

# The Evolution of U.S. Retail Concentration

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**Disclaimer:** Any opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Census Bureau. All results have been reviewed to ensure that no confidential information is disclosed. References to specific companies are based on public information and do not imply the company is in the confidential data.

# The U.S. retail sector

## Changes in the aggregate structure of retail

- ↑ national concentration (Hortascu and Syverson 2015; Autor, Dorn, Katz, Patterson, Van Reenan 2020)
- Growth of Walmart, Target, etc.
- Exit of small firms (Basker 2005; Jia 2008; Foster, Haltiwanger, Klimek, Krizan, Ohlmacher 2016)
- Effect on consumers? (Markups, Market Power, Costs)

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## Retail markets are local

- Negative effects of concentration operate through local markets
- What does increasing in national concentration imply for local markets?

## This paper: 3 Results

### 1. Measure **local** retail concentration with Census data 1982-2012

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Contribute to understanding of local markets using Census data

(Rossi-Hansberg, Sarte, Trachter 2020; Benkard, Yurucoglu, Zhang 2021; Rinz 2021)

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Make explicit the relationship between national and local trends

- National firms' expansion (Rossi-Hansberg, Hsieh 2019; Cao, Hyatt, Mukoyama, Saeger 2020)

# This paper: 3 Results

## 3. Effects of increasing local concentration on consumers

- Off-the-shelf model linking prices, markups, costs (Atkeson & Burstein, 2008)
- **Key:**  $\uparrow$  Local concentration  $\rightarrow$   $\uparrow$  Markups  $\rightarrow$   $\downarrow$  Passthrough of cost savings

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- Increases are small relative to drop in retail prices (↓ 35 percent)

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Local concentration explains part of increase in markups

- Room for other channels (Bornstein 2018; Brand 2020)

# Roadmap

Census Data on U.S. Retailers

Measuring National and Local Concentration

Decomposing National Concentration

Effect of Local Concentration on Markups

# What are retailers?

- Sell final goods to consumers
- Perform no transformation of materials
- Not Retailers:
  - Restaurants (transform food), Wholesalers (sell to businesses), Services: Barber, gym, etc. (no physical good)
- Excluded Retail Industries:
  - Auto dealers and gasoline stations (ownership issues)
  - Non-store retailers (measurement)

## Store-level sales data

- Census of Retail Trade (CRT)
  - All (employers) retail stores in the U.S.
  - 1982-2012 - Years ending in 2 and 7
- Location: **Commuting Zone**, Zip Code, County, MSA.
  - Also observe national e-commerce share.
- Industry: NAICS
- Sales by 20 product categories (clothing, groceries, etc.)

# Definition of markets - Industry vs Product

445-Grocery Stores



452-General Merchandisers



TARGET

448 - Clothing Stores



# Definition of markets - Industry vs Product



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# Measuring concentration

**Herfindahl-Hirschman Index** (for a product market  $j$ )

$$HHI^j = \sum_{i=1}^N (s_i^j)^2 \quad s_i^j : \text{Sales share of firm } i \text{ in product } j$$

# Measuring concentration

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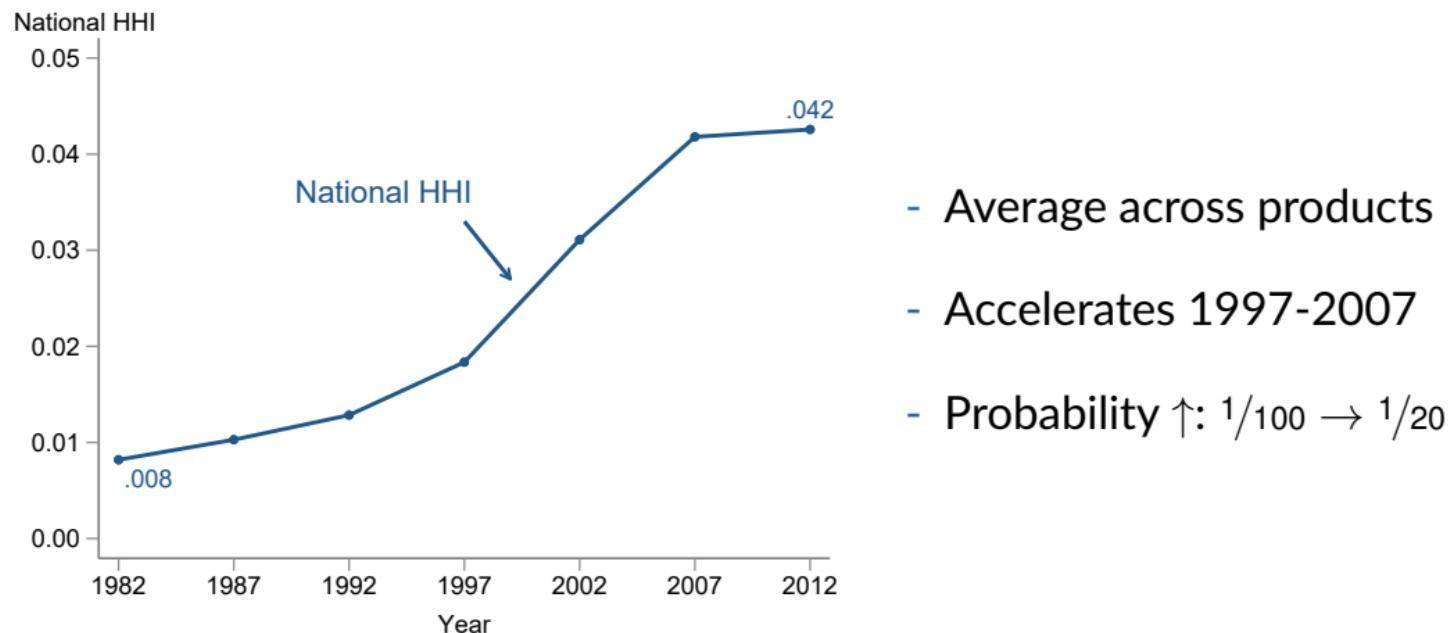
$$HHI^j = \sum_{i=1}^N (s_i^j)^2 \quad s_i^j : \text{Sales share of firm } i \text{ in product } j$$

**What does the HHI mean?**

- Probability two random dollars ( $x, y$ ) are spent at the same firm ( $i$ )

$$HHI = \Pr(i_x = i_y)$$

# National U.S. retail concentration

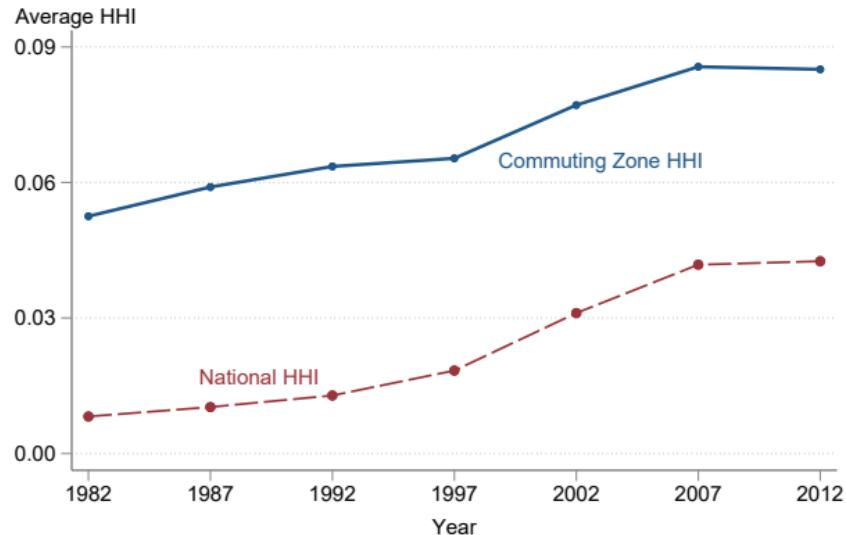


# Local U.S. retail concentration



- Steady increase of  $\sim 3pp$

# Local U.S. retail concentration



- Steady increase of ~ 3pp
- **Parallel** increase with national concentration
- Similar across geographies

details

## Additional results (1992-2012)

### 1. Concentration changes across products

details

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## 3. Effect of e-commerce (non-store retailers)

details

- Derive bounds on effect on local concentration
- Small effects until 2012

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## 4. Concentration changes in retail industries

details

- Larger increases in concentration (8.7pp Nat. - 12.6pp Local)
- General Merchandisers local concentration ↑ 28pp

# Roadmap

Census Data on U.S. Retailers

Measuring National and Local Concentration

Decomposing National Concentration

Effect of Local Concentration on Markups

# What does national concentration imply about local?

## Not Much:

example

- As local concentration increases so does national concentration
  - Consumers in the **same market** buying from the **same firms**
- As firms expand across markets they increase national concentration
  - Consumers in **different markets** buying from the **same firms**
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## Objective:

