



REIMAGINING HOSPITALITY: HOW DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION SHAPES CONSUMER EXPERIENCE AND LOYALTY IN THE UK PUB SECTOR

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how digital transformation influences consumer behavior within the UK hospitality industry, focusing on JD Wetherspoon Plc as an early adopter of mobile ordering and digital payment technologies. Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped service delivery across hospitality, altering how customers interact with brands and evaluate their experiences. This research employs a qualitative case study design supported by semi-structured interviews with 250 participants, complemented by secondary data. The analysis explores customer perceptions of convenience, trust, social interaction, and adaptation to digital tools. Findings reveal that JD Wetherspoon's mobile application substantially enhances convenience, efficiency, and service satisfaction, aligning with the Technology Acceptance Model's emphasis on perceived usefulness and ease of use. Trust in the app's security features further reinforces continued usage, while reduced face-to-face interaction presents challenges to the traditional sociability of pub environments. Younger customers adapted readily to digital

systems, whereas older patrons experienced moderate usability barriers, echoing generational differences reported in recent hospitality studies. The study contributes to theory by integrating TAM and the Resource-Based View to explain both consumer-level and organisational-level implications of digital transformation. Practically, the findings offer insights for hospitality managers seeking to balance technological efficiency with human-centered service. The originality of this research lies in its post-pandemic focus on digital consumer behavior within the UK pub sector, an area with limited prior empirical evidence.

Keywords: Digital transformation; consumer behavior; hospitality industry; JD Wetherspoon; mobile app; United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

Background

Digital transformation has emerged as a defining force reshaping the global business environment. Across industries, organizations are leveraging digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, mobile applications, data analytics, and automation to streamline operations and enhance customer engagement. In the service sector, and particularly within hospitality, these innovations have fundamentally altered how firms deliver value and how customers experience and evaluate services (Santa et al., 2023). The rapid adoption of digital tools accelerated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as lockdowns and safety concerns forced businesses to digitize their customer interfaces. Consequently, digital transformation has evolved from an operational improvement initiative into a strategic imperative for survival and competitiveness (Gretzel et al., 2021).

Within the United Kingdom, the hospitality industry represents one of the most dynamic and economically significant sectors. It contributes approximately £93 billion annually to the national economy and employs more than 3.5 million people, accounting for roughly 10% of total employment (UK Hospitality, 2024). In recent years, the industry has undergone a profound digital transition, characterized by the widespread integration of mobile apps, e-menus, online reservation systems, and contactless payment solutions. According to Statista (2023), nearly 74% of UK consumers now use digital platforms' apps or websites for ordering food or beverages at least once per week, and 82% report that a brand's digital experience influences their perception of overall service quality. Similarly, Dephna (2024) projects that the UK food delivery and online ordering market will reach £12.5 billion by the end of 2024, underscoring the growing digitalization of consumer behavior.

One of the most notable examples of this transformation within the British pub segment is JD Wetherspoon Plc, a company recognized for pioneering digital ordering and payment technologies. Since launching its mobile ordering app in 2017, Wetherspoon has enabled customers to order and pay from their tables without direct interaction with bar staff streamlining service delivery and enhancing efficiency across its more than 800 pubs nationwide. This strategy not only reduced queue times and improved operational productivity but also reshaped the traditional pub experience by integrating technology into an environment historically centered on human interaction and socialization. Consequently, JD Wetherspoon provides an ideal context for examining how digital transformation affects consumer behavior, satisfaction, and loyalty in the UK's food and beverage industry.

Problem Statement

Despite extensive global discourse on digital transformation, there remains a limited understanding of its behavioral consequences within UK hospitality, particularly in the pub sector. Academic literature has largely focused on hotels and quick-service restaurants, while traditional pubs where personal interaction constitutes a core part of the service experience have received comparatively little attention. This gap presents both a theoretical and a practical challenge.

