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**TECHNOLOGY, ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND
MANAGERIAL ROLES IN OMNICHANNEL RETAIL**

Evaluating the Obsolescence Claim in the Digital Corporation

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1. Introduction

Digital retail has changed how customers search, buy, collect and return products across physical and online channels (Shankar et al., 2021; Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019). Omnichannel retail describes coordinated customer and fulfilment activity across stores, websites, applications and related service channels (Cai and Lo, 2020; Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022). In this case, digital information is positioned alongside physical capital rather than displacing it (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). The resulting company will need to integrate consumer information closer with logistics, inventory and store operations than before (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022). This feature makes the retail industry an ideal choice for assessing whether old organisational design and management positions have become redundant (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020).

Large volume of online sales enables raising questions about validity of old arrangements in retail business. In the United Kingdom, Internet sales comprised 19.2 per cent of all retail sales in 2019 and 30.7 per cent in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2026). Thereafter, the annual ratio remained at 27 per cent between 2023 and 2025 rather than growing towards complete substitution (Office for National Statistics, 2026). Such dynamics refute an easy conclusion that digital retail replaces physical channels and its hierarchy (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020). Instead, digital expansion gives rise to interlinked channel systems, with brick-and-mortar stores becoming centres for collecting, returns and fulfilling orders (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Wan, 2022). The organisational shift is thus one of resource allocation rather than pure replacement (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Yang et al., 2024).

Current management research also challenges the idea that technology produces one universal organisational form. Digital transformation concerns change in organisational value creation that depend on technology and wider organisational adaptation (Vial, 2019; Becker and Schmid, 2020). Yet reviews identify different meanings and mechanisms across sectors, technologies and levels of analysis (Verhoef et al., 2021; Nadkarni and Prügl, 2021). Retail evidence gives a similarly mixed result because coordination needs can support either decentralisation or stronger central control (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Yang et al., 2024). Artificial intelligence also shifts some decisions towards machines while leaving judgement and accountability with people in other tasks (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh, 2019; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021). The

stronger interpretation is therefore conditional change rather than technological determinism (Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022; Wessel et al., 2021).

This report argues that Topic 2 is only partly justified in omnichannel retail. Digital systems have weakened some rigid boundaries between functions, channels and management levels (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2022). They have also increased the value of cross-functional work, data literacy and quicker local decisions in selected tasks (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024). However, high coordination demands still make hierarchy and central authority useful for shared inventory, network planning and risk control (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). Management roles therefore change more than they disappear because digital operations still require allocation, integration and accountability (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Nell et al., 2021). The report develops this position through recent peer-reviewed research and limited official statistics published after 2018.

1.1 Background

E-commerce and e-business describe related but different parts of digital retail. E-commerce concerns commercial transactions through electronic channels and often centres on customerfacing buying activity (Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019; Mishra, Singh and Koles, 2021). E-business is broader because digital systems also connect internal processes, suppliers, logistics and organisational communication (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Wessel et al., 2021). This distinction matters because organisational design changes are rarely caused by an online shop alone (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Hanelt et al., 2021). The deeper pressure comes from linked data and process changes that cross established departmental borders (Lokuge et al., 2019; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020). Digital transformation is also different from simply converting information into digital form. Gong and Ribiere (2021) found 134 definitions and used that diversity to build a more unified conceptual definition. Vial (2019) similarly treats transformation as an organisational response to digital disruption rather than a narrow technology installation. Wessel et al. (2021) sharpen this distinction by comparing digital transformation with earlier IT-enabled organisational transformation across two longitudinal cases. Their case depth explains process change well but does not prove one design outcome across all retailers (Wessel et al., 2021; Hanelt et al., 2021). The concept is therefore useful only when the analysis specifies what changes in value creation, work and authority (Nadkarni and Prügl, 2021; Kraus et al., 2022).

Retail has moved towards omnichannel systems because customers and operations now cross channel boundaries. The marketing side seeks consistent customer experience while operations must locate inventory and fulfil orders across several nodes (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Wan, 2022). Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs (2022) show that stores can regain operational importance when they support online fulfilment. Davis-Sramek et al. (2020) also trace how large US retailers altered fulfilment models over time rather than abandoning existing assets. This evidence conflicts with a simple digital-versus-physical story and points towards recombination of old and new resources (Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022; Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019). Retail organisations therefore face structural integration problems that are wider than channel expansion alone (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022).

1.2 Purpose and Scope

The report evaluates whether e-commerce and e-business make traditional organisational structures and management-role theories obsolete within omnichannel retail. Traditional structure is treated as formal hierarchy, functional specialisation and centralised decision authority rather than one fixed historical template (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). Management roles are examined through control, coordination, leadership and decision responsibility in digitally enabled work (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019). The report tests both supportive and opposing arguments because recent studies do not show a uniform move towards flat organisations (Mustafa et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024). Its central question is whether digital technology replaces established forms or changes when those forms remain useful (Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022; Martela, 2023).

