

Design Thinking and Innovation- LCLM 6002

Individual Report

Student Name: Slawomir Gora- Student Number: 2336470

Lecture's name: Charles Obinwa

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.

2. Task 1 – Innovation Opportunities in UK Furniture Retail

- 2.1 IKEA UK and the Changing Retail Market
- 2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Emerging Expectations
- 2.3 Customer Pain Points and Market Gaps
- 2.4 Digital Technology and New Retail Opportunities
- 2.5 Delivery and the Last-Mile Challenge
- 2.6 Sustainability, Circularity and Scalability
- 2.7 Causal Mapping and Key Opportunity Identified

3. Task 2 – Developing a New Venture through Design Thinking

- 3.1 Empathise – Understanding IKEA Customers
- 3.2 Define – The Customer Problem
- 3.3 Ideate – Exploring Possible Solutions
 - 3.3.1 Brainstorming and Divergent Thinking
 - 3.3.2 Mind Mapping
 - 3.3.3 SCAMPER
- 3.4 Evaluating the Concept through DFV
- 3.5 Proposed Venture Concept
- 3.6 Prototype and Minimum Viable Product (MVP)
- 3.7 Testing, Feedback and Refinement

4. Conclusion

5. References

1. Introduction

Buying furniture is different from many other retail purchases because customers need to consider more than price or appearance. The size of a room, available space, delivery options and how a product will look inside the home can all influence the final decision. As shopping becomes more connected across physical and digital channels, furniture retailers therefore need to make this process easier while responding to changing customer expectations.

IKEA UK is well positioned within this environment because its customer experience extends beyond traditional stores. Customers can shop online and use home planning and design services when considering different products and layouts (IKEA, 2025). At the same time, the company is continuing to develop its approach to accessibility and circularity, showing that convenience and sustainability are becoming increasingly connected to its wider retail model.

This report examines where further opportunities could exist for IKEA in the UK market. It considers customer behaviour, difficulties within the purchasing journey, digital technology, delivery and last-mile challenges, and sustainable growth. These findings are then used to identify a specific customer problem and develop a potential venture through Design Thinking, moving from problem exploration to concept development, evaluation, prototyping and customer testing.

2.1 IKEA UK and the Changing Retail Market

The UK furniture market is changing as customers become less dependent on a single way of shopping. A purchase may begin with online research, continue with a visit to a store and finish through a digital order. This is particularly relevant for furniture because customers often want to compare prices and dimensions before committing to products that may remain in their homes for several years.

IKEA has responded by developing a more flexible retail model in the UK. Alongside its traditional large stores, the company has expanded smaller formats, digital services and different ways for customers to access its products. Its 2025 UK report shows that IKEA continued investing in accessibility while adapting how and where customers interact with the brand (IKEA, 2025). This suggests that physical stores and e-commerce should not be viewed as completely separate channels.

There are also signs of continued demand within the wider furniture sector. Furniture retailers experienced spending growth during 2025, although economic pressure means that customers are still likely to think carefully about larger household purchases (Furniture News, 2026). For IKEA, competing in this environment is therefore not only about increasing product choice. The wider opportunity is to reduce the effort involved between discovering a product and successfully bringing it into the home, whether the customer begins that journey online or in a store.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Emerging Expectations

Furniture customers are not only changing where they shop, but also what they expect from the experience. Buying items for the home often involves balancing several factors at once, including price, quality, available space and personal style. This can make the decision more difficult than purchasing smaller everyday products.

Affordability remains particularly relevant. Even when spending on furniture grows, customers may still compare alternatives carefully before making larger purchases. Evidence from Barclays suggests that furniture stores experienced sustained spending growth during 2025, while wider economic pressures continued to influence household decisions (Furniture News, 2026). IKEA's position around accessible home furnishing can be useful in this environment, but low prices alone may not remove uncertainty from the buying process.

Digital convenience has also changed expectations. Customers can now explore furniture before entering a physical store, compare products and use online tools to plan their homes. IKEA already provides digital home-design services that allow customers to experiment with spaces and products (IKEA, 2025). This gives customers more control, but it can also raise expectations about how simple the journey from inspiration to purchase should be.