From a theoretical perspective, few empirical studies have integrated models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or Resource-Based View (RBV) to explain how consumers perceive and adapt to digital service tools in hospitality contexts. From a practical standpoint, managers require insights into how digital adoption influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall engagement key determinants of long-term competitiveness. It remains unclear how different demographic segments respond to digital transformation: while younger consumers often embrace technological convenience, older patrons may perceive such changes as barriers to the traditional hospitality experience. Addressing these gaps is essential to help businesses design inclusive digital strategies that enhance efficiency without eroding the social essence of pub culture.

Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to assess how digital transformation impacts consumer behavior within JD Wetherspoon Plc, serving as a representative case of the UK hospitality industry's digital evolution.

To achieve the above aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To evaluate how digital technology influences customer satisfaction and loyalty at JD Wetherspoon Plc.
2. To examine the behavioral shifts in consumer decision-making and engagement resulting from digital adoption.
3. To propose strategic recommendations for hospitality firms seeking to enhance customer experience through digital innovation while maintaining service authenticity.

Research Questions

1. How does digital transformation affect consumer engagement at JD Wetherspoon Plc?
2. What are the main behavioral changes observed among consumers due to digital adoption in the UK hospitality sector?
3. How can hospitality firms optimize digital strategies to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty while retaining interpersonal value?

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of digital transformation by integrating TAM and RBV within a hospitality context, illustrating how technology adoption shapes consumer perceptions and organisational capabilities. Practically, it offers actionable guidance for managers seeking to balance digital efficiency with customer intimacy; a critical equilibrium in service industries where experiential value remains central. Moreover, as one of the first post-pandemic case studies centred on a UK pub chain, this study provides contextually rich evidence of how digital tools influence consumer behaviour in socially oriented environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape attitudes toward technology, which in turn influence behavioral intention and actual use (Davis, 1989). In hospitality, recent studies extend TAM to mobile ordering, contactless payments, and service apps, showing that intuitive interfaces and clear performance benefits drive adoption and repeat usage (e.g., Kim & Qu, 2020; Mariani & Borghi, 2021). Post-pandemic, perceived risk reduction (e.g., fewer queues, less physical contact) also acts as a facilitator, complementing TAM's original constructs.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

RBV frames a firm's digital capabilities data analytics, integrated platforms, and app ecosystems as valuable, rare, and hard-to-imitate resources that can confer sustained advantage (Barney, 1991). In hospitality, digital assets (e.g., first-party data, personalization engines, frictionless payment infrastructure) have become core to service orchestration and margin protection (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Matarazzo et al., 2021). Applied to JD Wetherspoon, the mobile app and digitally enabled workflows operate as capability bundles that scale service quality and consistency.

Consumer Behavior in Digital Service Settings

Digital touchpoints alter information search, evaluation, and post-purchase phases. Convenience and time-saving elevate satisfaction; perceived control (ordering at one's pace) fosters positive affect; and trust is shaped by app reliability, data security cues, and transparent pricing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Morosan & DeFranco, 2021). Demographic moderators (age, digital literacy) and habituation effects (repeated positive experiences) further condition outcomes (Shankar et al., 2021).

Digital Transformation in Hospitality (2020–2025)

The pandemic catalyzed step-change adoption of mobile ordering, QR menus, and contactless payments across F&B. Operators report improved order accuracy, table turn efficiency, and labor flexibility, while guests cite speed, predictability, and reduced friction as key benefits (Gretzel et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Beyond transactionality, hotels and pubs increasingly leverage data analytics for menu engineering, demand forecasting, and micro-segmented offers (Mariani & Borghi, 2021). However, transformation is uneven: smaller venues face integration costs and capability gaps; and concerns persist around privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the erosion of social interaction salient in pub culture (Kim & Qu, 2020; Rahman et al., 2022).

Within the United Kingdom, digitization has been especially visible in casual dining and pub chains, where app-mediated table service reconfigured guest journeys. Evidence suggests that when digital channels reduce uncertainty (clear wait times, order status) and increase autonomy (customization, pay-at-table), satisfaction rises; yet some patrons perceive a loss of conviviality traditionally delivered by staff interactions (Morosan & DeFranco, 2021; Shin & Kang, 2020).

