The impact that online shopping has had on the high street

Introduction

The term online shopping or e-commerce denotes the exchange of commodities and services using digital means such as mobile applications, electronic payments, and digital marketing (Bao et al., 2025). For the purposes of this essay, high street retail shall be considered in the literal meaning of physical stores in the central area of a town that rely on customers visiting the store physically (Wadud et al., 2025). The author also shows that digital transformation has increased mobile commerce and omnichannel retailing within the UK, thereby affecting consumer browsing, comparison, and purchasing behaviors. Evidently, there are findings suggesting that online shopping or e-commerce has led to behavioral change among consumers in terms of convenience, speed, and personalization (Popescu, 2025). Further, the present essay considers that online shopping has transformed the high street via a reduction in physical retailing activities, behavioral change, and retail pressure.

Online Shopping and the High Street

One of the biggest effects caused by the phenomenon of online shopping is the reduction of physical retail activities in high streets. According to the House of Commons Library (2025), the number of online transactions increased from about 20% of total retailing transactions in Great Britain in 2019 to a peak of 37% in February 2021 and has stayed higher than their pre-crisis level. In 2024, as many as 34 multi-store retailing enterprises shut down their businesses, impacting a total of 7,537 physical outlets and 55,914 workers. Also, according to PwC (2025), 12,804 chain stores closed in the UK high streets, shopping centres, and retail parks in 2024 at an average of 35 closures daily, largely driven by the shift to online shopping and services, including banks. Peña-García et al. (2024) showed that consumer trust and

purchasing decision-making were significantly impacted by the presence and impact of online reviews. This makes purchasing from an e-commerce site more appealing than from a physically located store. Disruptive Innovation Theory allows for a different way to look at e-commerce as a model of lower friction and disruptive innovation to traditional retail by way of convenience, price comparison, and broader selections (Wadud et al., 2025). Further, it has substantially weakened the competitive position of high street retailers, and also an extrapolation based on literature about retail-digital transformation. Online shopping is not the only reason that retailers have seen a decline. The epidemic, pressure on shops due to increased costs, and other broader structural changes have also made high street shops less robust. In 2020, online shopping dramatically accelerated the number of closures and job losses among high street stores as they were then required to justify their continued existence by providing exceptional service, convenience, and experience to their customers rather than simply supplying goods (Wadud et al., 2025).

The introduction of online shopping has revolutionized the way consumers shop and expect things from retailers. According to the Theory of Technology Acceptance, consumers tend to accept online shopping as an alternative if they find it beneficial and user-friendly, and it has been found that usefulness, ease of use, attitude, and intention play vital roles in shaping consumer purchasing behavior from online markets through open-access research carried out recently (Catană et al., 2025). Similarly, it has also been seen that performance and effort expectancies enhance purchase intentions, whereas perceived risk lowers them in a UTAUT-based study conducted in 2025 (Farhat et al., 2025). Peña-García et al. (2024) showed that perceived authenticity and quality of online reviews affect trust in reviews and marketplaces as well as reputation systems. Therefore, this can explain why many consumers rely on

digital evidence when they cannot physically touch the products before making their purchase decisions. In addition, the behaviour of consumers is also influenced in various ways, including mobile applications, social media, and targeted advertising or promotions. Hysa et al. (2024) examined how much impact social media influencers have on the consumer's shopping habits and purchase intent. On the other hand, a separate study conducted on social e-commerce identified that both technical and situational cues could spur impulse buys (Xue et al., 2024). The expectations around delivery have been integrated into the online value offering, as has recently been revealed by the latest research around last-mile delivery, where the quality of delivery and customer satisfaction influence the preferences of consumers (Sharma et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there is an element of inconvenience involved in this transition, as the absence of sensory experience in shopping online may encourage more hasty purchasing decisions, with some customers actually preferring to shop in-store for products that require some form of tactile decision-making or immediate verification (Xue et al., 2024).

However, despite the problems created by online shopping, some high streets have been adapting by using omnichannel and experience-based approaches. Luo et al. (2025) reveal that e-commerce is changing the face of retail not only on the city scale but also nationally. Further, the high street of the future needs to be more about digitization than simply physical stores. In concrete terms, omnichannel shopping involves moving seamlessly from internet shopping and mobile ordering to in-store collection, with literature clearly outlining the shopping journey where consumers shop online, order products, collect from the store, and share the experience on social media (Gao and Jiang, 2025). The reason for its importance is that it ensures that the physical aspect of retail remains relevant by sustaining footfall while providing

convenience (Asante et al., 2025). On the other hand, the traditional high street concept is evolving into one based on experiential retailing. According to Zhang and Huang (2024), visual marketing strategies in physical stores might positively affect consumer purchases as well as prove the potential of such establishments in providing a holistic environment, sensory experience, and interaction instead of merely selling products. This trend partially explains the shift seen nowadays in numerous town centres towards social, community-based and entertaining spaces, combining retail and overall social experiences. Khalil et al. (2025) indicate the necessity of having certain capabilities, financial and organizational flexibility, as well as implying that large chain companies will be more ready to integrate digitally than small independent ones. In any case, from a critical point of view, it would mean that the high street is not disappearing, only changing its structure. It becomes possible for the high street to remain sustainable due to the development of the regeneration process, the interaction of digital and physical worlds, and something unique that online shopping cannot replace (Luo et al., 2025). In general, while online shopping is facilitating change, the high street transforms into an ambivalent space.

Conclusion

Online shopping has been a driving force behind the changes that have taken place on the high street by minimizing retailing activity and influencing the purchasing behavior of consumers. In fact, the development of electronic commerce, mobile commerce, and digital platforms has played an important role in leading to a decrease in foot traffic and the closure of shops. On the other hand, consumers' expectations and needs have pushed them towards engaging in online shopping. However, the high street is far from gone as there have been many retailers that have embraced omni-channel retailing as well as experiential retailing, among others. Indeed, despite the

negative impact that online shopping has had on the survival of most traditional businesses, it has served as an inspiration for retail innovation. Further, the future viability of the high street is dependent on further digitalization, experiential retailing, and government support to enable local businesses to be competitive in the digital space.

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