

Writing Module: Research Methods for Business
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Introduction

In today's fast-changing retail world, businesses must constantly adapt to survive. Boots UK, a leading health and beauty retailer, has recently closed hundreds of physical stores as part of a business strategy to cut costs and improve efficiency (BBC, 2023). While these closures may seem like a financial solution, they raise important questions about how customers feel about the brand and whether they remain loyal

after losing access to local branches. Retail is undergoing significant transformation, with more consumers shifting to digital commerce. A study by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlights the growing importance of omnichannel strategies, where brands must integrate physical and digital services to sustain customer satisfaction. In the case of Boots, store closures pose a challenge to its ability to maintain direct engagement with customers who may have previously preferred in-store interactions. This research proposal aims to explore the effects of store closures on customer loyalty and online engagement at Boots.com UK. It will investigate how consumers have responded to these changes and whether digital services can replace the in-person experience. Understanding these issues is crucial for Boots and other retailers looking to stay relevant in a competitive, digitally driven marketplace. This study will provide insights into customer behavioural changes, preferences in online interactions, and potential strategies Boots could adopt to mitigate any negative impact resulting from store closures.

1. Identification of a Business Problem

Boots UK, a long-standing leader in the health and beauty retail sector, has recently undergone a major transformation by closing over 300 of its physical stores across the United Kingdom (BBC, 2023). This decision is part of a broader strategy by its parent company, Walgreens Boots Alliance, to streamline operations and focus on digital growth. While this move may improve cost efficiency, it also presents a serious

business challenge: the potential loss of customer loyalty and trust due to reduced physical presence. For many customers—especially older adults and those in rural areas—Boots stores have been more than just retail outlets. They've served as accessible hubs for healthcare advice, prescription services, and personal interaction (London Insider, 2025). The closures may disrupt these relationships, leading to dissatisfaction and a shift to competitors. At the same time, Boots.com is expected to fill the gap, but it remains unclear whether the online platform can fully replicate the in-store experience and maintain customer engagement.

Additionally, research from Saunders et al. (2019) indicates that consumer trust plays a critical role in maintaining brand relationships during business transitions. Boots must proactively address concerns regarding accessibility, customer service quality, and ease of use on its digital platform to ensure continued engagement. If customers feel disconnected due to the removal of physical stores, there is a risk of brand dilution and migration to competitors offering more robust omnichannel support. This issue is significant because customer loyalty is a key driver of long-term business success. In a competitive market where consumers have many alternatives, losing loyal customers can lead to declining sales and weakened brand reputation. Understanding how store closures affect customer behaviour is essential for Boots to adapt its strategy and remain relevant in the digital age.

2. Research Aims and Questions

The main aim of this research is to explore how the recent store closures by Boots UK have affected customer loyalty and online engagement through its digital platform, Boots.com. As the company shifts its focus from physical retail to digital services, it becomes essential to understand whether this transition supports or weakens customer relationships.

Research Aim:

To examine the impact of Boots UK's store closures on customer loyalty and online engagement, and to identify strategies for improving digital customer retention.

Research Objectives:

- To assess customer perceptions of Boots following the closure of physical stores.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of Boots.com in maintaining customer loyalty.
- To identify key factors influencing online engagement among Boots customers.
- To recommend strategies for enhancing customer retention through digital channels.

Research Questions:

- How have Boots' store closures influenced customer loyalty and brand perception?
- What role does Boots.com play in maintaining customer engagement post-closure?
- What improvements can be made to Boots' digital strategy to retain and attract customers?
- How do customer expectations of digital retail differ from in-store experiences, and how can Boots address these gaps?

3. Critical Literature Review

Customer loyalty has become a crucial competitive advantage for retail businesses facing rapid digital transformation. Griffin (2002) defines customer loyalty as a commitment to repurchase or recommend a brand consistently over time. This loyalty, however, can be fragile—especially during periods of major change, such as store closures. Boots' recent decision to close hundreds of branches poses risks not only to sales, but also to its long-standing relationships with customers who valued face-to-face interactions. According to Hyken (2018), businesses that transform these

