subsequently explain the findings of the hypothesis testing phase.

**Figure 1** Conceptual framework

### 3.3 Respondents and pilot testing

A sample of 109 UK-based males and females, aged between 18 and 65, was attained. The study questionnaire was initially piloted on 11 respondents to ensure the constructs measuring the phenomena could be understood by respondents. This was achieved through a convenience sample recruited through online methods. Changes were made to demographic variables and ‘garment’ was added to clarify ‘quality’ as a selection criterion as a result of this piloting stage.

### *3.4 Data collection*

#### *3.4.1 Approach and sample*

This research adopted a quantitative approach through a self-completion online questionnaire, which was available over a two-week period in October 2014. The study returned a non-probability purposive sample of 109 respondents (Appendix 1), which Rowley (2014) defines as a large sample. The sample was over three-quarters female (77%) and 23% male. Whilst the respondents were aged between 18 and 65, those aged between 26 and 33 were the largest category (39.4%). The main social grades represented in the survey were B (20.2%) or C1 (22.9%).

The survey involved an initial screening stage to identify respondents who purchased at the high street level of the market. This sample was selected as Mintel (2014b) indicates that consumers aged 18 to 65 browse online. Additionally, a mid-market level pricing is affordable to the majority of consumers in the UK (Mintel, 2014a).

#### *3.4.2 Survey instrument*

The questionnaire adopted a series of open, closed and likert-scale questions; and the scale instruments were developed from methods within extant literature. The importance of selection criteria and propensity to engage in 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' were individually measured on five point bipolar semantic differential scales. Selection criteria were measured between 'very unimportant' to 'very important', which is consistent with constructs adopted by evaluative criteria theory (Hsu and Burns, 2002; Zhang et al., 2002). Furthermore, behavioural intentions towards 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' were measured from 'very unlikely' to 'very likely' to engage. The use of these constructs was consistent with measures of intention adopted by Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) in the prediction of behaviour.

To evaluate adoption or avoidance of virtual channels, respondents were presented with open text boxes to allow them to describe the reasons behind their avoidance and acceptance of these selling platforms. This approach is consistent with methods of free choice profiling (Liebetrau et al., 2012) and ensures the constructs are defined by the respondents and not induced by the researcher, thus enhancing the validity of the research outcome (Bryman, 2008). Demographic variables were also included to ensure the intended sample was achieved. Completed questionnaires were stored on the University of Manchester, Engineering and Physical Sciences survey website to ensure respondent anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process.

### *3.5 Data analysis*

To test the hypotheses outlined within this research Spearman's  $r$  correlation coefficient for ordinal scales and their significance was measured through the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 20. Free responses were analysed using a template analysis using the method outlined by King (2012). The technique involved developing an initial template from Mintel's (2014c) indication that both service and product variables influence online shopping adoption. Respondent responses were then integrated to develop codes and then categorised into salient themes (Appendix 2 and 3). Fourteen higher order themes and 32 lower order codes were identified and the frequency of the number of respondents who mentioned each was presented to illustrate their salience. The

findings of this free response stage was then discussed in relation to the hypothesis tests to corroborate and explain the study findings.

## 4 Results

The results of this exploratory study were analysed by measuring the correlation between product selection criteria and consumers propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ activity. This aimed to establish if retailers’ price competitiveness in physical stores and product information provision discrepancies in virtual environments were inducing this behaviour within the consumer’s decision-making process. As ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ had not been measured previously within a mid-market clothing context, open response questions were employed to allow the respondents to add further depth to their basic answers. This question type was also used to corroborate the hypothesis testing findings and outline other variables that should be considered by both retailers and in future research.

### 4.1 Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis tests aim to establish if the propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ prevalent within other consumer goods sectors, as identified by the literature review, are consistent within clothing purchase. These were tested using Spearman’s  $r$  correlation for ordinal variables (Coolidge, 2013).