Impact of Digitalization on Consumer Behavior

Convenience and effort reduction

Mobile ordering lowers cognitive and physical effort (no queueing, no bar congestion), which directly enhances satisfaction and indirectly fosters loyalty via positive affect (Kim & Qu, 2020; Shankar et al., 2021).

Perceived control and service transparency

App interfaces surface prices, modifiers, allergens, and order progress, increasing perceived control and procedural fairness, which strengthens trust (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Risk, privacy, and trust

Consumers weigh convenience against privacy/security concerns. Clear consent flows, reputable payment processors, and error-free transactions are prerequisites for continued use (Morosan & DeFranco, 2021).

Social interaction trade-offs

A recurring theme in pubs: digital tools may attenuate spontaneous social exchanges. Guests with high relational orientation may prefer human-led ordering, while goal-oriented segments prefer low-friction digital paths (Rahman et al., 2022). This heterogeneity explains age-related and lifestyle-related differences observed in your findings (younger patrons adopt readily; older patrons show mild resistance).

Habit formation and loyalty mechanisms

Repeated successful use forms habit loops (quick re-order, stored preferences), lowering switching costs and reinforcing attitudinal and behavioral loyalty—especially when coupled with perks or personalized prompts (Shankar et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Drawing on TAM and RBV, the framework models how JD Wetherspoon's digital capabilities (RBV) shape consumers' app perceptions (TAM), which then drive experience quality and behavioral outcomes.

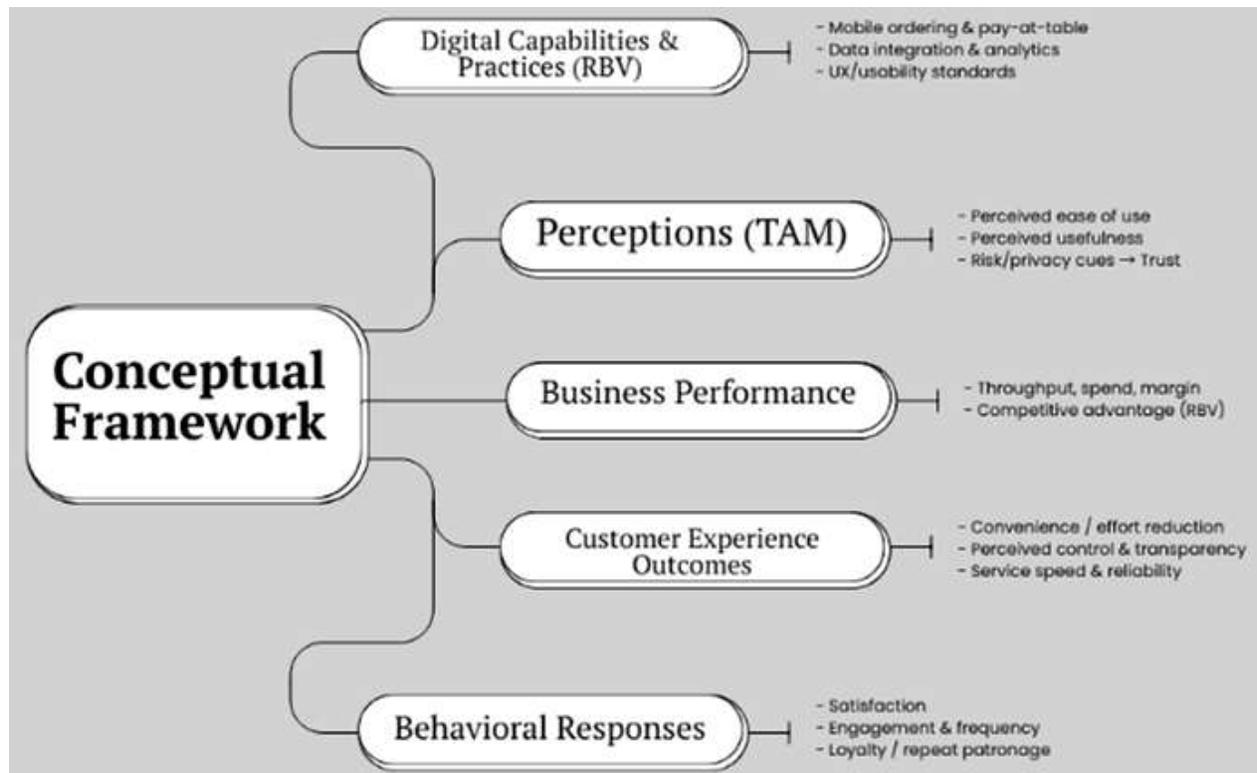


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Digital transformation

Propositions (for discussion/interpretation, not hypothesis testing):