The scope is a critical literature-based evaluation rather than primary empirical research. Greater weight is given to direct retailer data, longitudinal cases and large samples when organisational effects are assessed (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Yang et al., 2024; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020). Systematic reviews are used to map concepts but their synthesis cannot establish firmlevel causation by itself (Hanelt et al., 2021; Walter, 2021). Conceptual studies are used where they clarify mechanisms such as human-AI decision design or platform competition (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh, 2019; Rietveld and Schilling, 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Technology in Business

Across OECD economies the ICT sector grew about three times faster than the total economy during 2013-2023 showing broad rapid digital expansion overall (OECD, 2024). Cloud services, analytics and artificial intelligence now allow information to travel quickly between retail functions and locations (Shankar et al., 2021; Mikalef et al., 2019). Internet of Things technologies also connect physical products and stores with digital demand information (Caro and Sadr, 2019; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). These capabilities reduce some information delays but they do not remove organisational interdependence (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). The managerial effect therefore depends on how technology changes tasks and coordination rather than on technical adoption alone (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Wessel et al., 2021).

The digital transformation literature supports this broader view but remains conceptually uneven. Hanelt et al. (2021) review 279 articles and identify major organisational and strategic themes across a fragmented field. Nadkarni and Prügl (2021) also connect transformation with disruption and entrepreneurship while noting weaker attention to middle management. Kraus et al. (2022) map 217 business and management papers and confirm rapid growth alongside conceptual overlap. These reviews provide breadth, but their source bases contain varied measures and contexts which limit direct causal comparison (Hanelt et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2022).

2.2 The Rise of e-Commerce

With e-commerce, demand location and competition have been transformed due to the emergence of new interfaces and platforms through which consumers make decisions (Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019; Shankar et al., 2021). Research on platform competition highlights that competition is increasingly dependent on participation in ecosystems and network effects and not simply on product competition (Rietveld and Schilling, 2021; Cennamo, 2021). However, digital outreach does not imply elimination of logistical problems since products continue to be subject to logistical issues such as stock, delivery and return of the product (Wan, 2022; Yang, Li and Zhong, 2022). E-commerce has thus led to competition moving to combined customer and fulfilment systems and not eliminating physical logistics operations entirely (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Taylor et al., 2019).

Customer behaviour adds another reason to reject a pure online substitution model. Mishra, Singh and Koles (2021) reviewed 131 papers and found consumer decision-making spread across interacting omnichannel touchpoints. UK sales data also shows a lasting online shift without continuous movement towards a fully online market (Office for National Statistics, 2026). The annual internet share fell from 30.7 per cent in 2021 to 26.6 per cent in 2022 before stabilising around 27 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2026). The sector therefore rewards integration of channels more clearly than elimination of stores (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; DavisSramek et al., 2020).

2.3 The Emergence of e-Business

E-business extends the digital question from selling to the organisation of work. Omnichannel retail links ordering, inventory, customer service and fulfilment through shared information and process rules (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022). That connection creates dependencies between marketing promises and operational capacity which traditional channel silos handled poorly (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Cai and Lo, 2020). Digital supply chains can improve visibility but they also make failures in one function more visible to other functions (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Caro and Sadr, 2019). E-business therefore increases the need for organisational coordination at the same time as it enables faster information exchange (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022).

The operational evidence shows why this distinction matters. Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman (2022) use one deep case and six additional retailer cases to examine sorting choices in omnichannel logistics. Eriksson, Norrman and Kembro (2022) use three grocery-retail cases to explain capability development during omnichannel logistics transformation. Both studies offer detailed process mechanisms but their small case bases limit claims about all retail formats (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Eriksson, Norrman and Kembro, 2022). The evidence supports redesign of organisational links more strongly than abolition of formal organisation itself (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022).

2.4 Definition and Explanation of Organisational Structure

Organisational structure allocates tasks, authority and coordination responsibilities across people and units. Digital technology can alter each element because information can move without following every formal reporting line (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Mustafa et al., 2022). Yet

easier information transfer does not remove the need to decide who may act on that information (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Yang et al., 2024). A flat structure reduces formal layers while decentralisation moves decision rights away from a central authority (Martela, 2023; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). These ideas overlap but should not be treated as identical organisational changes (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Mustafa et al., 2022).

Direct evidence gives a more conditional account than broad digital narratives. Dessein, Lo and Minami (2022) use microdata from a large retailer to test coordination and local decision authority. Local volatility encouraged decentralisation when coordination needs were low but greater centralisation appeared when coordination needs were high (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). Yang et al. (2024) analyse 15,358 firm-year observations and find digital transformation reduces decision-right centralisation in Chinese business groups. Their setting is broader than retail and differs institutionally from UK firms which limits direct transfer (Yang et al., 2024; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). Taken together, the stronger claim is contingent redistribution of authority rather than automatic flattening (Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022; Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020).

