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Research Methods for Business-LCLM6004

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Business Research Proposal

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Topic: Digital Transformation in Retail: Investigating the Impact of Digital Technologies on Customer Experience and Business Performance at Boots UK

INTRODUCTION TO THE BUSINESS PROBLEM

Digital transformation has become a major issue in UK retail as customers increasingly move between websites, mobile applications and physical stores during the same purchasing journey. Online sales represented 27.4% of total retail sales in Great Britain in 2025, showing that digital shopping is now a permanent part of consumer behaviour rather than a temporary response to the pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2026). Retailers must therefore provide convenient and consistent services across their digital and physical channels.

Boots UK is a suitable organisation for this study because it combines a large store network with Boots.com, the Boots mobile application, the Advantage Card loyalty programme, click-and-collect facilities and online healthcare services. These technologies offer opportunities to improve convenience, personalisation and customer engagement. They may also support business performance by increasing online sales, strengthening customer loyalty and allowing Boots to make better use of customer data.

However, adopting digital technologies does not automatically produce a positive customer experience. Customers may encounter technical problems, poor website navigation, inconsistent information across channels, privacy concerns or difficulties accessing support. Academic research also suggests that successful omnichannel performance depends on factors such as channel integration, fulfilment flexibility, service quality and a seamless customer journey (Vhatkar et al., 2025).

The identified business problem is therefore whether Boots' digital technologies are genuinely improving customer experience and contributing to stronger business performance. Although Boots publishes information about digital growth, these figures provide limited understanding of how customers experience its technologies and which services influence their satisfaction, loyalty and purchasing behaviour. This study will address that problem by examining customer perceptions of Boots' digital services and their relationship with important business outcomes.

RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate how digital technologies used by Boots UK influence customer experience and business performance, with particular attention to convenience, personalisation, service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Research Objectives

The research will:

1. To identify the main digital technologies used by Boots UK to support customer interactions across online and physical retail channels.
2. To examine customers' perceptions of the usability, convenience, personalisation and reliability of Boots' digital services.
3. To assess the relationship between customers' experiences of Boots' digital technologies and outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty and intention to repurchase.
4. To evaluate how digital transformation may contribute to Boots UK's wider business performance, including digital sales growth, customer engagement and competitive position.
5. To identify the main challenges associated with Boots' digital transformation and recommend practical improvements to its digital and omnichannel strategy.

These objectives are specific because they focus on Boots UK and clearly identified aspects of digital customer experience. They are measurable through questionnaire responses and secondary business data. They are achievable within the available time and resources because the study will focus on a manageable customer sample rather than the whole UK retail sector. They are relevant to the identified business problem and time-bound because the research will be completed within the assessment period.

Research Questions

The principal research question is:

How do digital technologies influence customer experience and business performance at Boots UK?

The supporting research questions are:

1. How do customers perceive the convenience, usability and personalisation of Boots UK's digital services?
2. To what extent are customers' digital experiences associated with satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intentions?
3. Which digital technologies appear to provide the greatest value to Boots customers?
4. What challenges may limit the effectiveness of Boots UK's digital and omnichannel strategy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital transformation in retail

Digital transformation involves using digital technologies to produce significant changes in organisational processes, business models and value creation rather than simply transferring existing activities online (Vial, 2019). Vial's review demonstrates that transformation involves organisational structures, resources and responses to disruption alongside technology adoption. In retail, transformation may include e-commerce, applications, artificial intelligence, customer databases, digital payments, loyalty programmes and connected online and physical services.

Digital technologies can give retailers better customer information, more efficient processes and additional communication and sales channels. They can also alter relationships between retailers, suppliers and customers across the retail value chain (Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019). However, there is debate over whether technology alone improves performance. Verhoef et al. (2021) argue that successful transformation also depends on organisational capabilities, structures, strategies and suitable performance measures. This is relevant to Boots because introducing an application or online service does not demonstrate success unless it creates value for customers and the organisation.

Technology acceptance

The Technology Acceptance Model provides a useful theoretical basis for examining customers' use of Boots' technologies. Davis (1989) identifies perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as important influences on technology acceptance. Perceived usefulness concerns whether users believe that a technology improves their activities, while perceived ease of use concerns whether it can be used without unnecessary effort.

Applied to Boots, customers may consider its application useful when it saves time, displays relevant Advantage Card offers or simplifies purchases. Ease of use may depend on navigation, speed, account access and clarity of information. Nevertheless, the model has limitations because customer experience may also be influenced by trust, privacy, fulfilment quality, previous experiences and interactions with store employees. The proposed study will therefore use the model as one part of a broader customer-experience framework rather than treating usefulness and ease of use as the only influences.

Customer experience and customer journeys

Customer experience develops through cognitive, emotional, behavioural and sensory responses across the complete customer journey. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) divide this journey into pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages and explain that customers interact with organisations through multiple direct and indirect touchpoints.