Decompose National HHI into Local and Cross-Market concentration

## Relationship between National and Local HHI

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$$HHI^N = \overbrace{P(m_x = m_y)}^{\text{Collocation}} \underbrace{P(i_x = i_y | m_x = m_y)}_{\text{Av. Local HHI}} + (1 - P(m_x = m_y)) \underbrace{P(i_x = i_y | m_x \neq m_y)}_{\text{Av. Cross-Market HHI}}$$

# National HHI driven by rise of national firms

$$HHI^N = \underbrace{0.02}_{\text{Collocation}} + \underbrace{P(i_x = i_y | m_x = m_y)}_{\text{Av. Local HHI}} + 0.98 \underbrace{P(i_x = i_y | m_x \neq m_y)}_{\text{Av. Cross-Market HHI}}$$

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National index contains little information on local concentration

details

- Collocation term is less than 2 percent (Higher in other countries/industries)

Increase in national HHI reflects increasing cross market concentration

- Consumers in different markets shop at the same firms

# Roadmap

Census Data on U.S. Retailers

Measuring National and Local Concentration

Decomposing National Concentration

Effect of Local Concentration on Markups

# Consequences of increasing concentration

- Local concentration is most relevant for retail markets
- Higher concentration can increase market power and markups
- Key Question:
  - Effect of increase in concentration on passthrough of lower costs
- Off-the-shelf model of firm markups based on Atkeson & Burstein (2008)
  - Model implies explicit relationship between local concentration and markups

# Model of firms' markups

details

- **Market:** product-location pair
  - $J$  products in  $L$  locations
  - $I(j, \ell)$  firm compete in quantities (Cournot) in a market

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- **Pricing:** market-specific pricing ( $p_i^{j\ell}$ )
- **Technology:** firms vary in market-specific marginal cost ( $\lambda_i^{j\ell}$ )

# Pricing to market: Cournot competition

Details

$$p_i^{j\ell} = \mu_i^{j\ell} \lambda_i^{j\ell} \quad \mu_i^{j\ell} = \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} \left[ 1 - s_i^{j\ell} \right]^{-1}$$

Markup  $\mu_i^{jm}$  depends on firm  $i$ 's sales share in product-market  $(s_i^{jm})$ :

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**Key:** Aggregate to equation linking **Local HHI** and markups (Grassi, 2017)

$$\mu_j = \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} [1 - \text{HHI}_j]^{-1} \quad \left( \text{HHI}_j = \sum_{\ell} s_{\ell}^j \cdot \text{HHI}_{j\ell}^{\ell} \right)$$

## Data: Concentration and Markups

- Data from the Annual Retail Trade Survey (ARTS: 1993-2012)
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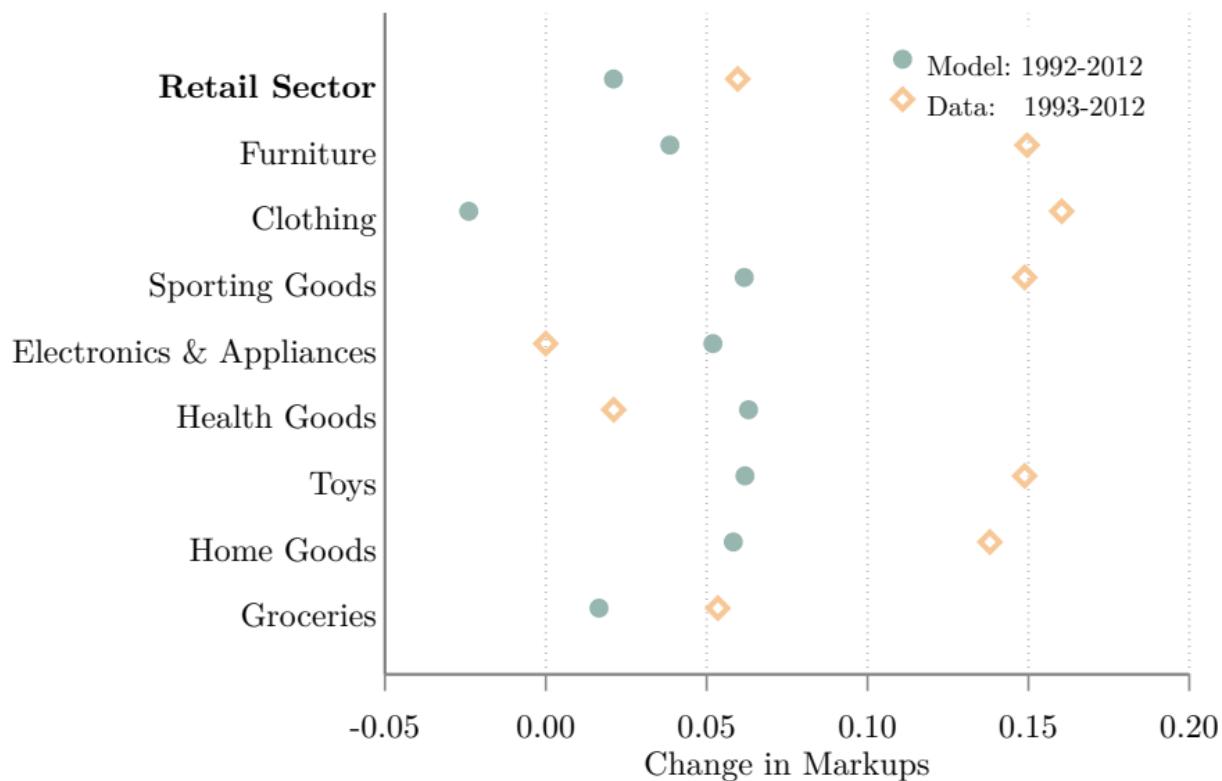
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## Results:

- Obtain implied markups from change in local concentration
- Change in local HHI implies 2pp increase in markups
- 1/3 of increase 1993-2012 increase in ARTS data

# Model vs Data: change in markups



# Conclusion

- Direct measurement of local concentration at product level
  - Retail firms compete in products across industries (e.g. General Merchandisers)
- Both local and national concentration rising in the retail sector
  - They rise for different reasons
  - 99% of national concentration is cross market
- National trends are not informative about local concentration
- Higher **local** concentration increased markups 2pp (1992-2012)
  - Explains about 1/3 of the rise in markups.

# Appendix

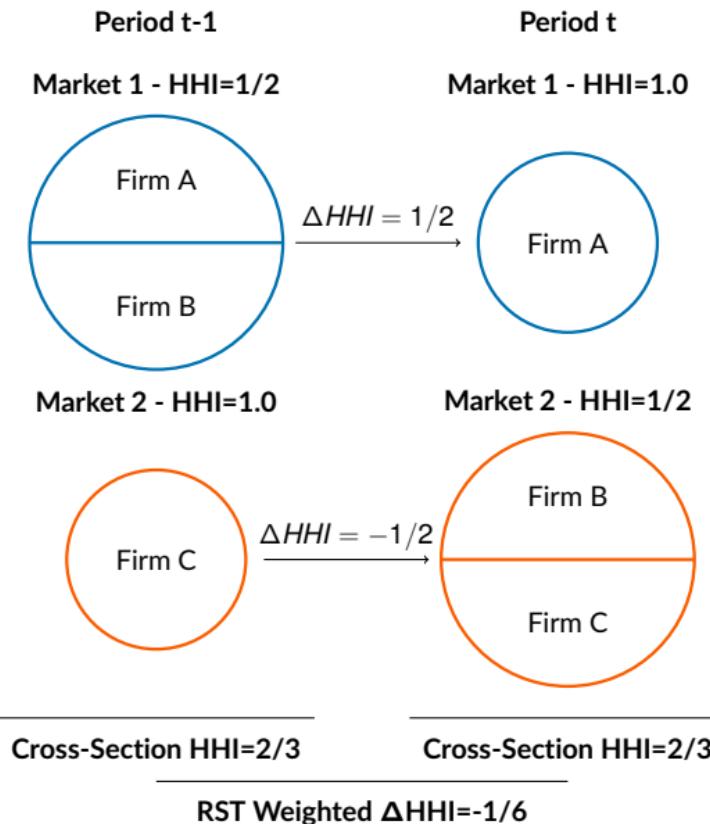
# Comparison to RST

Three main differences:

- Data source - Census vs NETS
  - Census covers universe of retailers
  - Administrative records
- Market definition - Product vs (detailed) Industry
  - Industry markets miss cross-industry competition
  - Problem is worse for detailed industries
- Aggregation methodology
  - RST aggregate change in local concentration with end-of-period weights
  - Bias towards decrease in concentration
  - We report changes in cross-sectional concentration