2.5 Theories of Management Roles

Recent literature presents management as a set of changing coordination and leadership tasks rather than a disappearing occupation. Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth (2020) identify topmanagement practices that shape digital transformation through strategic direction and organisational alignment. Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri (2019) find digital leadership research fragmented across technological and relational themes. Gilli, Lettner and Güttel (2024) similarly question whether leaders need new digital skills or enduring interpersonal qualities. These studies differ in method but agree that managerial work includes interpretation and people coordination beyond technical control (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024). Digital tools therefore change the content of management without proving that management roles are obsolete (Nell et al., 2021; Martela, 2023).

Artificial intelligence sharpens this argument because some decisions can be partly automated. Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh (2019) describe full delegation, sequential human-AI decisions and aggregated human-AI decisions as distinct organisational choices. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) argue that automation and human augmentation are interdependent rather than clean substitutes. Mikalef and Gupta (2021) also treat AI capability as organisational rather than purely technical because resources and human skills must work together. These studies do not

establish that AI removes managers across retail because two are conceptual frameworks and one tests firm-level capability (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh, 2019; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Mikalef and Gupta, 2021). Their combined value is showing that technology changes decision design while leaving governance choices inside organisations (Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021; Guha et al., 2021).

2.6 Implications for Traditional Models

The literature suggests that there is support for a selective challenge to conventional models of organisation and not total replacement. Post-bureaucracy structures can cut down on bureaucracy and bring about discretion closer to specialized tasks (Mustafa et al., 2022; Martela, 2023). The digital age allows top management to access information on the performance of scattered divisions (Nell et al., 2021; Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020). In the case of retailers, there is an added challenge since responsiveness to the needs of consumers locally must be combined with shared stock and network norms (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Wan, 2022). There is thus no single structure which can adequately describe a digital retail firm (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022). This is because there could be multiple paths for delegation depending on the task (Yang et al., 2024; Balakrishnan and Das, 2020).

A similar qualification applies to management theory. Control-centred assumptions are weakened where workers and algorithms hold timely operational information (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh, 2019; Mikalef et al., 2019). However, coordination remains necessary when fulfilment, customer promises and data governance cross organisational units (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). Leadership research also retains older relational qualities such as trust and communication beside newer digital knowledge (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022). The evidence therefore rejects the idea that digital competence simply replaces established managerial capabilities (Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019; AlNuaimi et al., 2022). Management theory remains useful when it explains coordination conditions instead of assuming fixed command structures (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021).

3. Changing Nature of 21st Century Corporations

The connections between consumers, workers, providers, and technology for digital firms have become stronger. For retailers, such connections range across both physical and online realms and frequently cross the boundaries of organizations (Hein et al., 2020; Rietveld and Schilling, 2021). This leads to moving the focus from departmental units to ecosystem-based units for management purposes (Cennamo, 2021; Stallkamp and Schotter, 2021). Nonetheless, such platform dependencies may give rise to novel mechanisms of centralization through standardization and data ownership (Hein et al., 2020; Cennamo, 2021).

3.1 Increased Connectivity and Globalization

In their article, Hein et al. (2020) describe how connectivity enables coordination across organizational boundaries by providing technical interfaces that link buyers, sellers, and complementors. Rietveld and Schilling (2021) analyse 333 articles and demonstrate the importance of competition in platform ecosystems for management, economic and information systems research. According to Cennamo (2021), competition in digital markets depends not only on traditional products' boundaries but also on rules of the platforms and its positioning strategies. The work of Hein et al. (2020) proves that coordination can go beyond the formal corporate boundaries since platforms depend on relationships between various actors with different interests. These works help to understand the role of connectivity in extending coordination across boundaries of the firm (Hein et al., 2020; Rietveld and Schilling, 2021). Digital connectivity has limitations that are important for organization design. As Stallkamp and Schotter (2021) claim, digital platform companies still face national institutional pressures and local market features despite low digital distance. Physical retail is subject to even higher local constraints since goods must be delivered, stored, returned within networks (Wan, 2022; Yang, Li and Zhong, 2022). Therefore, omnichannel retailers coordinate global information processes with local fulfilment processes and market understanding (Eriksson, Norrman and Kembro, 2022; Ishfaq, DavisSramek and Gibson, 2022). Such a combination increases pressure for standardization and local autonomy simultaneously (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Nell et al., 2021). Connectivity therefore expands coordination scope instead of making organisational boundaries meaningless (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Stallkamp and Schotter, 2021).

3.2 Shift towards Digital Transformation

Digital transformation changes retail when technology alters value creation and operating arrangements together. Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss (2019) show how digital technologies affect several stages of the retail value chain rather than the sales interface alone. Shankar et al. (2021) extend this view across customer interaction, operations and emerging retail technologies. Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs (2022) provide an important counterpoint because stores can gain new roles through online order fulfilment. This result contradicts claims that digital transformation means physical asset withdrawal (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020). Retail transformation is better described as reallocation of asset roles across connected channels (Cai and Lo, 2020; Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022).