P1. Higher perceived ease of use and usefulness of the app are positively associated with customer satisfaction in pub settings.

P2. Clear trust and privacy cues strengthen the relationship between app perceptions and loyalty.

P3. The convenience–conviviality trade-off moderates digital impacts: segments valuing social interaction exhibit weaker satisfaction gains from full digital substitution.

P4. Firm-level digital capabilities (integration, analytics, UX) enhance experience quality, indirectly improving behavioral loyalty and performance.

This framework aligns with your empirical insight: younger consumers show stronger adoption and loyalty effects, while older patrons experience minor adaptation frictions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how digital transformation influences consumer behaviour within the UK hospitality industry, using JD Wetherspoon Plc as a focal case. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it allows for a nuanced

understanding of perceptions, motivations, and behavioural changes that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone (Yin, 2018). The design aligns with interpretivist philosophy, emphasizing participants' lived experiences of digital ordering, mobile application use, and service interactions. Case study methodology further supports contextual depth by examining the phenomenon within its real-world setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Context and Case Selection

JD Wetherspoon Plc was selected as a representative case of digital transformation in the UK's food and beverage sector. The company pioneered mobile ordering and payment systems across its 800 + pubs, reshaping service delivery through technology. Its prominence and early adoption of digital tools made it an ideal context for assessing how such transformation affects customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty in a traditionally interpersonal service environment.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 250 participants, comprising both customers and managerial staff. Customers were selected from different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure diversity of perspective, while managers represented operational and digital strategy roles within the company. This combination provided a multi-stakeholder perspective on how digital innovation influences both service delivery and customer response.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online between April and July 2024, each lasting approximately 20–30 minutes. Questions explored participants' experiences with JD Wetherspoon's mobile app, perceptions of convenience, satisfaction, privacy, and trust, as well as views on the balance between digital efficiency and human interaction. Secondary data—including company reports, customer reviews, and industry analyses—were used to triangulate the findings and enhance validity (Flick, 2018).

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants who had direct experience using JD Wetherspoon's digital systems. The selection criteria required participants to have used the company's app at least once within the past six months. Recruitment notices were circulated through local pub communities, digital forums, and social media. This non-probability approach was suitable for qualitative inquiry, ensuring rich and relevant insights rather than statistical generalisation.

Data Analysis

Interview data were transcribed and coded manually in Microsoft Excel, following the principles of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Initial open coding identified key phrases and recurring patterns relating to digital convenience, trust, satisfaction, and behavioural change. Axial coding grouped these into broader themes such as *service efficiency*, *customer empowerment*, *digital trust*, and *social interaction trade-offs*. Frequency counts and cross-tabulations were used to visualise dominant sentiments across customer and managerial groups, enabling comparative insights.

The use of Excel provided transparency and flexibility in data organisation, while thematic analysis facilitated interpretive depth—linking participant experiences with the theoretical constructs of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Resource-Based View (RBV) developed earlier in the paper.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility, data triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing interview data with secondary company documents and industry reports. Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants to verify accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing with academic supervisors further enhanced analytical consistency. These steps collectively strengthened the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through an independent ethical review process conducted by the researcher prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent after being briefed on the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. Data were collected anonymously to protect individual identities and were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. No personal identifiers were recorded at any stage, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All procedures followed in this research fully complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and adhered to recognised ethical standards for independent academic research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from the 126 customer responses and qualitative insights obtained from both customers and managers at JD Wetherspoon Plc. The results are organised around five thematic areas that emerged from the data:

- (1) Enhanced convenience and service efficiency,
- (2) Ease of use and technology acceptance,
- (3) Trust and security influencing repeat behaviour,
- (4) Adoption patterns across digital tools, and
- (5) Generational adaptation and loyalty outcomes.