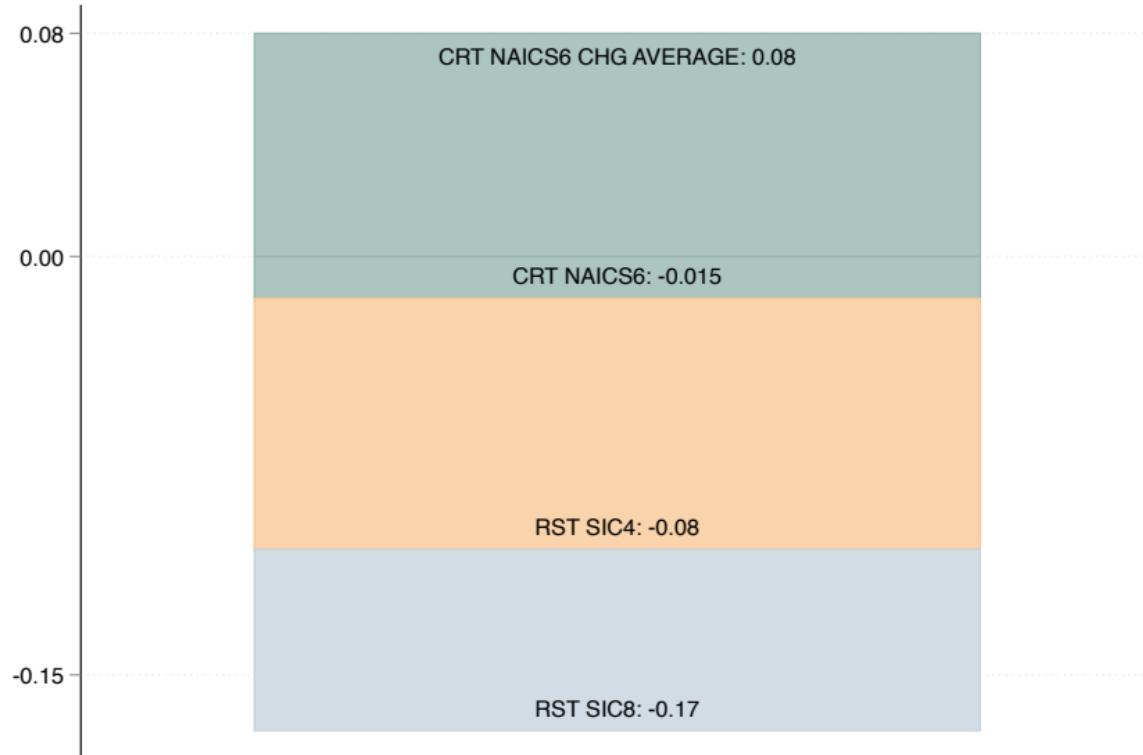
Each difference explains about 1/3 of discrepancy

# Weighting Comparison



- Growing markets less concentrated
- RST find decreasing concentration w/ no change in cross section

# Comparison to RST



# RST Comparison

National Concentration					
	Level	Change from 1992			
		1992	1997	2002	2007
RST	N/A	0.020	0.030	0.050	
NAICS-based	0.029	0.017	0.056	0.076	
Select NAICS	0.046	0.034	0.097	0.136	

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### Zip Code Concentration - End-of-Period Weights

---

	Level	Change from 1992			
		1992	1997	2002	2007
RST	N/A	-0.070	-0.100	-0.140	
NAICS-based	0.507	0.024	-0.018	-0.019	
Select NAICS	0.552	-0.021	-0.018	-0.015	

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### Zip Code Concentration - Current Period Weights

---

	Level	Change from 1992			
		NAICS-based	0.022	0.057	0.072
Select NAICS	0.552	0.026	0.067	0.083	

# Map of Commuting Zones

back



# Constructing sales by product category

[back](#)

Item 10. MERCHANTISE LINES				
Report sales for each merchandise line sold by this establishment, either as a dollar figure or as a whole percent of total sales. (See HOW TO REPORT DOLLAR FIGURES on page 1 and HOW TO REPORT PERCENTS below)				
HOW TO REPORT PERCENTS	If figure is <b>38.76%</b> of total sales:		Mil.	Thou.
	• Report whole percents	Not acceptable	Dol.	Percent
				39
				38.76
Merchandise lines	Cen-sus use	ESTIMATES are acceptable. Report dollars OR percents.		
		Mil.	Thou.	Dol.
1. Women's, juniors', and misses' wear (Report girls' and infants' and toddlers' wear on line 3 and footwear on line 4)	0220	230	231	232
2. Men's wear (Report boys' wear on line 3 and footwear on line 4)	0200			
3. Children's wear (Include boys' (sizes 2 to 7 and 8 to 20), girls' (sizes 4 to 6x and 7 to 14), and infants' and toddlers' clothing and accessories. Report footwear on line 4.)	0240			
4. Footwear (include accessories)	0260			

FORM RT-5302

## Data: Census of Retail Trade

- Observe store sales for **entire sample**
- Sales by product line for 80 percent of sales
- Aggregate lines into product categories
- Impute for stores with missing data [Details](#)

# Imputing Data

## 1. Data collection with Census of Retail Trade (every 5 years)

- Sales data by product for 80% of sales

## 2. Aggregation to product categories

- Goal: Aggregate so industries primarily sell one category

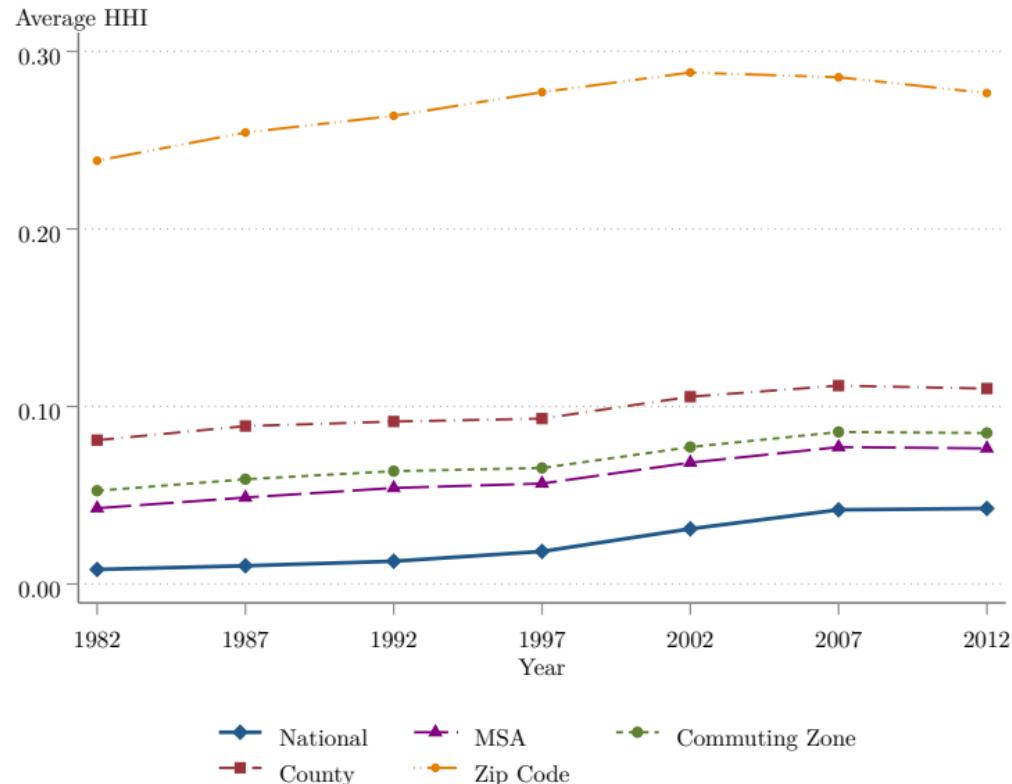
Broad Line	Product Category
Footwear	Clothing
Curtains	Clothing
Sewing	Clothing
Drugs, health aids, etc	Health
Optical goods	Optical Goods

