

# How has the Changing Retail Landscape Affected the Occupational Status of Women and Minorities?

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The retail environment is ever evolving from one whereby retail establishments were primarily brick and mortar, to a continuum whereby retail establishments range from brick and mortar, to hybrids of bricks and clicks, and further still to exclusively online venues. At the height of the brick and mortar retail industry format, the retail buying experience was characterized by consumers shopping at physical locations. During this period, there were immeasurable employment opportunities for a range of jobs and careers for individuals in the retail labor force. Those opportunities ranged from low skill jobs to professional career positions. Conversely, according to *Time* magazine, from 2002 to 2017, department stores lost 448,000 jobs while the online segment added 178,000 jobs (Time 2017). In addition, from January, 2017 to October, 2017, retail employees dropped from 15.9 million to 15.8 million, representing 10.8% of total US employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Multiple market and social phenomena such as globalization, mergers, acquisitions, and continuing technological innovations, have converged to create the perfect storm of growth in sales coupled with stagnate and often declining employment numbers.

Overall retail sales growth is projected to average 2% per year for the next 10 years. This statistic falls well below the national jobs growth rate of 7% annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Department store employees are characterized as 40% minority and 60% female. Given these statistics regarding the disproportionate number of women and minorities who have typically been employees in *traditional* retail industries, it is interesting as well as important to note the impact and repercussions of these population shifts. In addition, with the retailer sector often serving as the 'employer of last resort,' (e.g. offering service jobs) in the past, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, questions arise as to where low skilled workers will seek and find employment, and how they will sustain themselves if they are unemployed (e.g. unemployment insurance, health insurance, retraining). For women in particular, given that oftentimes they have family responsibilities, they are particularly

vulnerable with respect to work schedules and work locations. This paper investigates the degree to which women and minorities have been affected by the transitioning retail environment from a physical one to one that is increasingly online.

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*Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:* This paper explores the silent crisis taking place in the retail sector with the deluge of online purchasing. Routine retail jobs are disappearing and being replaced by robotic fulfillment. Indeed, as retail has moved online, its impact on the technological, educational, and ecological scenes are examined.

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