Artificial intelligence and connected devices deepen this reallocation but also create governance demands. Guha et al. (2021) describe AI applications across retail activities while stressing different effects on customers and firms. Caro and Sadr (2019) show how retail IoT can connect supply information with demand information through physical sensing. Mikalef et al. (2019) link big-data analytics capabilities with innovation through dynamic organisational capabilities rather than technology ownership alone. These findings imply that data becomes useful when organisational routines convert it into coordinated action (Mikalef et al., 2019; Mikalef and Gupta, 2021).

3.3 Importance of Adaptability and Agility

Organisational agility usually refers to the ability to notice change and respond quickly with suitable action. In Walter (2021), it is evident that the concept is widely applicable but poorly defined based on the review of 75 papers. This variance is important as speed is not always beneficial when there are retail decisions that affect a common network (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Walter, 2021). AlNuaimi et al. (2022) relate leadership, agility, and digital strategy, but the firm-level relationships do not determine one optimal retailer structure. Agility ought to be viewed as context-dependent responsive capability and not another term for flatness (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022). It is necessary to avoid considering a common phrase as structural evidence.

Agility is needed in omnichannel operations. Yang, Li and Zhong (2022) develop an analytical framework for mixed fulfilment approaches and demonstrate that the choice of channel and

fulfilment depends on operational contexts. Wan (2022) considers alternative distribution structures using real data from retailer order and delivery records, unlike other theoretical considerations. When compared with one distribution centre, two centres increased fill rate by 0.4 percentage points and decreased lead time by 9.7% without raising costs. The factory-direct approach improved fill rate by 0.5 points and lowered cost by 5.2% while increasing lead time by 12.5%. These trade-offs show that agile retail structures need a disciplined configuration and not constant decentralization (Taylor et al., 2019; Bijmolt et al., 2021).

4. Obsolescence of Traditional Organisational Structures

The obsolescence claim is strongest where traditional structure means slow vertical approval for routine digital decisions. In omnichannel retailing, there is a need for rapid reaction to signals from inventory, demand and exceptions in fulfilment (Wan, 2022; Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022). The digital approach offers access to information that allows for decentralisation of certain processes (Yang et al., 2024; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). On the other hand, the digital approach allows head office to have increased visibility about what goes on in different locations and across different channels (Nell et al., 2021; Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020). Technology may reduce one control mechanism and strengthen another (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022). Traditional structure should be considered to have been redesigned.

4.1 Hierarchical Structures vs. Flat Organisations

Flat structures appear attractive because digital communication can reduce some delays created by several reporting levels. Mustafa et al. (2022) compare 117 digital natives with 141 older managers in Norway and find support for post-bureaucratic preferences. Martela (2023) also examines self-managing organisations where middle-management work is redistributed through formalised coordination mechanisms. These sources show that fewer management layers are feasible under organisational arrangements (Mustafa et al., 2022; Martela, 2023). However, perception-based evidence and conceptual cases cannot demonstrate that flatness improves performance across large retail networks (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Walter, 2021). The case for total hierarchy removal is therefore much weaker than the case for fewer routine approval layers.

Retail microdata directly challenges the belief that uncertainty always requires local autonomy. Dessein, Lo and Minami (2022) find local volatility associated with decentralisation only when cross-unit coordination needs are low. Where coordination needs rise, the same uncertainty is associated with greater centralisation inside the large retailer (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). This result is important because omnichannel inventory and fulfilment decisions often affect several locations at once (Wan, 2022; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). A store can need discretion over a customer problem while central rules protect network-wide stock allocation

(Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Bijmolt et al., 2021). Hierarchy therefore remains useful when decisions create costs or dependencies beyond the local unit.

Large-sample digital evidence still supports some movement of authority away from central offices. Yang et al. (2024) find digital transformation associated with lower decision-right centralisation across 15,358 Chinese business-group firm-year observations from 2011 to 2021. The sample gives strong statistical power, but the institutional setting and business-group form differ from UK omnichannel retail (Yang et al., 2024). Nell et al. (2021) also report that senior managers expect digitalisation to expand some headquarters and top-management roles. These findings are not contradictory once task type is separated from organisational level (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). Digital information can decentralise operating decisions while centralising standards, investment choices and enterprise-wide governance (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Nell et al., 2021).

The balance therefore supports hybrid hierarchy rather than a flat ideal. Retailers need clear accountability for network capacity, security and cross-channel promises even when teams receive greater local discretion (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Soomro, Shah and Thatcher, 2021). Martela (2023) shows that removing middle managers requires substitute coordination structures rather than absence of organisation. Dessein, Lo and Minami (2022) provide stronger direct support for contingency because their retailer data links coordination conditions with authority allocation. The word obsolete is therefore too strong because hierarchy remains economically useful for some digitally connected retail tasks (Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022; Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020).