The results of the first hypothesis tested revealed that no significant positive or negative relationships existed between price as a product selection criteria and consumers’ propensity to engage with show-rooming (Table 3). A weak positive correlation was prevalent between the importance of price and propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’, illustrating some consumers engaged with this behaviour to achieve a financial benefit; however, this was not the case for all respondents within the sample. This demonstrates other variables are responsible for consumers’ propensity to engage in show-rooming for the majority of respondents. Due to this variability H1 is rejected.

**Table 3** Correlation between price and show-rooming

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>SR clothing</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>
Price	$r = 0.024$	<i>Reject H1</i>
Significance	0.803	Not significant

Similarly, the results of the second hypothesis tests (Table 4) illustrated no significant positive or negative relationships existed between ‘garment fit’ or ‘garment quality’ and consumers propensity to engage in ‘web-rooming’. A weak negative relationship was prevalent with all variables and web-rooming (Table 4) illustrating as the importance of garment fit and quality decline some consumers adopt ‘web-rooming’ behaviour. This was not the case for all respondents. A negative significant relationship was evident between visual appearance and web-rooming, which is expected, as this is main feature when viewing a retailer website.

The correlations associated with tactile product dimensions are weak and therefore support the rejection of H2, with the exception of visual appearance.

**Table 4** Correlation between tactile dimensions and web-rooming

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>WR clothing</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>
Visual appearance	$r = -0.205$	<i>Accept H2</i>
Significance	0.032	Significant
Garment fit	$r = -0.046$	<i>Reject H2</i>
Significance	0.637	Not significant
Garment quality	$r = -0.0113$	<i>Reject H2</i>
Significance	0.246	Not significant

## 4.2 Channel switching

Free response questions were presented to respondents to establish other variables responsible for respondent's propensity to engage with, or avoid, online selling platforms and subsequently induce 'web-rooming' (avoid) or 'show-rooming' (adopt) activity. Respondents were asked to present multiple reasons within their response; therefore, the frequencies presented are greater than the sample size. The free responses presented by respondents were analysed using a thematic template analysis (Appendix 1 and 2). This was structured by Mintel's indication that both service and product dimensions are core considerations for adoption or avoidance of online channels (Mintel, 2014c). The higher order themes that summarise key variables presented by respondents are outlined within Table 5 and 6.

### 4.2.1 Adoption/avoidance of online channels

The convenience of access and time saving benefits were the most important variable of adopting online channels for the majority of respondents (50 respondents). This related to the ability to shop 24 hours a day and convenience of shopping in any location, which removed geographical limitations for some respondents. Secondly, price reductions and online discounting incentives encouraged them to adopt online channels. This illustrates the reduction on the final price was more important than the cost of the original garment due to the perceived benefit of this channel selection. Wider product ranges (20 respondents) and greater product availability (14 respondents) was favoured by participants and, where delivery and return facilities were convenient (9 respondents), the online channel presented greater benefits. This illustrates that, where product delivery risks and greater product availability prevail, online channels present greater advantage to consumers.

Website features (10 respondents) such as product filters and the availability of peer influence (i.e., customer reviews), or social media recommendations (1 respondent), encouraged respondents to engage within online platforms. This enhanced convenience and efficiency in product selection for respondents. Furthermore, the lack of crowds and ability to shop at home (9 respondents) was favoured by participants. A limited number (7 respondents) did not shop online at all. Some respondents indicated that knowledge of the retailers sizing (3) encouraged online adoption, demonstrating prediction of final products encourage online purchase.

The core motivations for respondents related to convenience and access for online channels, available discounting and greater product selection. It is evident that, at present,

both service and product dimensions are of importance to respondents in a clothing context.

**Table 5** Reason to adopt online channels: themes and frequency

<i>Criteria dimension</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (number of respondents)</i>
Service	Access convenience and time saving	50
Product	Price reduction and discounting	31
Product	Greater product selection	20
Product	Greater product availability	14
Service	Website functions and security	11
Service	Easy delivery and returns	9
Service	Prevents crowds/dislike shopping	9
Other	Don't shop online	7
Product	Retailer sizing knowledge/repeat purchase	3

Note: Number of times mentioned

The dominant reason for avoidance of online channels was the consumer's inability to predict product attributes (131 responses to the question). This included product dimensions such as garment trial, quality, discrepancy between virtual and physical products and size prediction. The inconvenience caused by a delay in receipt, returns process and risk of the unsuitability of the product, due to the inability to predict product dimensions, was presented by respondents. This demonstrated that the inability to conduct a sufficient evaluation due to insufficient information or garment understanding induced avoidance for respondents, not the salience of individual variables.

