

Institution: Loughborough University		
Unit of Assessment: C17 – Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Building Economically Sustainable High Streets in the Digital Era		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001 to 2008, 2014 to 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Fiona Ellis-Chadwick	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Marketing and Retail	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: October 2000 to April 2009, August 2014 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2014 to December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Effective use of digital channels can increase the viability of High Street businesses accustomed to trading only from physical premises. Research by Dr Fiona Ellis-Chadwick has underpinned methods for measuring the extent and economic significance of digital channel adoption by businesses located in any given area. This work helped meet a recommendation of the UK government's 2015 <i>Digital High Street 2020 Report</i> through the creation of a Digital High Street Health Index, a tool to assess the online skills and activity of High Street retail businesses. It also shaped a 2018 nationwide training guide produced by Nominet, the organisation responsible for managing all the UK's internet domains, thus enabling more businesses to get online. Further, it has increased digital activity and skills among thousands of retail businesses in Leicestershire and Warwickshire – along with local authority support for such a shift – since 2017.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Many businesses in the UK are underperforming and missing trading opportunities due to lack of suitable deployment of online channels. To understand and address this problem, Ellis-Chadwick's body of research over the past 20 years has studied internet adoption as a channel to market for UK retailers and explored how businesses have – or have not – used internet technologies to develop strategic advantage and enhance trade.</p> <p>This research has identified many issues central to business and town-centre development and sustainability. Ellis-Chadwick captured the early tentative steps by retail businesses to get online, as well as subsequent developments, offering insights into how early experiments with digital channels became the global commercial phenomena we know today.</p> <p>Her research early in this century assessed the uptake, and types and predictors of internet use by retail organisations [R2, R3]. Of those that had developed a website, the majority were then using it primarily as a communication tool to promote corporate or product information to internet users, rather than to support direct sales. The importance of developing a coherent and integrated internet strategy, the need for senior management commitment, and the presence of an appropriate infrastructure and development capability were identified.</p>		

Ellis-Chadwick's work subsequently expanded to examine the maturity and sophistication of digital technology use by retailers. For example, having initially captured insights about the potential of internet technologies for businesses [R2, R3], the research began to focus on the strategic adoption of such technologies and how they could drive business success [R4, R5]. This enabled a detailed understanding of factors (such as the human and material resources required) that allow retailers to adopt online as an effective channel to market for sales, communications and relationship development. It also highlighted barriers, such as tensions between online and offline trading and the very patchy use of performance measurement in retailers' internet operations. R1 demonstrated that as the scale and scope of a retailer's e-commerce operations grew, there was a concomitant need for its e-service quality operations to develop, if it was to realise the full value from its online activities.

The research [R4, R6] also highlighted significant gaps between the skill sets of large and small businesses, with the latter significantly lagging. Moreover, the status of the digital economy in the retail sector was shown to be weak, with less than 20% of businesses trading online in some areas. The implications for local economies and their ability to survive going forward are significant.

Collectively, Ellis-Chadwick's research outputs paved the way for an innovative methodology to analyse business populations with precision. Having built up a detailed knowledge of the nature, drivers, and service quality issues of online retail activity (R6 summarised some of this), it became possible to assess the status of the digital economy at a town or city level, and thus to identify ways to improve local digital economy performance.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 Doherty, NF, and Ellis-Chadwick, F (2015): 'The role of e-service quality management in the delivery of business value', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, volume 27, issue 3, pages 52-62
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2015.07.002>

R2 Ellis-Chadwick, F, Doherty, NF, and Hart, CA (2003): 'An analysis of the factors affecting the adoption of the Internet in the UK retail sector', *Journal of Business Research*, volume 56, issue 11, pages 887-897
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(01\)00275-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00275-2)

R3 Hart, CA, Doherty, NF, and Ellis-Chadwick, F (2000): 'Retailer adoption of the Internet: implications for retail marketing', *European Journal of Marketing*, volume 34, issue 8, pages 954-974
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560010331441>

R4 Doherty, NF, and Ellis-Chadwick, F (2009): 'Exploring the drivers, scope and success of ecommerce strategies in the UK retail sector', *European Journal of Marketing*, volume 43, issue 9/10, pages 1246-1262
<http://doi.org/10.1108/03090560910976474>