Another emerging consideration is sustainability. Some customers are increasingly interested in extending the life of products rather than automatically replacing them. IKEA's work towards circularity, including services connected with reuse and resale, reflects this wider shift. For the business, the challenge is bringing affordability, convenience and more responsible consumption together without making furniture shopping more complicated.

2.3 Customer Pain Points and Market Gaps

The furniture buying journey can create problems that are less common in other areas of retail. A customer may like a product online but still be unsure about its real size, whether it matches the rest of the room or how practical it will be once assembled. This uncertainty can slow down the decision and create a gap between finding something attractive and feeling confident enough to buy it.

Choice itself can also become a problem. Customers browsing furniture online are presented with different sizes, styles, colours and combinations. IKEA already offers home-design tools to support this process, but customers still must connect individual products with their own space and requirements (IKEA, 2025). The market gap is therefore not simply a lack of digital access, but the difficulty of turning a large product range into a clear decision.

Practical issues continue after a product has been selected. Large items may require delivery, assembly and coordination around when somebody is available at home. These factors can make convenience just as important as the product itself, particularly for customers without a car or those living in smaller urban properties.

For IKEA, this points towards an opportunity to connect product selection, space planning and the practical steps after purchase more effectively. Rather than adding another isolated digital feature, innovation could focus on reducing uncertainty across the whole journey from considering a piece of furniture to having it in the customer's home.

2.4 Digital Technology and New Retail Opportunities

Technology can reduce some of the uncertainty involved in furniture shopping, particularly when customers cannot easily imagine how a product will work in their own home. For IKEA, digital innovation is therefore useful when it connects the online experience with the physical space where the furniture will eventually be used.

Home-planning tools already form part of IKEA's customer experience, allowing users to explore layouts before purchasing (IKEA, 2025). More recently, IKEA has also developed an AI-powered digital experience capable of creating realistic room designs from photographs of a customer's space (IKEA, 2026). This demonstrates how technologies such as artificial intelligence and visualisation are moving beyond basic product recommendations.

However, introducing more technology does not automatically solve the problems identified earlier. A visually impressive tool has limited value if customers still struggle with measurements, suitability, delivery or understanding what they need. The opportunity is therefore to use digital technology to remove specific points of uncertainty rather than simply adding more features.

For IKEA, future innovation could connect information about a customer's space and practical requirements with products and services already available. Used in this way, technology becomes part of the decision-making process rather than a separate digital experience.

2.5 Delivery and the Last-Mile Challenge

The customer journey does not finish when an order is placed. For furniture retailers, getting a large or heavy product from a warehouse or store into somebody's home can be one of the most difficult parts of the experience. Unlike smaller online purchases, furniture deliveries may require customers to select a suitable time, remain at home and consider whether an item can physically reach the intended room.

This makes last-mile delivery particularly important for IKEA. The company has been expanding the ways customers can access its products, including delivery and collection options as part of its wider effort to become more accessible (IKEA, 2025). Greater flexibility can make shopping easier, especially for customers who cannot transport larger products themselves.

There is still room to improve how delivery connects with the decisions made earlier in the journey. Knowing that a sofa fits inside a living room, for example, does not necessarily mean it will fit through a narrow doorway or staircase. Delivery information could therefore become useful before checkout, rather than appearing mainly after the customer has already selected a product.

For IKEA, improving this connection could reduce inconvenience for customers while potentially avoiding preventable delivery problems. In this sense, last-mile innovation is not only a logistics issue; it can influence the customer's confidence in making the original purchase.

2.6 Sustainability, Circularity and Scalability

For IKEA, growth also raises the question of what happens to furniture after it has been purchased. Products may be replaced because customers move home, change their interior or simply no longer need them. If these items are discarded while they are still usable, the environmental impact of furniture consumption increases.

IKEA has been moving towards a more circular business model, with greater attention given to extending product life, reuse and keeping materials in circulation (IKEA, 2025). Its Buy Back service supports this direction by allowing eligible IKEA furniture to be returned for resale rather than immediately becoming waste (IKEA, 2026). This creates value beyond the original transaction and gives some products a second life.

The challenge is making circular options convenient enough to become part of normal customer behaviour. A customer may support the idea of reuse but still choose the easiest option when disposing of unwanted furniture. Any future service therefore needs to consider convenience alongside environmental benefits.