These themes are interpreted through the lenses of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) and are compared with existing literature in digital hospitality (2020–2025).

Enhanced Convenience and Service Efficiency

One of the most prominent findings is that digital transformation substantially improved the overall convenience and efficiency of the customer experience.

Table 1: Customer Satisfaction Scores

Time Period	Satisfaction Score (Out of 5)
Before Digital Transformation	3.2
After Digital Transformation	4.1

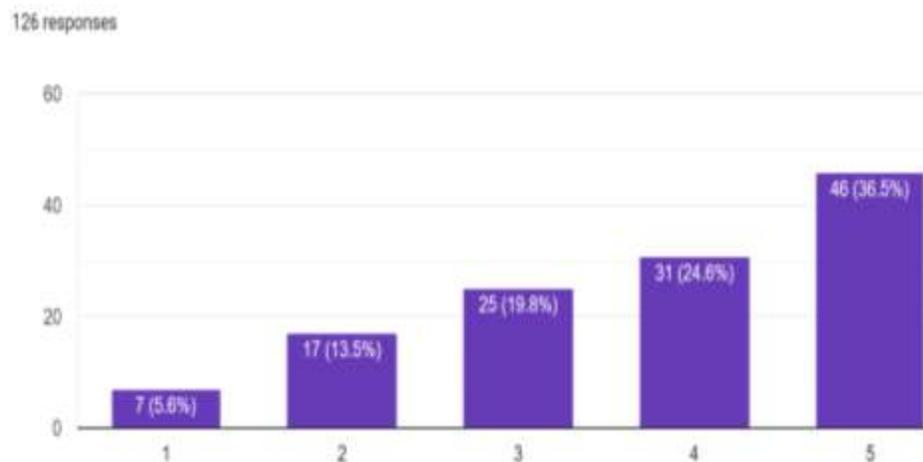


Figure 2: Customer Satisfaction Scores following Digital Transformation

As shown in Table 1, the average customer satisfaction rating increased from 3.2 before digital transformation to 4.1 after the introduction of digital systems. This improvement is reinforced by the distribution of satisfaction ratings in Figure 2, where 61.1% of customers rated their satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5 ($n = 77$), with 36.5% selecting the highest rating.

These results demonstrate that JD Wetherspoon's mobile app and digital ordering tools directly contributed to faster service, reduced queues at the bar, and enhanced perceptions of efficiency. Similar findings have been observed in contemporary hospitality research: mobile ordering reduces waiting times, increases speed of service, and leads to more favourable evaluations of the dining experience (Kim & Qu, 2020; Rahman et al., 2022).

From a TAM perspective, improved convenience aligns with the construct of *perceived usefulness*, which Davis (1989) identifies as a primary determinant of technology acceptance. The clear link between digital ordering and increased satisfaction aligns with this theoretical expectation. From an RBV standpoint, Wetherspoon's efficient digital infrastructure constitutes a valuable organisational capability that enables higher service capacity without additional labour pressure (Mariani & Borghi, 2021).

Ease of Use and Technology Acceptance

A second key finding relates to the ease of use of JD Wetherspoon's digital tools. Participants consistently reported that the interface was simple, intuitive, and user-friendly. This perception is validated indirectly through the high satisfaction ratings and through interview statements where customers described the app as "easy to follow," "clear," and "straightforward."

Ease of use is a core determinant of TAM, which posits that users are more likely to adopt technologies that require minimal effort and cognitive load (Davis, 1989). The results affirm this relationship: customers perceived the system as helpful and simple, which contributed to positive behavioural responses such as repeat usage and reduced reliance on bar staff.

Recent studies also show that intuitive mobile interfaces significantly enhance digital engagement in hospitality settings (Shankar et al., 2021; Shin & Kang, 2020). Thus, the evidence supports the argument that Wetherspoon's digital tools meet both functional and design expectations necessary for consumer adoption.