R5 Gunawan, G, Ellis-Chadwick, F, and King, M (2008): 'An empirical study of the uptake of performance measurement by Internet retailers', *Internet Research*, volume 18, issue 4, pages 361-381
<http://doi.org/10.1108/10662240810897781>

R6 Ellis-Chadwick, F (2019): 'The future of retailing: from physical to digital', in Stobart, J, and Howard, V (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the History of Retailing*, Routledge, pages 67-79
<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315560854-5>

R1 to R5 are published in peer-reviewed, well-established, internationally known academic journals in retail and marketing and related areas. R6 is an invited review contribution to an authoritative handbook on retailing. All outputs are based on research conducted during Ellis-Chadwick's two periods of employment at Loughborough.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In 2014, the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) identified the potential of Ellis-Chadwick's research and invited her to join the department's strategic advisory group/steering committee as research lead. Committee involvement enabled Ellis-Chadwick to collaborate with industry leaders across retail, finance, technology and transport sectors. In doing so, she was able to inform their thinking about the value of data and how this could better provide insights into the performance of the digital economy. This led to the impacts detailed below.

• ***Helped DCLG meet a key recommendation of the government's Digital High Street 2020 report***

In March 2015 the Digital High Street Advisory Board, working under the auspices of DCLG, published its *Digital High Street 2020 Report*. It recommended the creation of a Digital High Street Health Index to fill a gap in knowledge: baseline analysis of existing business performance in the digital economy. DCLG invited Ellis-Chadwick to produce the necessary measurement methodology, based on her research.

The DCLG policy official working with the steering group at the time commented in 2020: "Ellis-Chadwick's extensive research, which identified many of the key indicators of successful online retailing, enabled her to take the lead in specifying and developing the Digital High Street Index, thus meeting the fourth recommendation of the report." [S1]. The principal consultant to the Digital High Street Advisory Board commented in the same year: "The Index benefits local place managers, regeneration teams and development officers by providing an evidence base when planning investments in digital technologies and business training in their area." [S2]

Ellis-Chadwick's work also benefited DCLG staff and operations by increasing knowledge of and communication about digital skills for local businesses. The DCLG policy official stated that in 2017 Ellis-Chadwick "co-led two workshops for in total about 300 DCLG staff, which enabled them better to understand the nature of digital skills and how businesses can use them" [S1]. Ellis-Chadwick also participated in 10 DCLG roadshows for local government and businesses over the course of 2016, 2017 and 2018 [S1].

• ***Shaped and targeted training for 'disconnected' business across the UK***

Since 1996 Nominet has been the official UK domain registration body, responsible for registering all domain names of the forms .co.uk, .org.uk, .uk and .me.uk. Ellis-Chadwick worked with Nominet on its data sets during the development of the Digital High Street Health Index.

Having identified many businesses with no internet domain registrations, Ellis-Chadwick encouraged Nominet to develop a 2018 training guide to help 'disconnected' business on UK High Streets – approximately 30% of all retailers – take the first steps towards getting online. Nearly 10,000 copies of the guide, entitled *Why your business needs to have a website and four easy steps to getting started*, were distributed to businesses, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), libraries and other outlets, and a revised version remains available from Nominet online and from smallbusiness.co.uk [S3]. It had been downloaded nearly 5,500 times by December 2020 [S4].

In 2020 the former Head of Marketing at Nominet stated: “[Ellis-Chadwick] enabled us to identify the numbers and types of retail business across the UK that are less likely to have a website and be properly online. This assisted in our targeting of who we should provide the benefits of being online and who we could help get online... The insights she and her research contributed have been an important element of national attempts to keep High Street businesses viable.” [S4]

• ***Increased digital activity and skills among thousands of retail businesses in two counties***

Working with DCLG and LEPs across Leicestershire and Warwickshire, Ellis-Chadwick led a large-scale project over a 4-year period in 26 market towns, involving around 10,000 businesses. This produced baseline evidence on levels of digital activity uptake and a means of measuring improvements over time.

The annual Digital High Street Health Index reports influenced strategic development plans for digital growth among High Street businesses in these counties. It also informed the content and targeting of business training, especially among SMEs, where use of the Index identified major deficiencies. The Index has shown year-on-year gains in uptake, development and sophistication of online provision and a reduction in the number of disconnected businesses.