Scalability is equally important. A solution that builds on IKEA's existing digital channels, product information and circular services would be easier to expand than one requiring an entirely separate infrastructure. This creates an opportunity to connect new purchases, existing furniture and reuse within a more continuous customer journey.

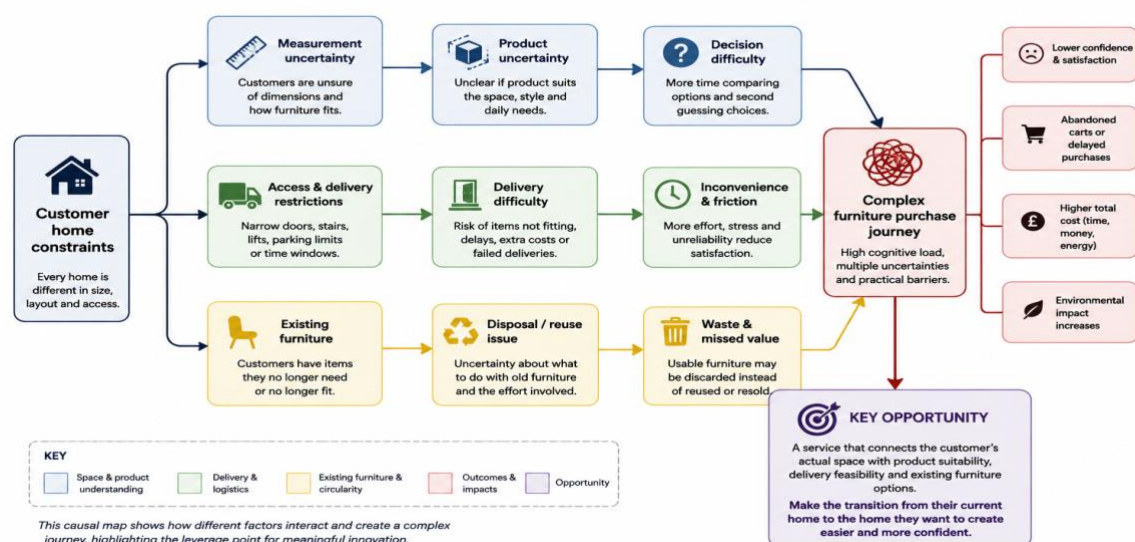
2.7 Causal Mapping and Key Opportunity Identified

Looking across the issues discussed in Task 1, the main difficulties are connected rather than independent. Causal mapping can be used to show how different factors influence one another and help identify where intervention could have the greatest effect (Shaw, Smith and Scully, 2019).

For IKEA customers, uncertainty about measurements and available space can make product selection harder. This may lead to more time spent comparing alternatives and lower confidence when deciding whether to purchase. Delivery adds another layer to the problem because choosing the correct product does not guarantee that it can be moved easily into the customer's home. At the same time, replacing existing furniture creates questions about disposal and reuse.

The opportunity identified is therefore broader than another room-design tool. IKEA could develop a service that connects the customer's actual space with product suitability, delivery considerations and existing furniture. For example, information about room dimensions and access points could help customers narrow down suitable products before reaching checkout, while unwanted IKEA furniture could be linked with existing circular services.

This direction brings together several issues identified in the analysis without treating technology as the solution itself. The central opportunity is to make the transition from the customer's current home to the home they want to create easier, with fewer practical decisions left for the customer to solve alone.



3.1 Empathise – Understanding IKEA Customers

Before deciding what IKEA should develop, the situation needs to be considered from the customer's point of view. Furniture shopping can involve uncertainty at several moments, especially when people are trying to make products work within the limitations of their own homes. This is different for each customer because available space, budget, transport and confidence with measurements can vary considerably.

A useful target user could be someone living in a rented flat in a UK city. They may have limited space, narrow access to the property and no suitable vehicle for transporting larger furniture. Their main concern is not necessarily finding products they like. Instead, they want confidence that what they choose will fit the room, can actually be delivered into the property and will not create another problem with furniture they already own.

This perspective changes how the opportunity is understood. The customer does not need another catalogue containing more choices. They need greater certainty between seeing a product and deciding that it is genuinely suitable for their home.

3.2 Define – The Customer Problem

The main difficulty is the distance between choosing furniture and being certain that the choice will work in real life. Online images, measurements and planning tools provide useful information, but the customer still has to bring this information together and apply it to their own home.