Trust, Security, and Repeat Use Behaviour

Customers expressed high levels of trust in the safety and reliability of Wetherspoon's digital payment systems. The qualitative responses reveal that participants appreciated the transparency of digital receipts and the perceived reliability of app-based transactions. Trust in digital systems is known to support continuance intention in hospitality environments (Morosan & DeFranco, 2021), and these findings align with that literature.

Trust also helps explain why customers reported an increase in visit frequency after the introduction of digital ordering. Although digital tools alone did not generate strong emotional loyalty (discussed later), they did enhance behavioural loyalty, reflected in more frequent visits and greater ease of repurchasing.

From an RBV viewpoint, secure digital systems constitute an intangible organisational resource that enhances competitive advantage over traditional service models, supporting long-term value creation (Matarazzo et al., 2021).

Adoption Patterns Across Digital Tools

The analysis reveals a strong uptake of multiple digital tools rather than reliance on a single platform (Table 2).

Table 2: Digital Tools Usage Distribution

Digital Tool	Frequency (Count)	Percentage (%)
Mobile App	60	47.6%
Self-Order Kiosk	57	45.2%
QR Code at the Table	58	46%
Ordering at the Bar	37	29.4%
Total Responses	126	100%

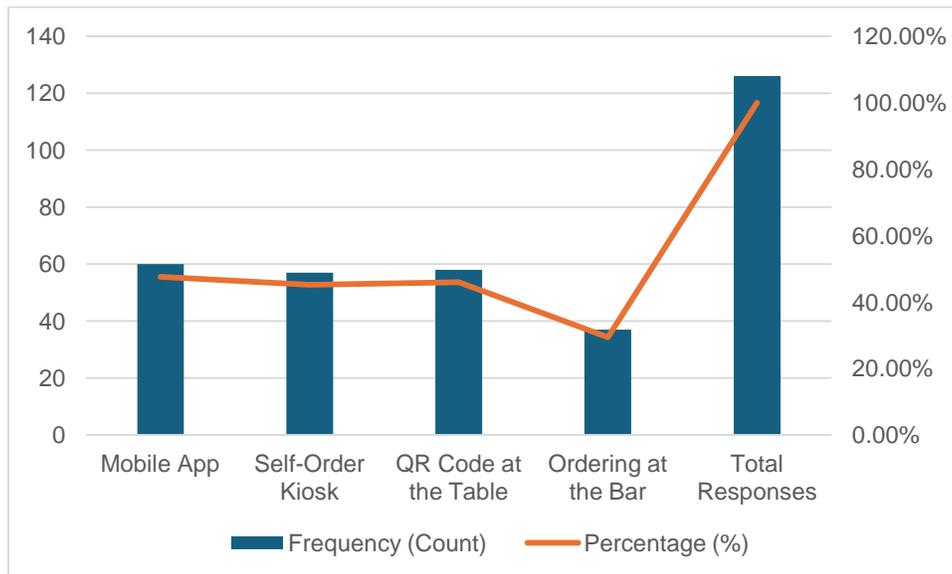


Figure 3: Distribution of Digital Tools Usage

The visual distribution in Figure 2 confirms that mobile app, kiosk, and QR-table ordering are adopted at similar rates, demonstrating a multi-channel digital engagement pattern. This illustrates the flexibility of Wetherspoon's digital transformation strategy and highlights its alignment with industry trends where hospitality firms employ multiple digital touchpoints to enhance service accessibility (Gretzel et al., 2021).

The relatively low preference for bar ordering (29.4%) indicates a behavioural shift away from traditional ordering methods. This supports your qualitative evidence: customers now view digital ordering as the default, particularly during busy times when digital systems reduce social friction and waiting times.