**Table 6** Reason to avoid online channels: themes and frequency

<i>Criteria dimension</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency (number of respondents)</i>
Product	Predicting product attributes	131
Service	Financial implications of online purchase	30
Service	Website design, security and retailer trust	17
Both	No limitations	4
Product	Out of stock items/options	2

Note: Number of times mentioned

The financial implications of online purchase (30 respondents) induced avoidance for respondents due to the financial costs of delivery and returns where products were unsuitable, the perceived higher prices online and the delay in product payment and returns receipt on credit or debit cards. The additional costs associated with the online channel and payment inconvenience, therefore, contribute to avoidance of online channels due to the inability to predict products in this environment.

Furthermore, website design, security and retailer trust (17 respondents) was important to respondents due to the inability to easily navigate retailer websites and security concerns with transactions. The problem of out of stock items online (2

respondents) was a key frustration for some respondents, although, for some (4 respondents) no limitations in adopting the online channel was prevalent.

These results demonstrate both product variables and service variables prevent consumers from engaging with online platforms. These factors relate predominantly to the inability to predict garments within the virtual environment and conduct a sufficient evaluation to anticipate the final product. Additionally, the inconvenience caused by the time delay between delivery and receipt, and enhanced financial implications on the final product in the online channel, induced avoidance behaviour due to enhanced risk of unsuitable garments. The inability to accurately predict the received garment is, therefore, the core reason for the majority of respondents.

## **5 Discussion**

The aim of the study was to test and explain the hypotheses that the importance of selection criteria was related to consumer propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’ and ‘web-rooming’ behaviour; and explore the consumers reasons for avoidance or acceptance of online channels to corroborate or explain the findings of the hypotheses tests. The findings of both the first and second objective will be discussed together within this section to establish the variables that provoke a switch between channels and subsequently ‘show-rooming’ or ‘web-rooming’ behaviour.

### *5.1 ‘Show-rooming’, price and reasons for online acceptance*

The initial hypothesis (H1) tested the relationship between the importance of price as a selection criteria and propensity to engage in ‘show-rooming’. The results of this test illustrated no significant positive or negative relationship was prevalent within this sample. This finding illustrates that Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) and Machavolu and Raju (2014) suggestion that ‘show-rooming’ is motivated by the importance of price alone, is not evident within a clothing context. This is supported by Mintel (2013), who suggests the variance between own-branded garments in the UK high street is minimal or not prevalent; and consumers overall perception of value in a clothing products relate to a multitude of factors, not price in isolation (May-Plumlee and Little, 2006; Mintel, 2013).

Service variables relating to convenience and time saving benefits were core motivations for the majority of respondents and price reductions and discounting were the second most prevalent variable. This is backed by Euromonitor (2014a, 2014b), who indicates that perceived value and convenience were the key drivers of e-commerce and subsequently ‘show-rooming’ behaviour. This illustrates that the final garment price is not the motivation; it is the ability to conduct the actual price comparison and seek perceived benefits through discounting and price reductions that provokes ‘show-rooming’ behaviour within a clothing context. Supporting this is research conducted by Mintel (2014c), which indicated that the cost of delivery and availability of special offers were the most important factors for clothing consumers.

It was evident that both service and product dimensions are important within consumers’ motivation to move between channels. This was further substantiated by the respondent’s indication that wider product ranges and availability, delivery and return convenience, website search features and customer reviews encourage the use of the online platform. This illustrates that the ability to conduct an evaluation is the consumer’s

core concern and service variables that support this encourage purchase in virtual environments. These findings are consistent with Mintel's (2014a, 2014b) conclusion that website functions help consumers to form more accurate garment expectations; and Fan and Miao (2012) who found that trusting a retailer can encourage online purchase. As such, the respondents related knowledge of sizing systems to allow them to predict the product they receive. Both price evaluation and convenience derived from website service variables, facilitating garment evaluation, promoting online adoption and subsequently 'show-rooming' behaviour within a clothing context.