Leicestershire

Leicestershire County Council’s Economic Growth Manager reported in 2020 that the Index had made a crucial contribution to the Leicestershire Market Towns Digital Project, via its deployment in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The project aimed to enhance the digital, retail and visitor offering of the county’s 11 market towns, which collectively employ more than 25,000 people and have an economic value of approximately GBP1.1 billion. The Economic Growth Manager remarked: “Our district council partners have used the information collected in the Index to better understand the levels and types of engagement at an individual business level... The project as a whole has been very successful, with... 581 businesses attending digital training (300 target). Without the Digital High Street Index we would have lacked proof that the project was working, and so for us the strongest value of this research has been in enabling our towns to improve the digital skills of their retailers – targeting the right people with the right support.” [S5]

Additionally, the Chief Executive of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and former Chair of the Leicestershire Market Towns Group reported in 2020 that the use of the Index across the county’s market towns had provided “very useful information and intelligence about the digital footprint and capabilities of our retailers”, leading to “a bespoke programme of support... based on the skills, needs and gaps identified through the research in areas where we have subsequently seen a 50% uptake in digital presence by retailers” [S6]. The Economic Development Officer at Blaby District Council reported in the same year that use of the Index had contributed to increased town-centre footfall and length of stay, as well as greater digital presence and interest in digital training among local retailers [S7].

Warwickshire

In a collaboration with the county council, the Index has also been used extensively across 15 market towns in Warwickshire. The county has 3,500 retail and service businesses, employing around 24,000 people. In 2018, reporting on the first stage of the work, which began a year earlier, a Local Government Association online article said: “In tandem with the Loughborough University research project, Warwickshire County Council has funded and delivered digital skills training... Around 70 businesses have undertaken the digital skills courses, with success stories including retailers that have expanded as a result of embracing digital.” [S8] One local small business owner said: “Since the training I have had

my own website running for approximately five weeks now... and my Facebook, Messenger, Twitter and Instagram accounts are all linked. I am now sourcing my own work on a regular basis... I don't believe I could have done this without being included on the digital skills course." [S9]

The Team Leader for Town Centres and Tourism and the Project Manager for Infrastructure and Sustainable Communities at Warwickshire County Council jointly stated in 2020 that the Index had played a vital role in the Warwickshire Towns programme for local retailers. Specifically, they said it had been central to:

- "Highlighting how Warwickshire's towns were performing in the digital arena, helping us become more aware of gaps and then supporting us to identify what, as a local authority, we could do to ensure that our retailers weren't missing out on their digital potential.
- Providing a brilliant baseline of levels of digital engagement... insights we hadn't previously had access to and which we have subsequently used to plan our services.
- Giving us a thorough and detailed evidence base so we could develop appropriate [targeted] interventions (e.g., a digital training programme and one-to-one mentoring).
- Evidencing the positive impacts of the programme... [which] has enabled us to justify the expenditure on further digital training and support." [S9]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All material at web-links is also provided to REF as PDFs.

S1 Testimonial from former DCLG policy officer assigned to Digital High Street 2020 project, August 2020

S2 Testimonial from principal consultant to Digital High Street Advisory Board, April 2020

S3 *Why your business needs to have a website and four easy steps to getting started*
<https://www.theukdomain.uk/get-online/getting-started/> and
<https://smallbusiness.co.uk/downloads/why-your-business-needs-to-have-a-website-and-4-easy-steps-to-getting-started/> (freely available revised version)

S4 Testimonials from former Head of Marketing, Nominet, June 2020, and the Nominet Registry Data Team Lead, February 2021.

S5 Testimonial from Economic Growth Manager, Leicestershire County Council, April 2020

S6 Testimonial from Chief Executive, Hinckley and Bosworth District Council, and former Chair, Leicestershire Market Towns Group, August 2020

S7 Testimonial from Economic Development Manager, Blaby District Council, September 2020

S8 *The Digital High Street Project: Warwickshire* – report on economic growth, submitted by People & Places Partnership in association with Loughborough University and Warwickshire County Council, May 2018 <https://www.local.gov.uk/digital-high-street-project-warwickshire>

S9 Testimonial from Team Leader for Town Centres and Tourism and Project Manager for Infrastructure and Sustainable Communities, Warwickshire County Council, August 2020