4.2 Matrix Organisations and Cross-Functional Teams

Omnichannel retail creates work that cuts across conventional marketing, operations and logistics boundaries. Bijmolt et al. (2021) identify problems at the marketing-operations interface because customer promises to depend on operational delivery. According to Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson (2022), digital supply chains are connected organizational systems rather than isolated logistics functions. Cross-functional team organization helps to deal with dependencies through adding various types of expertise to a single decision process (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Eriksson, Norrman and Kembro, 2022). A matrix form of organization institutionalizes mutual responsibility for functions or channels (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Mustafa et al.,

2022). The benefit here lies in the integration rather than a flattening of the organizational hierarchy.

Operational research supports integration while mentioning its costs. Design sorting is a joint decision on channel flows and fulfilment configurations (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022). The omnichannel revolution in the grocery industry presupposes capability development in various activities (Eriksson, Norrman and Kembro, 2022). According to Davis-Sramek et al. (2020), fulfilment transformation proceeds in time in six big US retailers rather than through a single switch. Although these articles explain coordination very well, the sample in their research is too small to draw general conclusions (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020). Various cross-functional forms are to be understood as the reaction to interdependencies and not as a universal replacement for functional organization (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019).

Functional specialization is still relevant since the technologies used in retailing require deep knowledge of domains. AI requires technical knowledge; knowledge of customer operations and logistics is different (Guha et al., 2021; Mikalef and Gupta, 2021). Cybersecurity needs specialist governance that cannot be shared informally (Soomro, Shah and Thatcher, 2021; Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021). Matrix-based work allows connecting specialists but generates ambiguous priorities of multiple managers (Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020; Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). The better principle is selective cross-functional integration based on shared processes (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022). Functional specialization is consistent with digital retail if interfaces are consciously managed.

Physical stores may serve as cross-functional nodes according to evidence as well. They allow supporting online fulfilment and restoring their value within omnichannel models (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022). Various fulfilment nodes generate trade-offs regarding fill rate, cost, and delivery time (Wan, 2022). Modern technologies in connected retail connect information about physical supply and digital demand signals (Caro and Sadr, 2019). These trends make the operation of stores closer to logistics and digital customer service rather than traditional channels (Shankar et al., 2021; Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss, 2019). Physical stores are not outdated; they are less functionally isolated (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Davis-Sramek et al., 2020).

4.3 Decentralisation and Empowerment

Decentralisation concerns where decision authority sits rather than how many management layers exist. Digital data can support local autonomy because employees can see current demand and operational conditions more quickly (Yang et al., 2024; Mikalef et al., 2019). Employee empowerment can then allow action without waiting for repeated vertical approval (Mustafa et al., 2022; Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022). Yet information access does not mean every local action should be independent because inventory and customer promises can cross unit boundaries (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Wan, 2022). Retail empowerment is therefore most defensible when decision boundaries are explicit, and coordination costs are low. This position fits contingency evidence better than unrestricted decentralisation (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020).

Artificial intelligence adds another layer to decision-right design. Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh (2019) distinguish full AI delegation from sequential and aggregated human-AI arrangements. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) warn that automation and augmentation remain connected because automation can create new human judgement tasks. Mikalef and Gupta (2021) find organisational AI capability relates to creativity and performance rather than treating algorithms as independent actors. These studies imply that managerial authority can move towards systems for bounded tasks while remaining human for exceptions and accountability (Guha et al., 2021; Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021). Digital decentralisation therefore includes allocation between people and machines as well as between organisational levels.

Empowerment also creates risks when local discretion affects personal data or security. Bandara, Fernando and Akter (2020b) classify privacy concerns in e-commerce and show that consumer data use creates several forms of perceived risk. Soomro, Shah and Thatcher (2021) draw on 33 interviews across three large UK e-tailers to examine identity-fraud prevention policy. Their direct sector setting makes the governance issue especially relevant despite the small number of firms (Soomro, Shah and Thatcher, 2021). Local freedom therefore needs common security controls and clear escalation responsibilities (Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021; Bleier, Goldfarb and Tucker, 2020). Empowerment in digital retail is bounded autonomy rather than removal of management authority.

5. Redefining Management Roles

Digital retail changes managerial work because connected operations require interpretation across technical and organisational boundaries. The managers need to transform information into managerial decisions and coordinate specialists with diverse kinds of expertise (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Mikalef et al., 2019). Also, they must address the reactions of the employees when the technology transforms the nature of their job and security of their employment (Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022; Nisafani, Kiely and Mahony, 2020). This is reducing the relevance of management that relies solely on supervision of the routine activities (Martela, 2023; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021). However, it makes the judgement, coordination, and accountability more important in uncertainty (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Nell et al., 2021). Management roles are therefore being redefined rather than removed.

5.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a term that refers to behaviour that fosters collective direction and change by motivating employees. There are many concepts used in studies about digital leadership, yet there is no one established theory (Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019; Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024). Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri (2019) analyse 54 sources and discover a divided literature including technology, communication, and leadership behaviour. Gilli, Lettner and Güttel (2024) raise questions about whether digital environment requires novel technical competencies or traditional interpersonal ones. Their comparison weakens claims that established leadership capacities have become obsolete (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020). Digital leadership is better understood as an altered mix of technological understanding and established people management.