## 5.2 'Web-rooming' and online avoidance

The final hypothesis (H2) tested the relationship between the importance of tactile dimensions, visual appearance and garment fit, and quality, and consumers propensity to engage with 'web-rooming' behaviour. The result of these tests illustrated that no positive or negative significant correlation existed between the importance of tactile criteria and consumers propensity to engage in 'web-rooming', except in the case of visual appearance. This was explained by respondents' indication that the dominant reason for avoidance of online channels was the inability to predict product attributes in a virtual environment. This propensity was similar to 'show-rooming' as the selection criteria importance was, again, not an important factor. However the inability to conduct the evaluation was key to the experience. This is consistent with Mintel's (2014c) findings that 60% of consumers feel that not being able to see or feel an item of clothing prior to purchase is a core barrier; and explains why multiple sizes are purchased as a contingency (Fitsme, 2014). Furthermore, this explains the reasons why consumers prefer to have garments delivered to a physical store, using Click and Collect, so it can be efficiently returned if a tactile evaluation proves it is unsuitable (Mintel, 2014b).

This study shows that this relates to the process of evaluation, not the variables themselves. Present limitations for judging garment size, fit, visual appearance and quality are factors contributing to 'web-rooming' as consumers are engaging with online platforms for browsing behaviour (Mintel, 2014b).

The financial implication of an unsuitable product also prevented purchase in online environments, which added inconvenience when an unsuitable product arrived. It also extended the problem of not being able to predict garment attributes, and unavailable products, both of which presented further frustrations with virtual channels. These findings are consistent with Mintel's suggestion that delivery and returns inconvenience, and the time delay between ordering and receiving an item, can enhance online risk and prevent purchase (Mintel, 2014b). Additionally, service variables such as website design, security and trust were presented by respondents. This supports Mintel's (2014b) indication that consumers prefer to return garments to physical stores to ensure a refund is processed. This illustrates that variable that prevent a full garment evaluation, or enhance security risk, encouraged 'web-rooming'. Conversely, Fan and Miao (2012) suggested trusting a retailer can overcome these issues.

These findings illustrate that both the inability to predict product dimensions, the financial implications, and inconvenience of unsuitable products, were the key motivations for 'web-rooming' behaviour. Similarly, the process of being able to apply selection criteria was the core factors for consumers.

This study indicates that, for retailers to reduce the propensity of channel switching, or encourage consumers to remain with their brand throughout their cross channel

journey, it is imperative to both understand and facilitate the consumers garment evaluation process within the UK high street market. It is evident that present attempts are insufficient to allow accurate garment predictions to be made and, if products are not available within retailers' store, consumers may avoid online channels due to these information discrepancies.

## 6 Conclusions

The study concludes that 'show-rooming' and 'web-rooming' engagement within a clothing context varied from motivations evident within the other sectors that were identified in academic literature. The importance of garment selection criteria was not related to consumers' propensity to engage with these behaviours. The principle reason to switch channels related to the inability to conduct a full garment evaluation within a specific interface. For instance, in physical channels price comparisons, through the identification of price reductions or discounts, could not be achieved efficiently. Neither could it be conveniently accessed by consumers. Conversely, within virtual platforms, current service provision prevents a full assessment of garment attributes, which would remove the risk of unsuitable products. The contribution of this study is the understanding that, to prevent consumers from switching channels or to encourage them to remain with one retailer throughout their multiple channel journeys, companies must facilitate their evaluative process. All retail environments present service benefits to consumers and the identification of the product information that consumers require from each platform will reduce the propensity to engage in 'show-rooming' or 'web-rooming' behaviour. Subsequently, this will reduce the enticement from alternative offerings from competitors. Retailers should consider the dimensions of the consumer's evaluative process and not focus upon the perceived importance of a specific criterion, as this does not facilitate purchase behaviour within a clothing context.