For IKEA, this creates a practical problem at the point where interest becomes commitment. A product may have the right appearance and price while still being unsuitable because of room dimensions, restricted access or delivery conditions. Replacing furniture can add another decision, particularly when the customer has an existing item that needs to be removed, sold or reused.

The problem identified for this project is therefore lack of certainty before purchase. Customers need a simpler way to check the relationship between the product, the property and the practical process of getting it into place.

Defining the issue in this way also prevents the project from becoming focused on technology too early. The next stage can explore several possible responses to the same problem and compare which one offers the strongest value for both the customer and IKEA.

3.3 Ideate – Exploring Possible Solutions

With the problem centred on certainty before purchase, the idea generation stage can look beyond the usual solution of simply improving product recommendations. Several different interventions could reduce the gap between browsing furniture and knowing whether it will work inside a customer's home.

One possibility is a digital access checker that considers doors, corridors and stairs alongside normal room measurements. Another is a furniture compatibility tool that filters products according to the physical characteristics of the property. Delivery planning could also be brought forward in the journey, allowing customers to identify possible access difficulties before reaching checkout. A further idea would connect replacement purchases with IKEA's circular services, giving customers an easier route for dealing with furniture they no longer need.

These possibilities approach the same problem from different directions: space, access, delivery and reuse. Keeping them separate at this stage is useful because it avoids committing immediately to one large solution.

3.3.1 Brainstorming and Divergent Thinking

At this point, the ideas were deliberately kept open rather than ranked immediately. Divergent thinking is useful during innovation because it encourages different directions to emerge before attention is narrowed towards a final concept (IDEO U, 2026).

Brainstorming produced solutions ranging from relatively simple changes to more ambitious services. These included a doorway and staircase measurement tool, product filtering based on room dimensions, delivery-access checks, a feature for planning what happens to existing furniture, and a digital record of the customer's home measurements that could be reused for future purchases.

An important difference appeared between these ideas. Some focused only on the product, while others considered the customer's home and the practical journey surrounding the purchase. The second group offered greater potential because the problem identified earlier does not come from a lack of furniture choices.

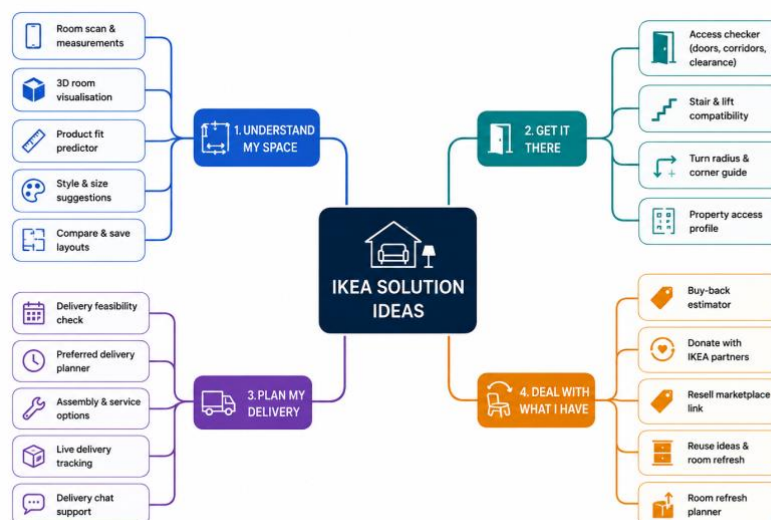
Rather than selecting a winner at this stage, the ideas were carried forward into a mind map. This makes it possible to see where separate solutions overlap, and which combinations could address several customer difficulties at the same time.

3.3.2 Mind Mapping

The brainstorming ideas were then arranged through mind mapping to understand how the different parts of the problem could connect. Instead of organising the map around individual technologies, the ideas were separated into four areas: the room, access to the property, delivery and existing furniture. Mind mapping can help organise ideas visually and reveal relationships that may be less obvious in a written list (Simplilearn, 2026).

The room branch included measurements, available space and product dimensions. Access focused on doors, corridors and stairs, while delivery considered whether selected furniture could realistically reach its intended location. The final branch explored what could happen to furniture being replaced, including reuse or IKEA's existing circular services.