## 3. Imputation - depending on data availability use

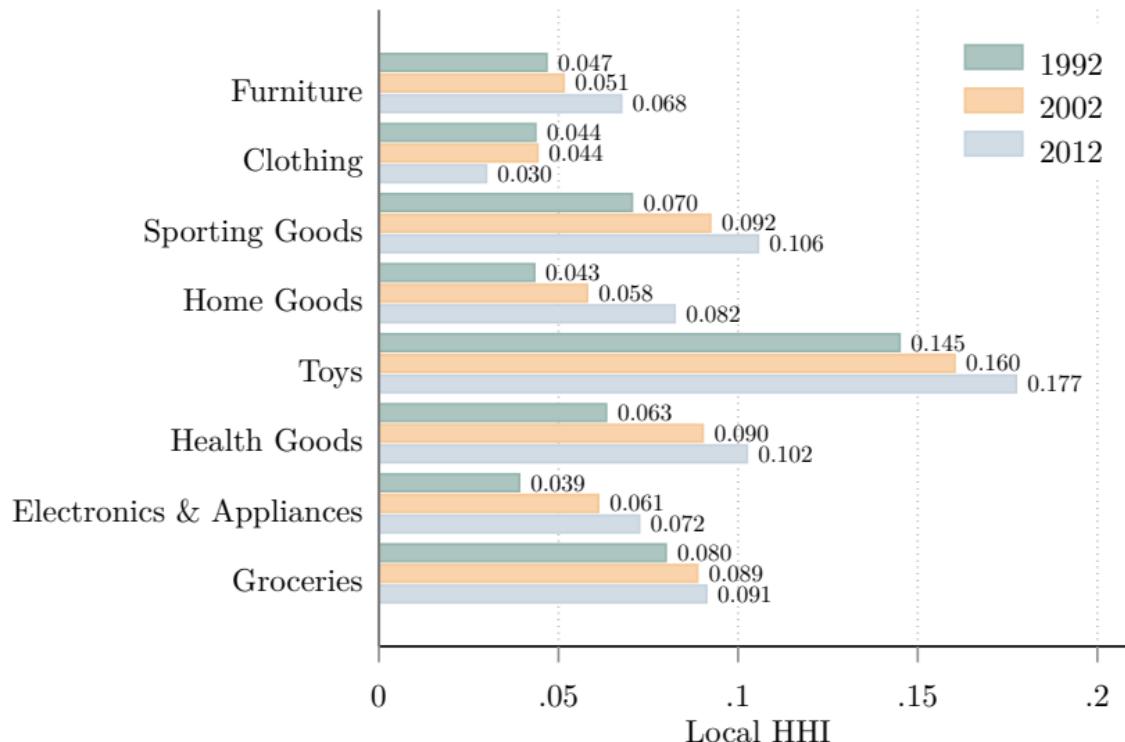
- Sales of other stores of the same firms
- Sales of the store in other years
- Industry, kind of business, and multi-unit status

# Local Concentration Increases

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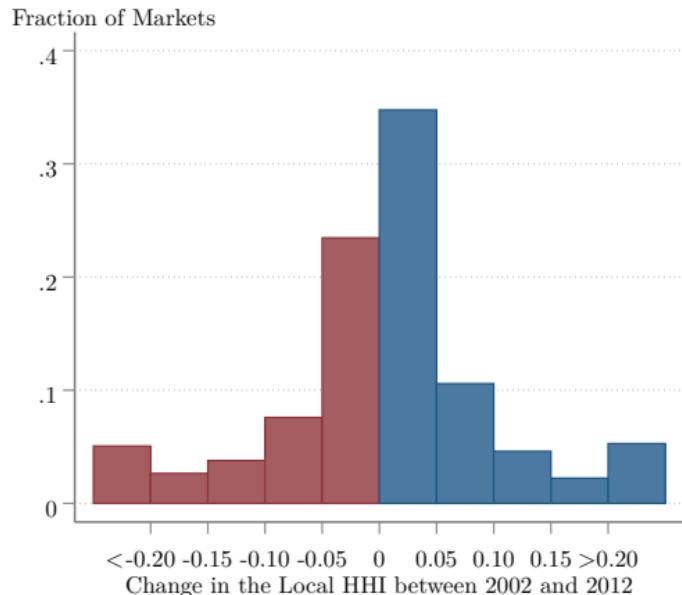
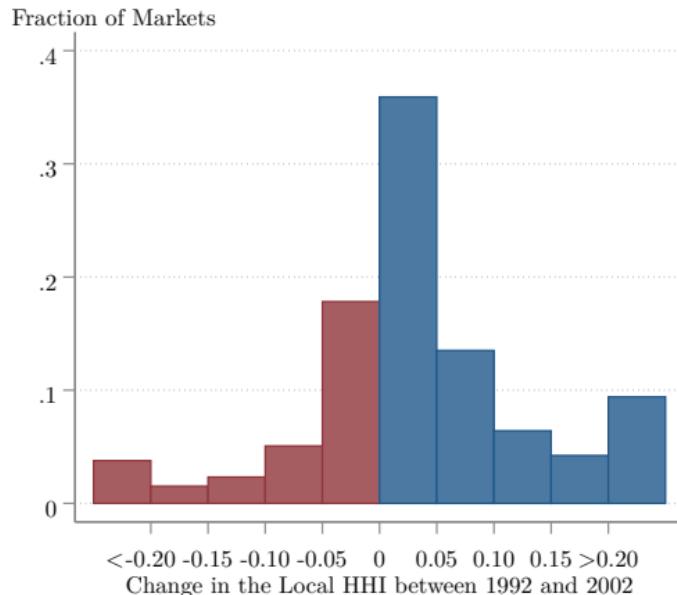


# Local Concentration Across Products

[back](#)

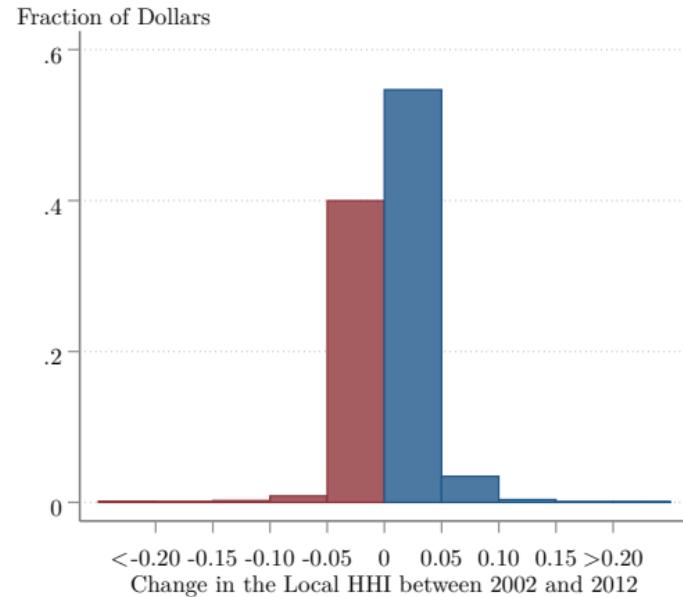
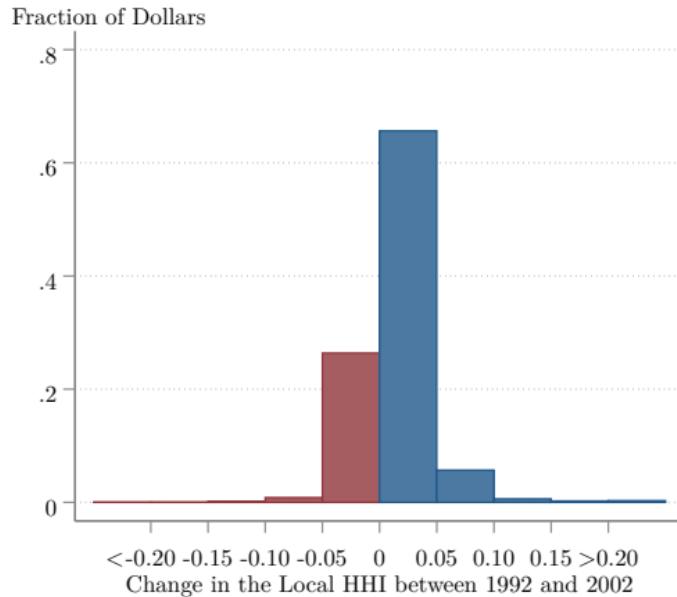
# Changes in Concentration Across Locations - I

back



# Changes in Concentration Across Locations - II

back



# Accounting for Non-Store Retailers

back

- Non-store retailers (e-commerce, catalogue) only report national sales
- Historically online sales are low for most product categories
  - Moderately important by 2012 (2.7% of sales 1992 → 9.5% in 2012)
  - Low share in most products (Groceries 1.3%→0.7%)
  - High share in some products (Electronics and Appliances 7.5%→20.9%)

details

# Accounting for Non-Store Retailers

back

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  - Low share in most products (Groceries 1.3%→0.7%)
  - High share in some products (Electronics and Appliances 7.5%→20.9%)
- Use national numbers for e-commerce shares to **obtain bounds**
  - Assumption: Online sales proportionally distributed across markets

$$\underbrace{H\bar{H}I = (1 - s_{NS})^2 H\bar{H}I_{BM}}_{\text{Lower Bound: Diluted Sales}}$$