Quantitative work supports leadership effects but does not justify one universal style. AlNuaimi et al. (2022) connect leadership with organisational agility and digital strategy in a model of digital transformation. Erhan, Uzunbacak and Aydin (2022) link digital leadership with innovative work behaviour through employee-level relationships. These studies identify associations, but crosssectional designs make reverse causality and common-method effects difficult to remove fully (AlNuaimi et al., 2022; Erhan, Uzunbacak and Aydin, 2022). Retail managers therefore should not treat transformational behaviour as a guaranteed performance technology. Experimental evidence gives a useful qualification about employee treatment during digital

change. Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch (2022) test complementary leadership behaviours with 815 participants in an organisational-change experiment. Their results show that task and people orientation interact rather than producing simple benefits from adding more of both (Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022). This matters because retailers can push digital targets while underestimating uncertainty experienced by staff (Nisafani, Kiely and Mahony, 2020; Borle et al., 2021). A manager who explains change and supports learning may therefore protect implementation quality better than one focused only on digital targets (Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022; Trenerry et al., 2021). The experiment is stronger for causal inference than surveys but cannot reproduce long-term store politics or workload pressures.

Leadership is still important due to omnichannel conflicts which are cross-functional. The marketing team may offer customers convenience which increases cost or complexity to the logistics and store teams (Bijmolt et al., 2021; Wan, 2022). However, even cross-functional teams cannot solve such conflicts on their own because they involve shared power which still requires prioritising certain elements (Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman, 2022; Kretschmer and Khashabi, 2020). Senior management is responsible for making trade-offs regarding customer service, costs, and network capacity (Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020; Nell et al., 2021). This work is less about managing teams and more about solving interdependence between specialised teams. Digital retail therefore changes how leadership is exercised while preserving its coordination purpose.

5.2 Embracing Technological Literacy

Technological literacy implies that managers have the knowledge of capabilities and limitations of digital technologies without becoming software developers or data scientists (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019). For example, Guha et al. (2021) explain how retail AI affects different customer and business-related processes with distinct organizational consequences. In turn, Mikalef and Gupta (2021) position AI in a wider concept of the organization as a set of skills, resources, and coordination to clarify why the same technology works differently in various organizations (Mikalef et al., 2019; Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021).

AI readiness literature suggests that technical access is far from the only condition for effective implementation of the technology. The researchers have identified 18 factors and 58 indicators based on 25 interviews with experts (Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021). Additionally, Mikalef and Gupta (2021) provide measures of firm-level AI capabilities associated with creativity and

performance. As found by Raisch and Krakowski (2021), automation creates some augmentation needs, and therefore, the managers must make decisions on the boundary between automated processes and human reviews.

The quality of decision making depends on integration between the human decision maker and the AI system. In their review of possible organizational structures, Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh (2019) distinguish the structures depending on task characteristics and algorithmic confidence. Moreover, as Raisch and Krakowski (2021) prove, human augmentation is not an alternative to automation. For instance, recommendations, forecasting, and customer service in retail have different governance needs (Guha et al., 2021; Shankar et al., 2021). The strategy of maximal delegation of decisions to AI does not consider differences in the cost of mistakes and consequences for customers. Managers play a critical role in establishing the decision boundaries and taking responsibility (Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021; Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth, 2020).

Technological literacy also includes understanding data limits and organisational incentives. Mikalef et al. (2019) find that analytics capability works through dynamic capabilities rather than producing innovation mechanically. Eller et al. (2020) similarly connect digitalisation outcomes with organisational antecedents in a sample of 193 small and medium firms. Their self-reported SME setting limits direct transfer to large omnichannel retailers with more complex governance (Eller et al., 2020). Wessel et al. (2021) show through two longitudinal cases that digital transformation can reshape organisational identity as well as technology use. Managers therefore need to interpret technology within organisational purpose rather than treat digital investment as an isolated technical project.

6. Challenges and Opportunities

Digital retail creates gains only when organisational change handles employee, security and operating constraints together. The same connected systems that improve visibility can increase dependence on data quality and shared infrastructure (Ishfaq, Davis-Sramek and Gibson, 2022; Caro and Sadr, 2019). Automation can remove repetitive work while creating new monitoring, exception and learning tasks (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Trenerry et al., 2021). While customer data enhances personalisation, it poses challenges for the protection of customers' privacy and governance (Bleier et al., 2020; Bandara et al., 2020b). Value creation is linked to firms' technological capabilities rather than the number of technologies adopted (Mikalef and Gupta,

2021; Furr et al., 2022). The contradiction explains the persistence of legacy controls in digitally advanced retailers.