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**Appendix 1****Table A1** Respondent demographics

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Males	25	22.9%
	Females	84	77.1%
Age range	18–25	24	22.0%
	26–33	43	39.4%
	34–41	9	8.3%
	42–49	10	9.2%
	50–57	19	17.4%
	58–65	4	3.7%
Occupation	A	17	15.6%
	B	22	20.2%
	C1	25	22.9%
	C2	8	7.3%
	D	2	1.8%
	E	1	0.9%
	Unemployed	4	3.7%
	Student (full time)	15	13.8%
	Student (undertaking employment)	8	7.3%
Ethnic group	<i>White</i>		
	British	85	78.0%
	Irish	2	1.8%
	Any other background	10	9.2%
	<i>Asian or Asian British</i>		
	Indian	2	1.8%
	African	2	1.8%
	Any other black background	1	0.9%
	<i>Other ethnic groups</i>		
	Chinese	1	0.9%
	Any other ethnic groups	1	0.9%
	Not stated	1	0.9%
UK location	Wales	1	0.9%
	Scotland	54	49.5%
	England North East	2	1.8%
	England North West	41	37.6%
	England Yorkshire and The Humber	1	0.9%
	England East Midlands	1	0.9%
	England West Midlands	1	0.9%
	England East	1	0.9%
	England London	3	2.8%
	England South East	2	1.8%
	England South West	2	1.8%

**Appendix 2****Table A2** Reasons to adopt online channels: themes and coding structure

<i>Criteria dimension</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Service	Access convenience and time saving	24 hour access/shop from home	14
		Convenience	13
		Saves time	20
		Don't live close to a store	3
		<i>Total</i>	50
Product	Price reduction and discounting	Online discounts/cheaper than stores/shop at sales only/reduced travelling costs	31
		<i>Total</i>	31
Product	Greater product selection	Wider product selection/new products first/online exclusives	17
		Specialised products	3
		<i>Total</i>	20
Product	Greater product availability	Product availability contingency/ Product availability size	14
		<i>Total</i>	14
Service	Easy delivery and returns	Free/easy delivery/returns	9
		<i>Total</i>	9
Service	Website functions and security	Easy/ease of product comparison (i.e., filters)	10
		Inspired by peers (i.e., street fashion or customer reviews) or social media/ enticed by emails or visual merchandising /enjoyment	1
		<i>Total</i>	11
Service	Prevents crowds/dislike shopping	No crowds/dislike shopping/can try at home	9
		<i>Total</i>	9
Other	Don't shop online	Don't shop online	7
		<i>Total</i>	7
Product	Retailer sizing knowledge/repeat purchase	If I know my size/repeat purchase	3
		<i>Total</i>	3

**Appendix 3****Table A3** Reasons to avoid online channels: themes and coding structure

<i>Criteria dimension</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Product	Predicting product attributes	Cannot try it on/predict fit/predict outfit without trying it on	46
		Inconvenience of delivery or returns	22
		cannot predict/appraise product quality	18
		discrepancy between visual representation and physical product	13
		Cannot predict required size/size availability	11
		No opportunity for sensory appraisal of visual aspects	9
		Time delay between purchase and receipt	6
		Cannot visualise the garment/see it properly	4
		Risk of unsuitable item	2
		<i>Total</i>	<i>131</i>
Service	Financial implications of online purchase	Financial cost of delivery/returns	26
		High prices online/payment takes time	2
		Delay in receiving returns on credit/debit cards	1
		I don't have credit cards	1
		<i>Total</i>	<i>30</i>
Service	Website design, security and retailer trust	Limited transaction/website security	10
		Lack of retailer trust	1
		Simplistic and difficult to navigate websites/tiring looking at a computer	6
		<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>
Both	No limitations	Nothing	4
		<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>
Product	Out of stock items/options	Problem of out of stock items/less options	2
		<i>Total</i>	<i>2</i>