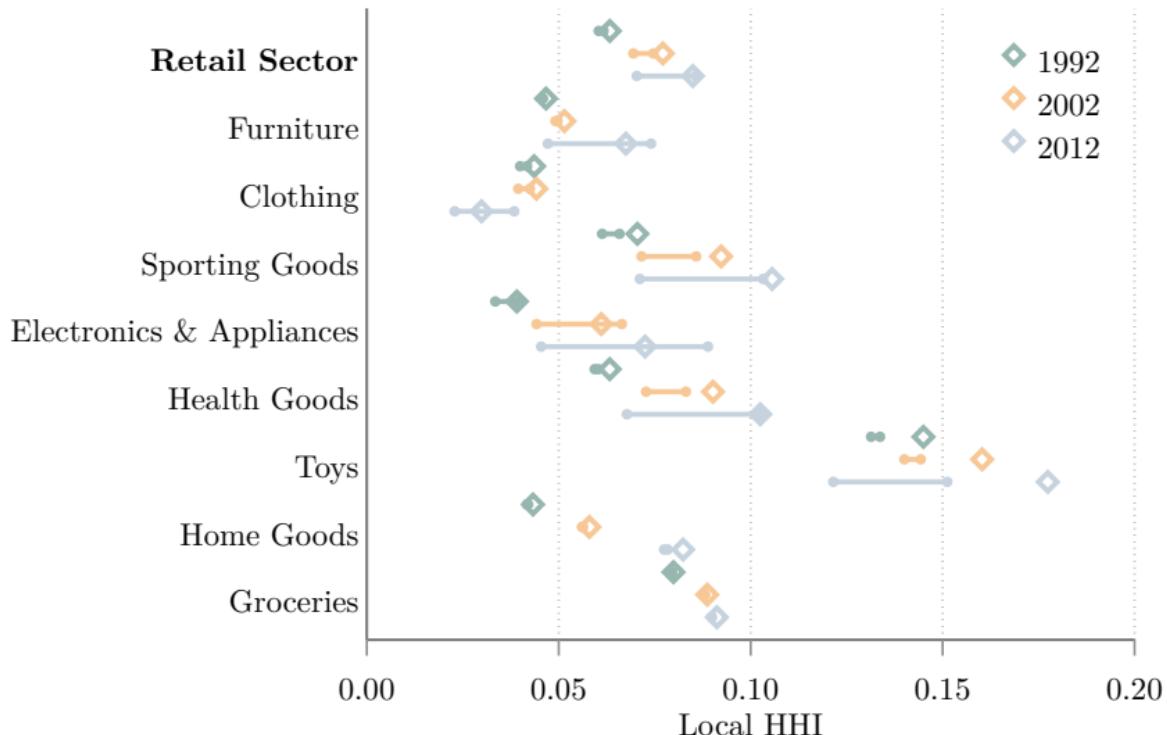
and

$$\overline{H\bar{H}I} = (1 - s_{HS})^2 H\bar{H}I_{BM} + s_{NS}^2$$

Upper Bound: Concentrated Sales

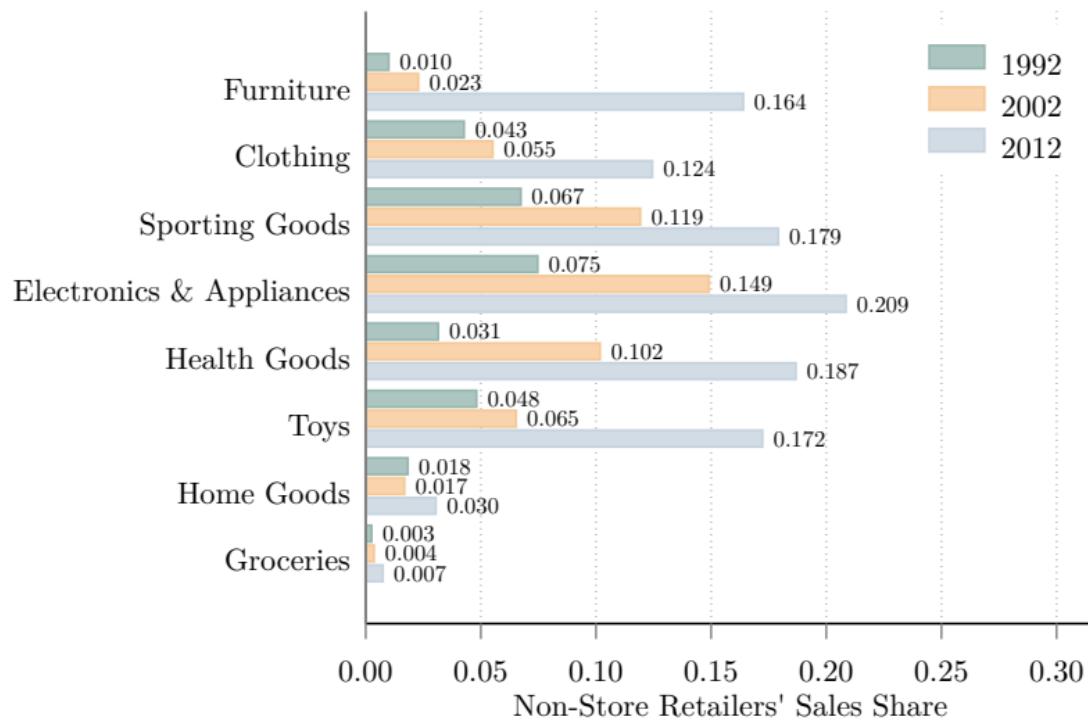
# Bounds on Local Concentration

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# Non-Store Retailers Share by Product

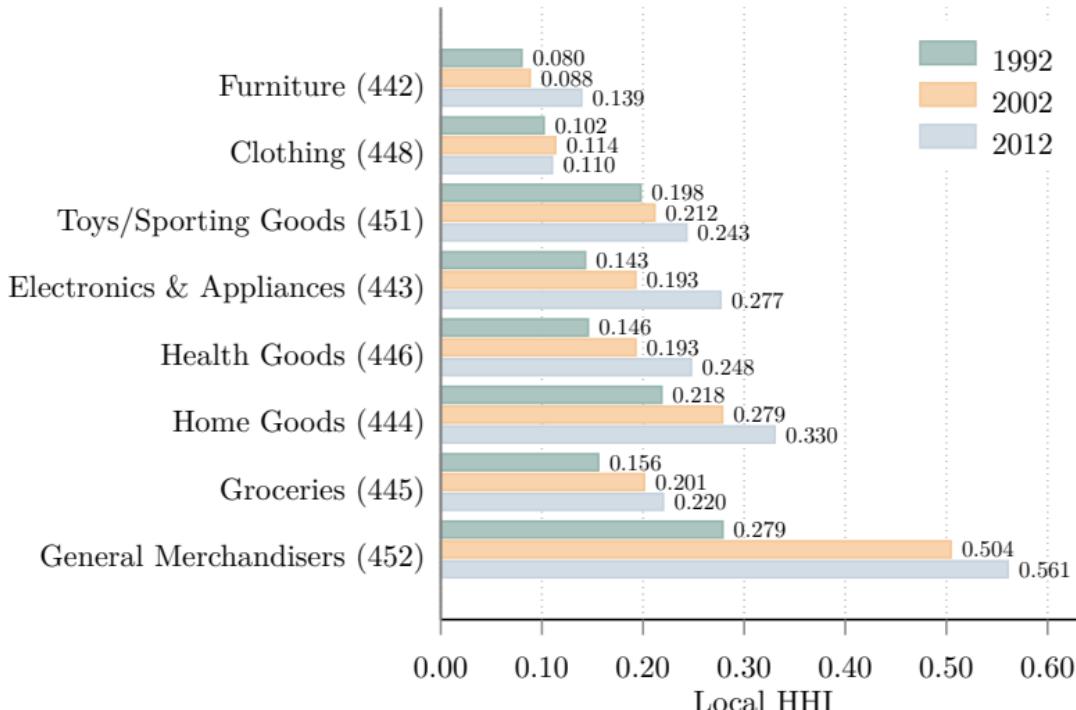
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# Average Industry Concentration

National Concentration					
	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Product Based	0.013	0.019	0.031	0.042	0.043
Industry Based	0.029	0.046	0.085	0.105	0.116
Commuting Zone Concentration					
Product Based	0.064	0.066	0.078	0.086	0.086
Industry Based	0.177	0.199	0.263	0.287	0.303
Zip Code Concentration					
Product Based	0.264	0.277	0.288	0.286	0.277
Industry Based	0.530	0.552	0.603	0.611	0.615