6.1 Overcoming Resistance to Change

Employee resistance can reflect genuine work-design costs rather than simple unwillingness to modernise. Nisafani, Kiely and Mahony (2020) review technostress causes including overload, complexity, insecurity and technology intrusion into work. Borle et al. (2021) review 21 eligible occupational studies and connect techno-stressors with mental-health and work outcomes. Their synthesis is limited by heterogeneous measures and study designs which weakens precise effect comparisons (Borle et al., 2021). Trenerry et al. (2021) therefore use a multi-level framework that includes individual, team and organisational conditions around digital change. Management should treat resistance as information about implementation conditions rather than a defect to suppress.

Training helps when it matches actual task changes instead of serving as symbolic change activity. Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski (2021) include skills and organisational readiness among the conditions surrounding AI adoption. Eller et al. (2020) also show that digitalisation outcomes depend on organisational resources and managerial orientation rather than technology availability alone. Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch (2022) provide stronger causal support that leadership behaviour shapes employee responses during digital change. However, their experiment cannot establish how responses develop across long retail transformations with repeated technology changes. Retail managers therefore need continuing learning arrangements alongside clear role redesign and workload decisions (Trenerry et al., 2021; Nisafani, Kiely and Mahony, 2020).

Resistance also affects the obsolescence claim because new systems can create demand for more management during transition. Wrede, Velamuri and Dauth (2020) show top managers remain active in aligning strategy and organisational change. Nell et al. (2021) warn about digitalisation traps and preserve a strong role for senior managerial judgement. Martela (2023) shows that self-management requires substitute structures when conventional middlemanagement roles are reduced. Digital change therefore can remove some supervisory routines while adding coordination and capability-building work elsewhere (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Nadkarni and Prügl, 2021). The transition burden gives another reason to reject a simple disappearance model for management roles.

6.2 Ensuring Data Security and Privacy

E-commerce privacy creates a direct tension between data-based service and consumer control. Bandara, Fernando and Akter (2020b) develop a taxonomy that separates several privacy concerns arising during e-commerce activity. Bandara, Fernando and Akter (2020a) use qualitative consumer inquiry to explain why stated privacy concerns can coexist with continued online disclosure. Maseeh et al. (2021) analyse 184 articles and show that methods and contextual moderators help explain inconsistent privacy effects. The meta-analysis offers broad quantitative synthesis but inherits variation in underlying measures and settings (Maseeh et al., 2021). Retail managers therefore need policies that recognise context-specific consumer responses rather than assuming one stable privacy attitude.

Information disclosure research adds a governance problem inside the customer relationship. Kolotylo-Kulkarni, Xia and Dhillon (2021) review 62 eligible studies and identify several drivers of disclosure in e-commerce. Bleier, Goldfarb and Tucker (2020) frame privacy as a constraint on data-based innovation and marketing rather than an external compliance issue. These perspectives imply that commercial teams and security teams cannot manage customer data independently (Bleier, Goldfarb and Tucker, 2020; Bandara, Fernando and Akter, 2020b). Crossfunctional coordination is therefore required because personalisation choices can create privacy and reputational consequences. Digital retail weakens functional isolation while making formal accountability for data more necessary.

Security research from UK e-tailers provides a more concrete organisational example. Soomro, Shah and Thatcher (2021) use 33 semi-structured interviews across three large UK e-tailers to examine identity-fraud prevention policies. The study has direct sector relevance but its threecompany base limits claims about all retail organisations. Its value lies in showing that fraud prevention involves policy, process and human behaviour alongside technical protection (Soomro, Shah and Thatcher, 2021). This supports central standards where local decisions could expose shared customer or payment systems (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022; Jöhnk, Weißert and Wyrski, 2021). Cybersecurity therefore provides a clear case where digital growth can strengthen formal governance rather than remove it.

6.3 Leveraging Technology for Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage from digital retail depends on fitting technology to operating capabilities. Reinartz, Wiegand and Imschloss (2019) show that digital change can affect several retail valuechain activities with different competitive consequences. Mikalef et al. (2019) find analytics capabilities support innovation through wider dynamic capabilities rather than through data alone. Mikalef and Gupta (2021) reach a similar conclusion for AI capability and firm outcomes. These studies weaken the assumption that acquiring advanced tools creates advantage without organisational development. Retail performance should therefore be linked to capability configuration and process integration rather than digital spending itself.

Fulfilment evidence makes the configuration problem measurable. Wan (2022) finds that alternative distribution designs create different combinations of fill rate, lead time and cost. Yang, Li and Zhong (2022) similarly show through analytical modelling that mixed fulfilment strategies depend on market and operational conditions. Operational choice therefore involves trade-offs rather than a universal digital best practice (Wan, 2022; Taylor et al., 2019). Kembro, Eriksson and Norrman (2022) also show that sorting design is tied to wider omnichannel logistics choices. Competitive gains are more credible when technology changes a coherent operating system rather than one isolated channel.

