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Research Methods for Business (LCLM6004)

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Abstract

This research proposal examines Royal Mail's operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and adaptation to digital transformation within the UK postal sector. The study aims to identify key challenges affecting service quality and competitiveness. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis, will be used. Expected findings may reveal opportunities for improving delivery performance, customer experience, and technological integration. Recommendations will focus on service innovation, operational optimization, and strategies to enhance long-term sustainability and customer trust.

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1. Introduction

Royal Mail is one of the United Kingdom's oldest and most established postal and delivery service providers. It all began in the reign of Henry VII in 1516 with the creation of the postal service operating only for the king and the court, and was open to the general public only in 1635. In 1660, the Postal Act created the postal service of public property and in 1711 he set up a unified postal service throughout Scotland, England and Wales, joining Ireland in 1808. In 1784, given his familiar view across the country, the Postal Service changed its name to Royal Mail. with a history dating back to 1516. It delivers mail and parcels to households and businesses across the UK. In recent years, the organisation has operated in a highly competitive environment shaped by digital transformation, the growth of e-commerce, and changing customer expectations. While traditional letter volumes have declined due to increased digital communication, demand for parcel delivery has risen significantly. (Duarte, 2019)

To remain competitive, Royal Mail has invested in operational modernisation, technological innovation, and service improvements. Despite these efforts, the organisation continues to face significant operational and strategic challenges that impact its efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

1.1 Background of the Identified Problem: Digital Transformation

One of the most significant challenges facing Royal Mail is digital transformation. This involves integrating digital technologies into its operations to improve efficiency, customer service, and overall organisational performance. Key initiatives include automating sorting centres, enhancing parcel tracking systems, and using data-driven technologies to optimise decision-making. Digital transformation has become essential as the postal industry continues to evolve. Traditional letter volumes have declined due to the widespread use of digital communication, while the rapid growth of e-commerce has significantly increased demand for faster, more reliable, and transparent parcel delivery services.

“Digital transformation has fundamentally changed how people live, businesses operate, and consumers make purchasing decisions. Global investment in digital transformation technologies and services surpassed \$2.16 trillion in 2023 and is projected to increase to approximately \$3.5 trillion in the coming years.” (Paul et al., 2024).

At the same time, competitors such as Amazon Logistics, DPD, and Evri have invested heavily in automation, real-time tracking, and advanced logistics technologies. As a result, Royal Mail faces increasing pressure to modernise its operations to remain competitive and meet rising customer expectations. However, implementing digital transformation within a long-established organisation presents significant challenges, including substantial investment costs, workforce adaptation, resistance to change, and potential operational disruption during the transition.

1.2 Significance of the Problem and Impact on Business Performance

Digital transformation is a critical issue for Royal Mail because it directly affects operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and its ability to compete effectively in the market. Failure to modernise could lead to slower delivery services, increased operating costs, and lower service quality compared with competitors. From an operational perspective, reliance on outdated systems and manual processes can reduce productivity and create inefficiencies. These challenges can increase labour costs and limit the organisation's ability to respond to growing parcel volumes and customer demands. But in recent months, Royal Mail has taken significant steps to improve the quality of its postal services, particularly following the change in ownership and management. The new owners have announced a commitment to invest £500 million over the next five years as part of a comprehensive program to modernise operations and enhance service performance.

"Royal Mail has publicly stated that service standards are improving and that it remains on course to achieve its revised delivery performance targets by this time next year, namely 90% of first-class mail delivered on time and 95% of second-class mail delivered on time." Only three-quarters of first-class mail delivered on time (BBCNEWS, 2026)

1.3 Organisational context and its challenges

- **Universal Service Obligation (USO):** Mandates six-day-a-week letter delivery and five-day-a-week parcel delivery to every UK address at a uniform price.
- **Privatisation Legacy:** Fully privatised in 2013, currently owned by International Distribution Services (IDS), which agreed to a takeover by EP Group.
- **Operational Shift:** Letter volumes decline steadily while parcel volumes grow, requiring a costly pivot toward e-commerce logistics.

"Royal Mail is more than the UK's leading postal and delivery service provider. It is a modern, environmentally conscious, and digitally focused organisation with over 500 years of history. The company aims to connect customers, businesses, and communities through a complex nationwide delivery network, while recognising its employees as a key driver of operational success. Royal Mail continues to invest in innovation and sustainable practices to improve service quality and meet the evolving needs of customers." (Royal Mail, 2024).

1.4 Key Challenges

- **Financial Losses:** High operational costs and falling letter demand have driven heavy financial deficits.
- **Industrial Strife:** Frequent strikes and disputes over pay, job security, and modernisation terms damage service reliability.
- **Modernisation Delays:** Slow rollout of PDA technology, route re-imaginings, and flexible working structures hinder efficiency gains.
- **Regulatory Reform:** Pressure on the government and Ofcom to reform the USO by dropping Saturday letter deliveries to cut costs.

2. Research Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

2.1 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to examine the impact of digital transformation on the operational efficiency and business performance of Royal Mail.

Digital transformation is essential for Royal Mail to improve efficiency, meet customer expectations, and remain competitive in the UK postal industry (Verhoef *et al.*, 2021).

2.2 Research Objectives

- To examine the digital transformation initiatives at Royal Mail.
- To evaluate the impact of digital transformation on operational efficiency and customer service.
- To identify challenges and recommend improvements to Royal Mail's digital transformation strategy.