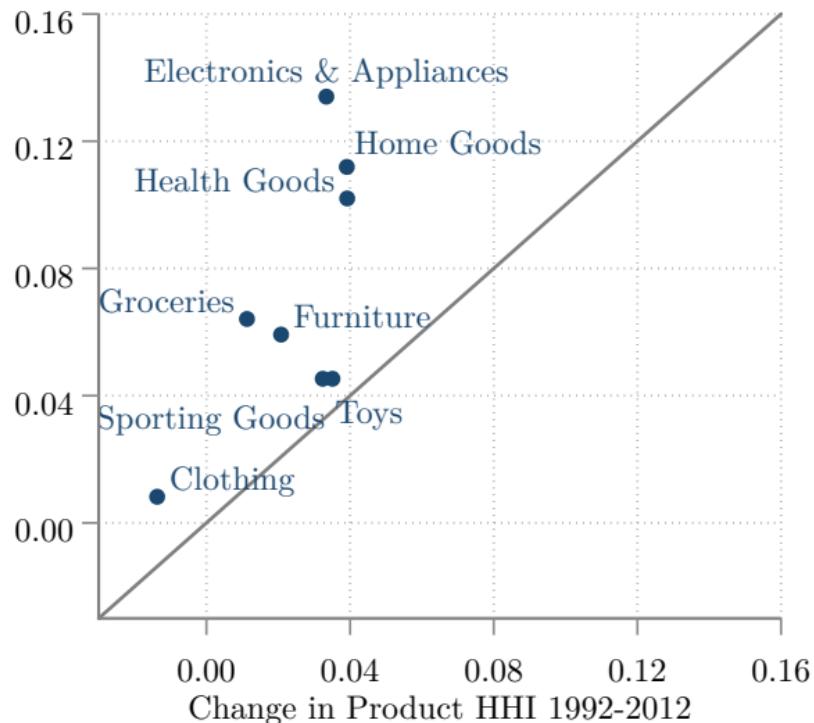
# Local Concentration Across Industries



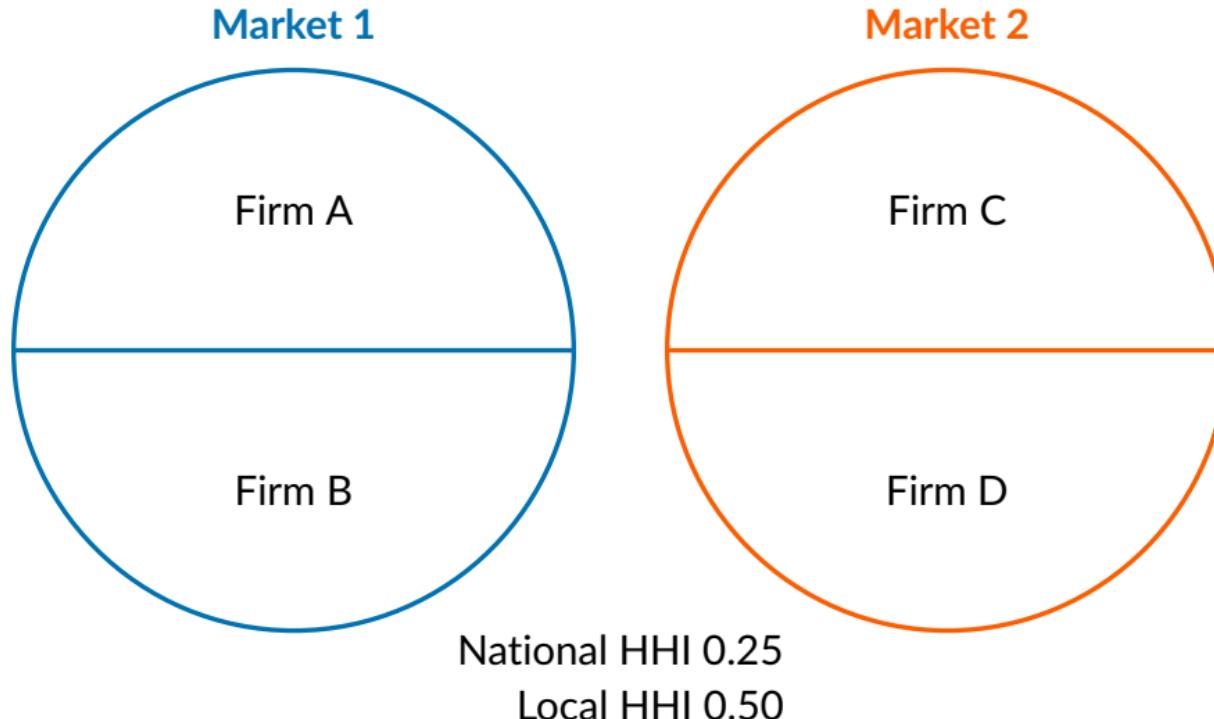
# Local Concentration Products vs Industries

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Change in Industry HHI 1992-2012

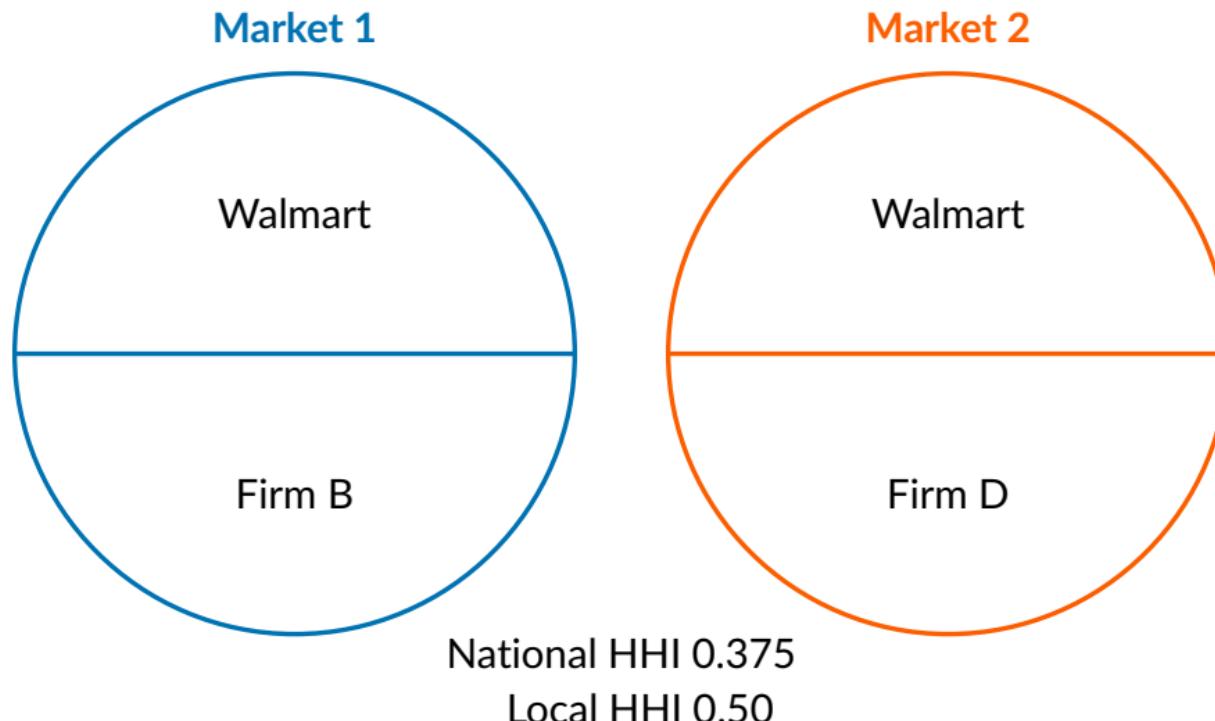


# What does national concentration imply about local?



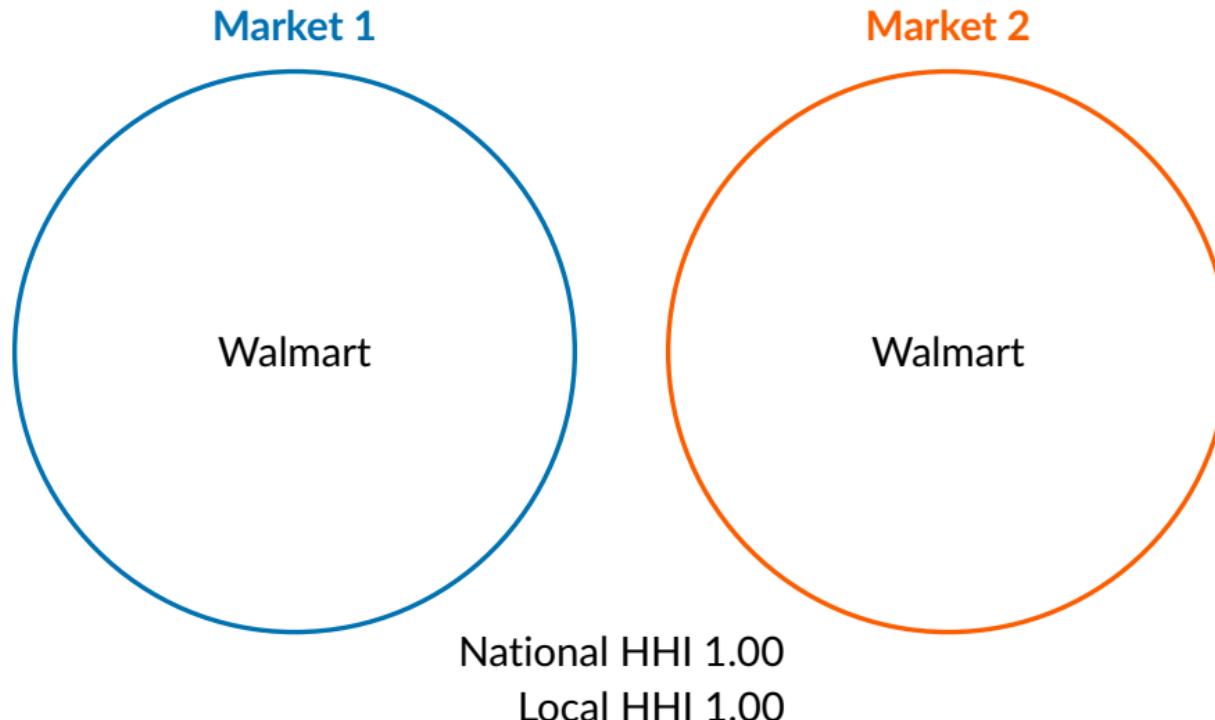
# Scenario 1: Increasing national, local unchanged