interactions into memorable experiences often retain customers more effectively. Boots' challenge lies in replicating that personal, in-store service through digital touchpoints on Boots.com. Studies show that online engagement is increasingly linked to perceived value and convenience (Baxter, 2020). However, digital platforms must go beyond basic functionality to foster a lasting emotional connection—a task not easily achieved in the absence of physical interaction. Spector and Reeves (2020) emphasize the importance of a values-driven service culture in creating brand loyalty. Their work on Nordstrom illustrates how trust and reliability influence customer perception. If Boots fails to maintain a high level of service and trust online, there is a risk of brand dilution, especially among its core customer base that may feel neglected post-closure. Further research by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlights how digital engagement strategies must align with customer behaviours and preferences. Retail brands implementing virtual consultations, AI-driven customer support, and personalized loyalty programs tend to have greater success in maintaining post-transition engagement. Boots UK could apply similar strategies to reinforce trust and improve the customer journey online.

4. Research Methodology & Design

To explore how Boots UK's store closures have influenced customer loyalty and online engagement, this study will adopt a mixed-methods research design. This approach combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more complete understanding of customer experiences and perceptions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Philosophy and Approach

The research will follow a pragmatic philosophy, which supports using multiple methods to answer complex questions (Saunders et al., 2019). A deductive approach will be used to test existing theories of customer loyalty and digital engagement in the context of Boots.com.

Data Collection Methods

- Quantitative Data: An online survey will be distributed to Boots customers across the UK. The survey will include closed-ended questions measuring satisfaction, loyalty, and frequency of online engagement.
- Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a smaller group of participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences with Boots.com after store closures.

Sampling Strategy

A stratified sampling method will be used to ensure diversity in age, location, and shopping habits. The survey will target at least 150 respondents, while 10–15 participants will be selected for interviews. This balance allows for both general trends and personal perspectives to be captured.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to identify patterns in customer loyalty and online usage. Qualitative data will be coded thematically to uncover recurring themes and customer sentiments.

Ethical Considerations

All participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Data will be collected anonymously, and no personal identifiers will be stored. Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant academic body before data collection begins. This methodology ensures that the research is both reliable

and valid, offering practical insights that Boots can use to improve the digital strategy and customer retention efforts.

5. Business Relevance & Practical Implications

The findings of this research have the potential to offer valuable insights for Boots UK as it navigates a rapidly evolving retail landscape. With the closure of over 300 stores, Boots is shifting toward a more digitally focused model. However, this transition must be carefully managed to avoid alienating loyal customers who previously relied on in-store services (Money Maze Podcast, 2024). One key implication is the need for Boots to strengthen its omnichannel strategy. According to the 2025 SWOT analysis, Boots' ability to integrate online and offline experiences is a major strength, but also a challenge when physical locations are reduced. By understanding how customers respond to these changes, Boots can tailor its digital offerings to meet expectations, such as improving online customer service, offering virtual consultations, and enhancing the usability of Boots.com. Additionally, the research may help Boots refine its loyalty program, which is already one of the most generous in the UK (Money Maze Podcast, 2024). Insights from customer feedback could inform how the Advantage Card is used to personalise offers, reward online engagement, and maintain emotional connections with the brand. From a broader perspective, this study could guide strategic decision-making for other retailers facing similar challenges. As more companies reduce their physical footprint, understanding the balance between cost-saving measures and customer satisfaction becomes critical. Boots' experience may serve as a case study for how to manage digital transformation without sacrificing brand loyalty. Finally, the research could support policy development within Boots, especially in areas like digital accessibility, customer service training, and ethical data use. These improvements would not only enhance customer experience but also reinforce Boots' reputation as a trusted and innovative healthcare retailer.

Conclusion

This research proposal has explored a timely and significant issue: the impact of Boots UK's store closures on customer loyalty and online engagement. As the company pivots toward a more digitally focused model, understanding how customers respond to these changes is essential for maintaining brand trust and long-term success.

The literature review highlighted that while digital platforms offer convenience and scalability, they must also deliver personalized, emotionally resonant experiences to retain loyal customers (Griffin, 2002; Hyken, 2018). Boots.com has the potential to fill the gap left by physical stores, but only if it continues to evolve in ways that meet customer expectations for service, accessibility, and value.

By using a mixed-methods approach, this study will gather both broad and in-depth insights into customer behaviour. The findings could inform Boots' digital strategy, enhance its loyalty program, and guide other retailers facing similar transitions. Ultimately, this research aims to support Boots in delivering a seamless, customer-centric experience—online and beyond.

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