2.3 Research Questions

1. What digital transformation initiatives has Royal Mail implemented?
2. How has digital transformation affected Royal Mail's operational efficiency and customer service?
3. What challenges does Royal Mail face, and how can they be addressed?

3. Critical Literature Review

The literature identifies three key themes relevant to Royal Mail's operational efficiency. First, research on digital transformation in the postal sector suggests that established postal operators often face difficulties modernising because of legacy systems, organisational rigidity, and the slow adoption of automation technologies.

Second, studies on data-driven logistics highlight the importance of real-time tracking, predictive analytics, and integrated digital platforms in improving operational efficiency, enhancing decision-making, and delivering a better customer experience.

Third, regulatory literature emphasises the challenge of balancing the Universal Service Obligation (USO) with the need to improve operational performance. These reports argue that Royal Mail faces structural and regulatory constraints that make achieving efficiency gains more difficult than for private-sector competitors.

The organisation achieved operational and financial improvements during the year despite a challenging economic environment. Royal Mail has shown signs of recovery, although it continues to face significant challenges. Meanwhile, General Logistics Systems (GLS Delivery) recorded revenue growth and strong adjusted operating profit while making progress towards its strategic objectives. Despite these positive developments, continued investment in GLS and the ongoing transformation of Royal Mail remain essential to support future growth and long-term performance. ((*Financial Times*, 2024))

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Justification of Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach is appropriate for this study because it combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of Royal Mail's operational performance and customer experiences. By integrating numerical data with detailed participant insights, the study offers a more balanced and in-depth analysis of the research problem.

Quantitative Research

The quantitative method enables the collection of numerical data from a large sample of respondents through surveys. This data can be used to assess customer satisfaction, delivery performance, service quality, and perceptions of Royal Mail's services. Statistical analysis helps identify patterns, trends, and relationships, providing objective evidence to support the research findings.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative method explores participants' experiences and perspectives in greater depth. Through interviews or case studies, customers and employees can discuss their views on service quality, operational challenges, and organisational practices. This approach provides valuable contextual insights that cannot be obtained from quantitative data alone.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data will be collected through

- Online surveys distributed to Royal Mail customers.
- Semi-structured interviews with employees, managers, or regular customers (where accessible).

The survey will contain closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to measure customer satisfaction, delivery speed, service quality, pricing, and trust.

The interviews will consist of open-ended questions exploring operational efficiency, digital transformation, customer service challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

4.2 data will be obtained from

- Royal Mail annual reports
- Industry reports
- Academic journals
- Government publications
- Market research reports
- News articles
- Company websites

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis A survey collects data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of current opinions, behaviours, or conditions. This approach is useful for assessing the present state of affairs and generating up-to-date information. Although surveys can be used to monitor changes over time through repeated data collection, this is less common in small-scale research projects due to time and resource constraints. (Denscombe, 2017).

Survey responses will be analysed using descriptive statistics such as:

- Frequencies
- Percentages
- Mean scores
- Charts and graphs

4.3 Sampling Strategy, Research Ethics, Reliability, and Validity

Sampling Strategy

A **non-probability convenience sampling** technique will be used because it allows data to be collected efficiently from readily available participants.

- 100–150 Royal Mail customers for the questionnaire.
- 5–10 interview participants (customers or employees where possible).

Research Ethics

These include:

- Participants will receive clear information about the purpose of the research.
- Participation will be entirely voluntary.
- Informed consent will be obtained before data collection.
- Participants may withdraw at any stage without penalty.
- Personal information will remain confidential and anonymous.
- Data will be securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.
- The research will comply with applicable data protection requirements, such as the UK GDPR.

5. Business Relevance and Practical Implications

5.1 Improve operations

The proposed research could support Royal Mail in making more informed business decisions by identifying the key factors affecting customer satisfaction and service quality. By evaluating customer feedback and service performance, the study can highlight areas for improvement, including delivery reliability, communication, and customer service, enabling the organisation to enhance operational performance and meet customer expectations more effectively.

The findings can support management in developing strategies to improve operational efficiency, enhance customer experience, and strengthen customer loyalty. For example, if customers report delays or poor communication, Royal Mail can invest in improved tracking systems, staff training, or more effective delivery planning.

5.2 Discuss potential recommendations, innovations, or strategies that could emerge from your findings.

The findings of this research could help Royal Mail identify practical ways to improve its operations and increase customer satisfaction. If the study identifies issues such as delivery delays or poor service, the company could improve route planning, upgrade its parcel tracking systems, and provide customers with more accurate real-time delivery updates. The research may also suggest investing further in digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) for demand forecasting and automated sorting systems, to improve efficiency and reduce delivery times. In addition, customer feedback could be used to develop services that better meet customer needs, including more flexible delivery options, faster complaint resolution, and personalised delivery notifications. The research may also recommend expanding sustainability initiatives, such as increasing the use of electric delivery vehicles and environmentally friendly packaging, to reduce environmental impact while enhancing Royal Mail's reputation.

5.3 Reflect on how the project contributes to your understanding of applied business research.

This project has improved my understanding of applied business research by showing how research can be used to solve real business problems. It has helped me develop skills in analysing evidence, selecting appropriate research methods, and making practical recommendations. Overall, it has reinforced the importance of evidence-based decision-making in improving organisational performance. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

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