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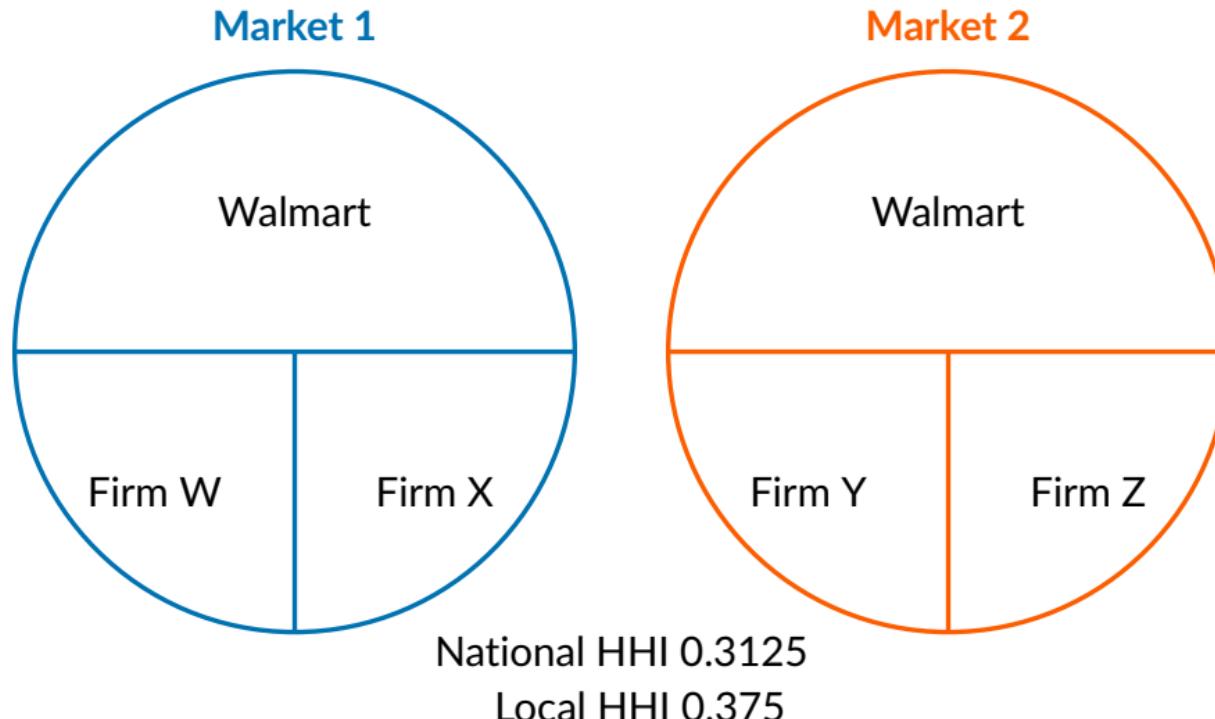
## Scenario 2: Increasing national and local

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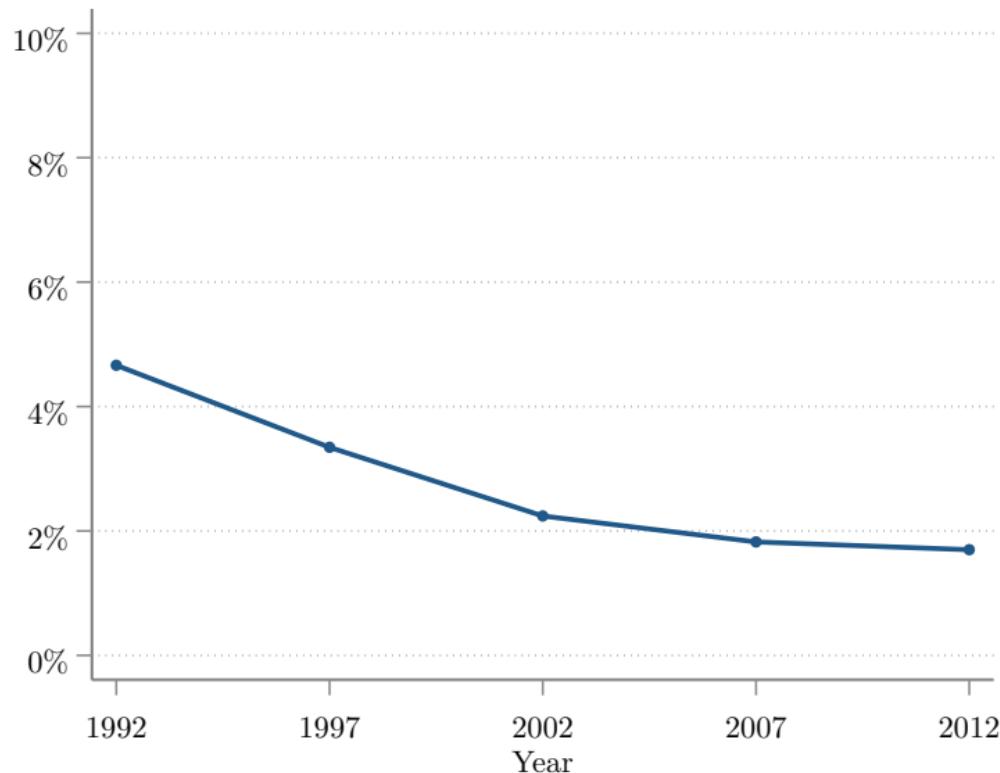
## Scenario 3: Increasing national, decreasing local

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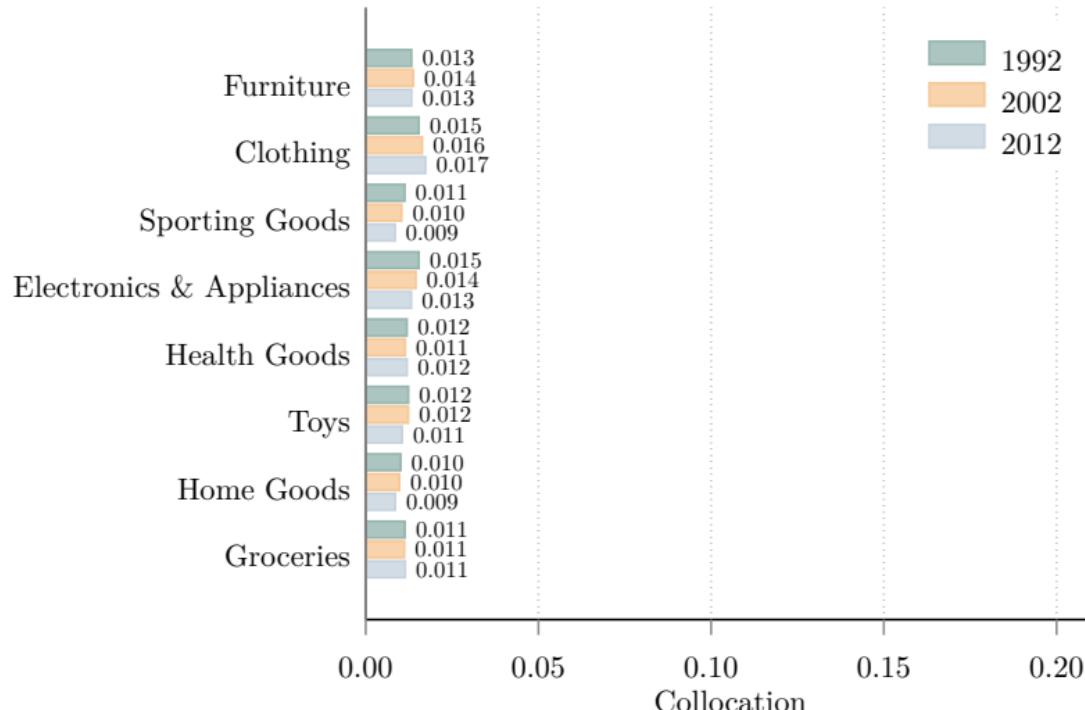
# Contribution of Local HHI to National HHI

back



# Collocation Across Products

back



## Decomposition Equation - Local HHI

$$\text{Local HHI} = \sum_m s_m \sum_{i=1}^{N_m} (s_i^m)^2 = \sum_m s_m \underbrace{\sum_{i \in N_m^{new}} (s_i^m)^2}_{\text{Entry}} + \overbrace{\sum_{i \in N_m^{old}} (s_i^m)^2}^{\text{Continuers}}$$