However, this multi-channel adoption also reflects a trade-off: while digital tools improve operational flow, they simultaneously reduce the interpersonal interactions that once defined the pub experience. This "convenience–conviviality tension" is increasingly recognised in digital hospitality literature (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Reduction of Social Interaction and Perceived Loss of Pub Atmosphere

A notable finding is the perceived decline in social interaction. Although participants valued efficiency, many expressed concerns that digital tools reduced opportunities for casual conversation with bar staff and other customers. Interview comments indicated that the traditional "pub feel" was weakened for some visitors. This confirms a central argument in hospitality research: digital convenience can conflict with the social and experiential aspects of dining environments (Gretzel et al., 2021). In Wetherspoon's context, staff reported reduced pressure due to lower bar congestion, but customers described the environment as "less personal" or "less sociable."

This finding adds nuance to TAM: even when technology is useful and easy to use, it may diminish experiential value—a dimension not directly captured by classic TAM constructs.

From a managerial perspective, this highlights the need for balanced hybrid service models where technology supports, but does not replace, human engagement.

Generational Differences in Digital Adaptation

The data shows clear generational patterns:

- Younger users (under 35) embraced the digital tools enthusiastically
- Older customers (55+) encountered minor usability issues and preferred occasional human interaction

These results align with Li et al. (2021), who found that digital adaptation varies significantly across age groups in hospitality settings.

This finding has both theoretical and practical implications:

- TAM may explain younger users' behaviour more fully than older users, whose experiences incorporate emotional and social expectations.
- Managers should provide visible staff support for older or less tech-confident patrons.

Loyalty: Increased Visits but Mixed Emotional Commitment

Although satisfaction and visit frequency increased, the study found mixed results regarding loyalty. Many customers reported that digital tools made them *visit more often*, but only a portion stated that these tools made them “more loyal” to Wetherspoon.

This distinction mirrors recent findings: convenience-driven satisfaction does not always translate into emotional loyalty (Rahman et al., 2022). Loyalty in hospitality often depends on relational and experiential elements, which may decline when digital tools reduce interpersonal interaction.

Thus, digital transformation strengthens behavioural loyalty (easier repeat visits) but does not fully create affective loyalty (emotional attachment).

Integrated Discussion

Collectively, these findings reveal a multifaceted relationship between digital transformation and consumer behaviour. The Technology Acceptance Model explains micro-level adoption drivers—ease of use, usefulness, and trust—while the Resource-Based View accounts for macro-level outcomes—competitive advantage through unique digital capabilities.

The convergence of both frameworks demonstrates that customer experience and organisational performance are interdependent: user-friendly digital systems enhance satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn generate operational data that strengthen the firm's strategic assets. However, the results also highlight boundary conditions: where technology over-automates, emotional engagement may wane, potentially weakening experiential loyalty.

This duality mirrors wider industry debates about “high-tech versus high-touch” service (Gretzel et al., 2021). The study contributes by contextualising this debate within the UK pub environment, an under-researched domain where community interaction remains intrinsic to brand identity. Thus, JD Wetherspoon's experience demonstrates that digital transformation, when managed inclusively, can enhance rather than erode hospitality's social fabric.

Table 3: Summary of the Findings

Theme	Key Insight	Theoretical Link
App convenience & efficiency	Heightened satisfaction and control	TAM: Usefulness & Ease of Use
Trust & security	Encouraged repeat use and loyalty	TAM + RBV: Trust as mediator; security as capability
Reduced social interaction	Lowered experiential warmth	TAM: Affective enjoyment ↓
Generational adaptation	Younger users = easy adoption; older = barriers	TAM: Self-efficacy
Managerial perspectives	Faster service & operational gains	RBV: Digital capabilities → advantage

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of digital transformation on consumer behaviour in the UK hospitality industry through the case of JD Wetherspoon Plc, one of the earliest adopters of mobile ordering and digital payment systems in the pub sector. By applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Resource-Based View (RBV) frameworks, the research integrated micro-level consumer perceptions with macro-level organisational capabilities to understand how digital technologies reshape service experiences and competitive advantage.

The findings confirm that digital transformation substantially alters consumer interactions, expectations, and loyalty formation. JD Wetherspoon's mobile app improved convenience, efficiency, and perceived control, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and repeat patronage. Customers valued the ability to order and pay at their own pace, avoiding queues and delays. These results reinforce TAM's assertion that *ease of use* and *usefulness* are fundamental drivers of adoption in digital hospitality contexts.