Looking at the ideas together revealed an important connection. A customer could provide information about their home once and potentially use it across several stages of the purchase. This shifts the concept away from another product-search feature and towards a service built around the characteristics of the customer's home itself.



3.3.3 SCAMPER

The ideas from the mind map were developed further using SCAMPER, which provides different ways of questioning and changing an existing concept rather than treating the first version as final (Boardmix, 2026).

In IKEA's case, the most useful development came from combining activities that customers normally complete separately. Room measurements could be connected with product dimensions, while access information could be considered alongside delivery before an order is confirmed. Another possibility is to adapt IKEA's existing digital planning tools so that they consider practical restrictions around the property, rather than concentrating mainly on how furniture looks within a room.

Some unnecessary repetition could also be eliminated. Instead of measuring the same doorway, staircase or room each time a customer considers a new product, this information could be saved and reused when checking other items.

SCAMPER therefore moves the concept towards a connected service rather than a collection of individual tools. The strongest direction is one where IKEA uses information about the customer's actual home to support decisions across product fit, access and delivery, with circular options available when existing furniture needs to be replaced.

3.4 Evaluating the Concept through DFV

The concept now needs to work on three different levels: it must solve something customers actually care about, be realistic for IKEA to deliver and offer enough value to justify further development. These areas can be considered through desirability, feasibility and viability, which provide different perspectives when evaluating a potential innovation (Ben Hamida et al., 2017).

Desirability is mainly linked to confidence. The proposed service could help customers identify unsuitable furniture earlier by considering room dimensions and property access before purchase. This reduces the amount of information customers need to connect by themselves and addresses the uncertainty identified in Task 1.

Feasibility is strengthened by the fact that IKEA already operates digital planning and home-design services (IKEA, 2025). The concept would build on these capabilities, although accurate measurements, reliable compatibility checks and appropriate handling of customer data would still need to be considered.

From a viability perspective, preventing avoidable problems could improve the purchasing experience while potentially reducing costs associated with unsuccessful deliveries or unsuitable purchases. However, these benefits cannot simply be assumed. IKEA would need evidence that enough customers use the service and that the value created is greater than the cost of developing and maintaining it.

3.5 Proposed Venture Concept

Following the idea development and DFV evaluation, the concept selected for IKEA is a Home Fit & Delivery Assistant. Rather than functioning as another interior-design tool, the service would focus on whether a piece of furniture can realistically work within the customer's property.

Customers could enter or scan basic measurements for their room and important access points such as doors, corridors or staircases. When browsing IKEA products, the service could use this information to indicate which items appear suitable for the available space and whether there may be difficulties getting them to the intended room. Delivery options could then be considered as part of the same journey instead of being treated as a separate decision at checkout.

The concept could also connect customers replacing furniture with IKEA's existing circular activities, including its Buy Back service where products are eligible (IKEA, 2026). This would make the service relevant both before and after a new furniture purchase.

The main value of the venture is therefore not giving customers more choice. It is helping them make fewer unsuitable choices, while connecting product selection, the realities of the home and delivery within one customer journey.

3.6 Prototype and Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

The first version of the Home Fit & Delivery Assistant should be deliberately limited. An MVP is intended to test the core value of an idea before significant resources are committed to building a complete service (Tilburg University, 2026).

Instead of launching room scanning, automatic access detection and circular services at once, the prototype could begin with manual measurements. Customers would enter the dimensions of one room together with the width of relevant doors and corridors. When viewing selected larger IKEA products, the prototype would compare these measurements with product dimensions and provide a simple indication of suitability.

A second function could introduce delivery information earlier. Before adding an item to the basket, customers could see whether additional access information may be required and what delivery options are available. Keeping the prototype this simple would make it possible to observe whether customers value these checks before developing more advanced technology.

The MVP could initially be tested with a limited product category, such as sofas. If customers use the feature and find the information useful, IKEA could gradually introduce automated room scanning, more detailed access checks and connections with circular services. This approach keeps the initial investment controlled while allowing the final service to develop from actual customer behaviour rather than assumptions.

3.7 Testing, Feedback and Refinement

Rather than testing every possible feature, the first trial should answer one main question: does checking suitability before purchase make customers feel more confident about buying furniture? A small group of IKEA customers could use the MVP while considering a sofa for their home.