A Boots customer might search for a product on the website, check availability through the application, use an Advantage Card offer, collect an order from a store and contact customer services afterwards. The experience therefore depends on the combined journey rather than one isolated digital interaction. Convenience and personalisation may strengthen satisfaction, but personalisation can also create concerns about the collection and use of customer data. Boots must consequently balance relevance with transparency and trust.

Omnichannel integration

Omnichannel retailing aims to connect online and offline touchpoints so customers can move between them with minimal difficulty. Integration may involve consistent prices, promotions, stock information, customer accounts and order-collection processes.

However, Gasparin et al. (2022) challenge the assumption that maximum integration always provides the best experience. Their study identifies consistency and connectivity as separate dimensions and shows that customers can experience different types of journeys depending on how these dimensions interact. This suggests that Boots should not judge its strategy only by the number of connected technologies. It must consider whether the connections are useful and understandable from the customer's perspective.

Retailers must also consider cost, system compatibility, employee training and operational complexity. Adding channels may increase convenience, but it may also transfer purchases between channels without increasing total sales. Digital-sales growth should therefore not automatically be interpreted as proof of improved overall performance.

Literature gap

Existing literature provides substantial knowledge about digital transformation, technology acceptance, customer journeys and omnichannel retailing. However, much of this research examines general retail settings or international customer samples. Limited independent research has considered how Boots UK customers experience the combined use of Boots.com, its application, Advantage Card services, click-and-collect and digital healthcare platforms.

Boots' publications provide valuable sales and usage figures, but they primarily present the organisation's perspective. They do not provide detailed independent evidence about customer perceptions or the relationship between digital-service quality, satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intentions. The proposed study will address this gap by applying technology-acceptance and customer-journey concepts to the specific context of Boots UK.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study will adopt a pragmatic research philosophy because it focuses on choosing methods that are most effective for answering the research questions. Pragmatism is suitable for business research because it allows the researcher to combine different forms of evidence rather than relying only on one philosophical position (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A mixed-method approach will therefore be used. Quantitative data will help measure customer perceptions, while qualitative comments will provide deeper explanations of customers' experiences with Boots' digital services (O'Leary, 2021).

The research will use a case-study design focused on Boots UK. It will be cross-sectional because data will be collected during one period rather than over several months or years. The study will be mainly descriptive and explanatory, as it will describe how customers experience Boots' digital technologies and examine possible relationships between digital service quality, satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention.

Primary data will be collected through an online questionnaire. Most questions will use a five-point Likert scale to measure convenience, ease of use, personalisation, reliability, trust, channel integration, satisfaction and loyalty. A small number of open-ended questions will allow respondents to explain problems and suggest improvements. Questionnaires are appropriate because they can collect comparable information from several participants efficiently, although they may provide less detailed evidence than interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The study will use purposive and convenience sampling. Approximately 80–120 UK adults who have used at least one Boots digital service will be invited to participate. These services may include Boots.com, the Boots app, the Advantage Card, click and collect or Boots' online healthcare services. This sampling method is practical within the available time, although the sample may not represent every Boots customer.

Quantitative responses will be analysed using Excel through frequencies, percentages, mean scores and simple correlation analysis. Open-text answers will be examined through thematic analysis to identify repeated themes such as convenience, technical problems, trust and personalisation (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Reliability will be supported by using the same questionnaire and response scales for all participants. A pilot test will be completed to identify unclear questions. Validity will be strengthened by linking each questionnaire item to the research objectives and literature review. Participation will be voluntary, informed consent will be obtained, and no identifying or medical information will be collected. The main limitations are the non-random sample, self-reported responses and the inability of a cross-sectional study to prove direct causation.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study is relevant because digital channels have become an important part of Boots' retail strategy. Although its reported growth suggests considerable digital engagement, management also needs independent customer evidence to determine which services create value and which require improvement (Boots UK, 2025).

The findings could support decisions concerning application and website design, Advantage Card personalisation, click-and-collect, stock information, customer support and connections between digital services and physical stores. For example, low ease-of-use ratings could justify improvements to navigation, while customer concerns about personalisation could indicate the need for clearer privacy communication. Evidence of inconsistent online and in-store experiences could support greater coordination between technology, marketing, pharmacy and store-management teams.

Positive customer experiences may contribute to satisfaction, loyalty, engagement and repurchase intentions. However, implementing recommendations could require investment in systems, cybersecurity and staff training. Existing technologies may be difficult to integrate, and employees may resist changes that increase workloads or alter established responsibilities. Boots must also ensure that personalisation complies with data-protection requirements and that customers with limited digital confidence are not excluded.

The recommendations will therefore consider feasibility as well as customer preference. This could help Boots prioritise investments that offer clear customer benefits rather than adopting technologies only because they are available or used by competitors. The project also contributes to applied business research by connecting established digital-transformation theories with a specific managerial problem.

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