Platform participation adds opportunities but also brings about changes in dependencies and control dynamics. According to Cennamo (2021), competitive advantage is associated with platform positioning and strategic interaction. Ecosystems effects on platform competition are pointed out by Rietveld and Schilling (2021) as factors that could lead to new value capture for platform participants. According to Stallkamp and Schotter (2021), international platform activities are subject to local institutions and markets. Therefore, digital presence does not eliminate the effect of geography, governance, and dependence of partners. Omnichannel retail competitive advantage is created through management of these dependencies while maintaining unique competencies (Hein et al., 2020; Furr, Ozcan and Eisenhardt, 2022).

7. Conclusion

It can be argued that the idea of how e-commerce and e-business have made traditional retail organization structures redundant is an exaggeration. Digital technologies have brought changes in information processing, channel boundaries, and the speed of many decisions (Shankar et al., 2021; Cai and Lo, 2020). Nonetheless, studies on direct retail suggest that authority depends on coordination needs and local uncertainties (Dessein, Lo and Minami, 2022). Additionally, omnichannel fulfilment makes physical assets relevant by changing their nature within interconnected distribution networks (Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs, 2022; Wan, 2022). What should be said is that digital retail brings hybrid organizations combining decentralized action and selective centralization (Yang et al., 2024; Nell et al., 2021). Traditional structures are therefore conditionally useful rather than generally obsolete.

Roles within management reach similar qualified results. Routine monitoring is likely to decrease since the information will be visible from the use of shared technologies and some decisions will become automated (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Shrestha et al., 2019). Regardless of that, managers still make allocation of decision-making rights and handle cross-departmental conflicts (Wrede et al., 2020; Bijmolt et al., 2021). Leadership also retains relational qualities beside newer requirements for data and technology understanding (Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024; Weber, Büttgen and Bartsch, 2022). This indicates that the role re-definition theory has more supporting evidence than the idea that management will disappear. This is because digital technologies change what managers manage and coordinate, but not the requirement for management.

7.1 Summary of Findings

The strongest structural evidence is obtained from those designs where the choice in real organizations and not attitude to digital technologies is observed. Dessein, Lo and Minami (2022) show directly that retail decentralisation reverses when coordination needs rise. Yang et al. (2024) provide large-sample support for lower centralisation under digital transformation but in a different national and organisational setting. Mustafa et al. (2022) and Martela (2023) show that postbureaucratic forms are possible but provide weaker performance evidence. These findings together support contingency because digital tools can alter the cost of information without removing coordination problems. Organisational structure therefore remains a management choice shaped by interdependence and risk.

Omnichannel research also rejects the idea that digital business simply substitutes online assets for physical assets. Hübner, Hense and Dethlefs (2022) describe the renewed operational role of stores within omnichannel fulfilment. Davis-Sramek et al. (2020) show fulfilment transformation developing longitudinally across six large US retailers. Wan (2022) then provides order-level operational evidence that alternative fulfilment structures produce measurable trade-offs. UK sales data also shows online retail remaining large without replacing the wider retail market (Office for National Statistics, 2026). The combined evidence supports resource recombination and channel integration rather than wholesale organisational replacement.

Management change is therefore substantial but selective. Digital leadership requires technical understanding while still depending on communication, judgement and employee support (Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019; Gilli, Lettner and Güttel, 2024). AI changes some decision structures but creates new choices about delegation, review and accountability (Shrestha, BenMenahem and von Krogh, 2019; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021). Privacy and security also create reasons for formal governance when customer data crosses functions and locations (Maseeh et al., 2021; Soomro, Shah and Thatcher, 2021). The most defensible position is therefore neither traditionalism nor technological replacement. Omnichannel retailers need hybrid structures and managers able to decide where autonomy should stop.

7.2 Implications for Future Research

Future research could test hybrid organizational design using more robust longitudinal and causal approaches. For instance, additional retailer-level panels might determine whether investments in digital change decision rights ex ante or ex post performance (Yang et al., 2024; Dessein, Lo, and Minami, 2022). Cross-country research designs might study whether institutional circumstances affect the trade-off between centralized standards and local autonomy (Stallkamp and Schotter, 2021; Nell et al., 2021). Field experiments might consider the decision limits for stores, fulfilment centres, and AI-supported teams. Such studies will move the debate on digital maturity being inherently associated with organization flattening past fashion.

Research on management roles should distinguish automation of tasks from elimination of roles. Longitudinal designs might document which managerial tasks become redundant, and which coordination tasks become new ones following implementation of AI (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Shrestha, Ben-Menahem, and von Krogh, 2019). Retail research might consider the impact of such changes on employee stress levels because digital implementation might redistribute

rather than decrease the workload (Borle et al., 2021; Nisafani, Kiely, and Mahony, 2020). Research on privacy and security should investigate the impact of decision-making authority on incidents and customers' trust in various channels (Maseeh et al., 2021; Soomro, Shah, and Thatcher, 2021). This research will be able to empirically challenge the idea of obsolescence based on organizational outcomes.

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