During the trial, IKEA could observe whether users complete the measurement process, how often the tool identifies potential fit or access problems and whether customers continue towards purchase afterwards. Short feedback could also explore whether the information was understandable and whether customers trusted the result.

The findings would determine what happens next. If users find manual measurement frustrating, for example, automated scanning could become a priority. If access checks prove more useful than room-fit information, development could concentrate on that area instead. Features that customers rarely use could be removed rather than expanded.

Testing in this way keeps refinement tied to evidence. The final service may therefore look different from the original concept, which would be a positive outcome if those changes reflect how customers behave when buying furniture.

4. Conclusion

The main opportunity identified for IKEA comes from a practical issue that can easily be overlooked when furniture shopping moves between digital and physical environments. Finding an attractive product is only one part of the decision. Customers also need to know whether it suits their space, can reach the intended room and can be delivered without creating additional difficulties.

The proposed Home Fit & Delivery Assistant responds to this by bringing information about the customer's home into the purchasing process. Instead of increasing the number of products or recommendations available, the concept aims to remove uncertainty before an order is made. Its connection with delivery and IKEA's circular activities also means that the idea extends beyond the initial product choice.

Design Thinking has allowed the concept to develop from a customer problem rather than from a predetermined technology. Brainstorming, mind mapping and SCAMPER expanded the possible responses, while DFV helped narrow them into something that could realistically be tested.

Starting with a limited MVP would give IKEA evidence about whether customers value the service before expanding it further. Ultimately, the concept shows how digital innovation could make furniture shopping more confident and practical while supporting a more connected customer journey.

References: The reference list contains approximately 289 words and has not been included in the main assignment word count.

- IKEA (2025) *IKEA UK Annual Report 2025*. Available at: [IKEA UK Annual Report 2025](#) (Accessed: 10 August 2026).
- IKEA (2026) *IKEA continues long-term accessibility journey*. Available at: [IKEA UK](#) (Accessed: 10 August 2026).
- IKEA (2025) *IKEA launches new AI-powered digital experience, empowering customers to create lifelike room designs*. Available at: [IKEA](#) (Accessed: 10 August 2026).
- LogicTrade (2026) *UK Furniture Retail Industry Trends 2026*. Available at: [LogicTrade](#) (Accessed: 10 August 2026).
- IMARC Group (2026) *UK Furniture Market*. Available at: [IMARC Group](#) (Accessed: 11 August 2026).
- Furniture News (2026) *Furniture stores saw sustained spending growth in 2025, says Barclays*. Available at: [Furniture News](#) (Accessed: 11 August 2026).
- IKEA (n.d.-a) *Home Design*. Available at: [IKEA UK Home Design](#) (Accessed: 11 August 2026).
- IKEA *Transitioning towards a circular business*. Available at: [IKEA UK](#) (Accessed: 11 August 2026).
- IKEA *IKEA Buy Back Terms and Conditions*. Available at: [IKEA UK](#) (Accessed: 12 August 2026).
- ScienceDirect (2024) *[Article]*. Available at: [ScienceDirect](#) (Accessed: 12 August 2026).
- IDEO U *Brendan Boyle on Divergent Thinking and the Innovation Funnel*. Available at: [IDEO U](#) (Accessed: 12 August 2026).
- Simplilearn (n.d.) *Mind Mapping in Design Thinking*. Available at: [Simplilearn](#) (Accessed: 12 August 2026).
- Boardmix (n.d.) *SCAMPER Examples*. Available at: [Boardmix](#) (Accessed: 13 August 2026).
- Tilburg University (n.d.) *Minimal Viable Product*. Available at: [Tilburg University](#) (Accessed: 13 August 2026).
- Hamida, S.B. *et al.* (2017) "The ValXplore method: exploring desirability, feasibility and viability of business and system design under uncertainty," *INCOSE International Symposium*, 27(1), pp. 1157–1171. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2334-5837.2017.00419.x>.
- Shaw, D., Smith, C.M. and Scully, J. (2019) 'From Brexit to Article 50: Applying Critical Realism to the design and analysis of a longitudinal causal mapping study', *European Journal of Operational Research*, 276(2), pp. 723–735. Available at: [DOI](#) (Accessed: 13 August 2026).