- Results depend on entry timeframe
- Entrants within past 10 years play small role in Local HHI
- Entrants within the past 20 years play a large role
- Recently importance of continuers increasing

## Decomposition Equation - Cross Market HHI

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Cross HHI} &= \sum_m \sum_{n \neq m} s_m s_n \sum_{i=1}^N s_i^m s_i^n \\ &= \sum_m \sum_{n \neq m} s_m s_n \left( \underbrace{\sum_{i \in N_{mn}^{new}} s_i^m s_i^n}_{\text{Entry}} + \overbrace{\sum_{i \in N_{mn}^{old}} s_i^m s_i^n}^{\text{Continuers}} \right)\end{aligned}$$

- Entrants within past 10 years play small role in Cross Market HHI
- Entrants within the past 20 years play a large role
- Recently importance of continuers increasing

## Model details

- Economy has  $L$  locations and  $J$  products
- Without loss, there are  $I$  firms in each market  $(j, \ell)$
- Firms produce using only labor:  $y_i^{j\ell} = z_i^{j\ell} n_i^{j\ell}$ 
  - Firms differ in productivity  $z_i^{j\ell}$
  - Labor is immobile across locations
  - Location specific wage  $w_\ell$  such that:  $\sum_j \sum_i n_i^{j\ell} = N_\ell^S$
  - Firm's marginal cost:  $\lambda_i^{j\ell} = w_\ell / z_i^{j\ell}$
- CES demand for varieties of product  $j$  in location  $\ell$ : elasticity  $\epsilon_j$
- Cobb-Douglas aggregators:
  - Products in location  $\ell$  - Match product share by location
  - Retail output across location - Match location share

# Functional forms: Aggregation

- Aggregate retail output:

$$Y = \prod_{m=1}^M (y_m)^{\beta_m} \quad \sum_{m=1}^M \beta_m = 1$$

- Market retail output:

$$y_m = \prod_{j=1}^J (y_j^m)^{\gamma_j^m} \quad \sum_{j=1}^J \gamma_j^m = 1$$

- Product output (market  $m$ ):

$$y_j^m = \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \left( y_i^{jm} \right)^{\frac{\epsilon_j - 1}{\epsilon_j}} \right)^{\frac{\epsilon_j}{\epsilon_j - 1}} \quad \epsilon_j > 1$$

# Functional forms: Demand and prices

back

- Demand for market  $m$  and aggregate price  $p$ :

$$p_m y_m = \beta_m P \cdot Y \quad P = \theta \prod_{m=1}^M (p_m)^{\beta_m} \quad \text{where } \theta = \prod_{m=1}^M (\beta_m)^{-\beta_m}$$

- Demand for product  $j$  in market  $m$  and market  $m$ 's price:

$$p_j^m y_j^m = \gamma_j^m p_m y_m \quad p_m = \Gamma \prod_{j=1}^J (p_j^m)^{\gamma_j^m} \quad \text{where } \Gamma = \prod_{j=1}^J (\gamma_j^m)^{-\gamma_j^m}$$

- Demand for firm  $i$ 's product  $j$  in market  $m$  and product  $j$ 's price in market  $m$ :

$$y_i^{jm} = \left( \frac{p_i^{jm}}{p_j^m} \right)^{-\epsilon_j} y_j^m \quad p_j^m = \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \left( p_i^{jm} \right)^{1-\epsilon_j} \right)^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon_j}}$$

# Shares inversion details

## Markups

- Inversion is immediate from optimal markup rule given type of competition
- Solve with either Cournot or Bertrand competition

## Prices and quantities:

- Recall the demand for firm  $i$ 's output of product  $j$  in market  $m$ :

$$y_i^{jm} = \left( \frac{p_i^{jm}}{p_j^m} \right)^{-\epsilon} y_j^m$$

- Manipulating gives shares as:

$$s_i^{jm} \equiv \frac{p_i^{jm} y_i^{jm}}{p_j^m y_j^m} = \left( \frac{p_i^{jm}}{p_j^m} \right)^{1-\epsilon} = \left( \frac{y_i^{jm}}{y_j^m} \right)^{\frac{\epsilon-1}{\epsilon}}$$

# Aggregating markups - I

**Average product markup:** Ratio of price  $p_j^\ell$  to marginal cost  $\lambda_j^\ell$ .

- CRS imply  $\lambda_j^\ell$  is also the average cost:

$$\lambda_j^\ell \equiv \frac{\sum_i \lambda_i^{j\ell} y_i^{j\ell}}{y_j^\ell} = \sum_i \lambda_i^{j\ell} \frac{y_i^{j\ell}}{y_j^\ell}$$

- Replacing on markups:

$$\mu_j^\ell \equiv \frac{p_j^\ell}{\lambda_j^\ell} = \left[ \sum_i \lambda_i^{j\ell} \frac{y_i^{j\ell}}{p_j^\ell y_j^\ell} \right]^{-1} = \left[ \sum_i \left( \frac{\lambda_i^{j\ell}}{p_i^{j\ell}} \right) \left( \frac{p_i^{j\ell} y_i^{j\ell}}{p_j^\ell y_j^\ell} \right) \right]^{-1}$$

- (Weighted) harmonic mean of individual markups:

$$\mu_j^\ell = \left[ \sum_i \left( \mu_i^{j\ell} \right)^{-1} s_i^{j\ell} \right]^{-1}$$

# Aggregating markups - II

Relationship to local HHI:

$$\begin{aligned}\mu_j^\ell &= \left[ \sum_i \left( \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} [1 - s_i^{j\ell}]^{-1} \right)^{-1} s_i^{j\ell} \right]^{-1} = \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} \left[ \sum_i (1 - s_i^{j\ell}) s_i^{j\ell} \right]^{-1} \\ &= \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} \left[ 1 - \sum_i (s_i^{j\ell})^2 \right]^{-1} = \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} \left[ 1 - \text{HHI}_j^\ell \right]^{-1}\end{aligned}$$

Relationship to product's gross margins:

$$\mu_j \equiv \frac{\sum_\ell p_j^\ell y_j^\ell}{\sum_\ell \lambda_j^\ell l_j^\ell} = \frac{\sum_\ell p_j^\ell y_j^\ell}{\sum_\ell \frac{\lambda_j^\ell}{p_j^\ell} p_j^\ell y_j^\ell} = \left[ \sum_\ell (\mu_j^\ell)^{-1} s_j^\ell \right]^{-1} = \frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1} [1 - \text{HHI}_j]^{-1}$$

# Matching markups from ARTS

1. Identify main industry of each product category (e.g., Clothing - NAICS 448)
2. Assume that General Merchandisers charge a **product markup** proportional to that of product's industry:

$$\mu_{GM}^j = \lambda \cdot \mu_j^{ARTS}$$

3. Estimate  $\lambda$  to be consistent with General Merchandiers's markup:

$$\mu_{GM}^{ARTS} = \sum_j \omega_{GM}^j \mu_{GM}^j = \lambda \sum_j \omega_{GM}^j \cdot \mu_j^{ARTS}$$

4. Compute product markups - Geometric average of markups

$$\mu_j = \left( \frac{1 - \omega_{GM}^j}{\mu_j^{ARTS}} + \frac{\omega_{GM}^j}{\mu_{GM}^j} \right)^{-1}$$

# Estimated parameters by product

back

Product Category	1992	$\varepsilon_j$ 2002	2012
Furniture	<b>2.70</b>	2.43	2.43
Clothing	<b>3.07</b>	2.83	2.48
Sporting Goods	3.73	3.77	3.20
Electronics & Appliances	4.48	5.74	4.95
Health Goods	4.38	5.30	5.09
Toys	<b>5.55</b>	5.91	4.91
Home Goods	4.85	4.13	3.92
Groceries	<b>5.82</b>	5.39	6.40