However, the results also revealed important nuances. While customers trusted the app's security features and reliability—factors that enhanced trust and intention to reuse—some expressed concern that reduced staff interaction diminished the traditional sociability of the pub experience. Younger patrons adapted seamlessly to digital platforms, viewing them as natural extensions of daily routines, whereas older consumers reported minor usability barriers and a preference for interpersonal contact. From an RBV standpoint, JD Wetherspoon's investment in robust digital infrastructure constitutes a valuable and inimitable resource, yet human capital and emotional connection remain essential complementary assets for sustained differentiation.

Managerially, digital adoption yielded operational efficiencies: faster table turnover, more accurate orders, and reduced front-of-house pressure. These outcomes demonstrate that

technology can generate dual benefits—*enhanced customer experience and internal process optimisation*—when integrated strategically. Nonetheless, the research highlights a convenience–conviviality paradox: over-automation risks eroding the social dimension that defines hospitality. Balancing high-tech efficiency with high-touch service will therefore remain the industry’s central challenge.

Overall, the study contributes to theoretical discourse by extending TAM and RBV to an under-explored context—the digitally transformed pub environment—and offers practical insights for service organisations navigating the intersection of technology and human experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Managerial Recommendations

1. Adopt a hybrid service model (“high-tech, high-touch”).

Combine digital ordering with optional personal interaction. For instance, maintain visible floor staff who greet guests and aid, ensuring that efficiency gains do not compromise social warmth.

2. Enhance usability and accessibility.

Simplify interface design larger fonts, intuitive icons, and straightforward navigation—to accommodate older patrons or first-time users. Providing short “how-to” cards or in-app guidance can reduce digital anxiety.

3. Strengthen digital trust and transparency.

Continue communicating robust data-security measures and privacy standards. Visible encryption symbols and immediate digital receipts reinforce customer confidence in payment systems.

4. Leverage analytics for personalised engagement.

Utilise app-generated data to tailor promotions, recommend menu items, and reward frequent users. Personalisation can translate digital convenience into emotional loyalty, deepening the customer–brand relationship.

5. Train staff for digital–human synergy.

Equip employees with skills to troubleshoot app issues, explain digital features, and use freed-up time for relational tasks such as guest engagement or service recovery. This integration preserves human value while maximising technology’s benefits.

6. Promote digital inclusivity and feedback.

Encourage multi-channel feedback digital surveys, QR codes, and in-person comments—to capture diverse user experiences. Continuous monitoring ensures alignment between evolving consumer expectations and system updates.

7. Invest in continuous innovation.

The pace of digital evolution demands agility. JD Wetherspoon and other operators should evaluate emerging technologies—AI-based recommendation engines, augmented menus, or digital loyalty wallets—to sustain competitive edge.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, the research validates that TAM and RBV can be complementary rather than competing frameworks: technology acceptance explains behavioural outcomes, while resource-based reasoning clarifies firm-level performance. Integrating these models provides a holistic view of digital transformation as both a psychological and strategic process.

Practically, the results emphasise that digital transformation is not merely technological adoption but a cultural shift demanding continuous learning and adaptation. Firms that treat technology as an enabler of *value co-creation*—not merely cost reduction—will build stronger, longer-lasting customer relationships. The study thereby reinforces hospitality's evolving identity: an industry simultaneously digitally empowered and human-centred.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is limited by its single-case design and qualitative scope. Findings, while rich in contextual insight, cannot be statistically generalised. Future research could pursue comparative studies across multiple UK hospitality chains or conduct quantitative surveys to test relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. Longitudinal investigations would also help track how sustained technology usage modifies loyalty and brand attachment over time. Additionally, exploring AI-driven personalisation, sustainability tracking, or metaverse-based customer experiences could extend theoretical understanding of digital transformation in hospitality.

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APPENDIX

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APP	Mobile Application
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DT	Digital Transformation
EJEFR	European Journal of Economic and Financial Research

F&B	Food and Beverage
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JDW	JD Wetherspoon Plc
RBV	Resource-Based View
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UK	United Kingdom
UX	User Experience