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Executive summary

The current report aims to identify the aspect of customer engagement in increasing customer experience. This is achieved through the use of various theories on management. The theories helped in predicting purchase behavior of customers and attributes they look for while availing services. In addition to that, the report carried out a descriptive analysis of the quality process in Argos that helped in understanding the purchase behavior of customers and operational pattern of the business organization. Moreover, an in-depth analysis has been carried out to determine the impact of quality system on enhancing the experience of customers. The experience of customers is also analyzed that helped in finding the gaps and scopes that can serve helpful in the near future. Based on these gaps a set of recommendations is made along with an employee training plan to ensure better services to customers. Lastly, the module is aligned with standards of Education for sustainable development to see whether it abides by the rules and regulations.

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1. Introduction

The current report aims to understand the importance of engaging customer to enhance their user experience. In the mentioned report Argos has been chosen as the company where part-time employees need to be trained. This training serves as a useful tool to enhance the aspect of customer service in retail sector of Argos. The report specifically uses management theories such as a theory of contingency, social cognitive theory, and Theory of Customer Value Hierarchy. These theories have been used to understand behavior of customers and employees alike. In further sections, entities such as customer experience and relationship management are discussed along with the importance and issues.

A critical understanding of a quality process in Argos has also been evaluated to determine the impact on customer satisfaction undertaken by part-time employees in Argos. Lastly, a set of recommendations have been made along with future scopes. Argos Ltd is a retail organization established on 13 November 1972, by Richard Tompkins with the headquarters in England. It specializes in manufacturing of consumer goods with 845 stores spread over UK and Ireland. It is a subsidiary company of Sainsbury with approximately thirty thousand employees. Currently, the report aims to seek to improve its customer relations, particularly for the part-time employees working on the weekends. **[Refer to appendix1]**

2. Findings:

2.1 Customer Experience and relationship management

As stated by Khodakarami *et al.* (2014), aspect of customer relationship is the subjective and internal response that garners to have any mode of contact with the company. As critiqued by McColl *et al.* (2015), contact may be either direct or indirect that is generally initiated by the customers during the course of product purchase. On another hand, indirect response is created by sudden interaction among the customers with Argos. As stated by Neupane (2015), customer experience means involvement of customers at emotional, rational and sensorial level. On the other hand, as critiqued by Robson *et al.* (2016), customer experience is a collective impact created by various touch points. These touch points include the business variables such as impeccable customer service, orientation of market, attribute of orientation in manufacture of goods.

As stated by Shin (2015), in the current competitive market lowering the prices to beat the competitors are not enough to enhance experience of the customers. In the chosen retail sector,

Argos the business makes use of customer- centricity deviating from the previously used traditional rose- coloured mechanism of feedback. So changes in the mode of interaction between the employees and customers were made to ensure productivity among the employees. As opined by Terho *et al.* (2015), the most important contribution of positive customer experience is the increase of brand image of the business. Being a leading giant of the retail sector Argos Pvt Ltd has a clear idea about enhanced brand image through positive word of mouth. **[Refer to appendix 2]**

As opined by Yawar and Seuring (2017), management of business relations combines of knowledge, competencies, and outlook towards work that is responsible for fostering a positive relationship between different departments of a single organization with their stakeholders or their business partners. In the current case study of Argos Pvt Ltd it has been observed that like other business in the retail sector, this organization makes use of a software namely Customer Relationship management tool (Buttle, 2009). This tool prevents unnecessary pop-up ads and helps to find customer they are looking for. Those customers are offered assistance based on their intention. Then they are connected to an advisor from Argos through sales chat that is committed to offering help (argos.co.uk, 2018). This attributes of the retail sector act as a plus point to lure customers and enhance relationship management. As observed by Christopher *et al.* (2013), however, there still exists to be certain gaps in customer service and relationship management in Argos Pvt. Ltd. among the employees who work on a part-time basis.

2.2 Issues in customer engagement of Argos Pvt Ltd

Based on findings made by Steve Carson, trading directed of Argos it was seen that there was a lack of customer engagement. This can be clearly proven from the fact when Carson went to different branches to tally customer feedback and the complaints that he was receiving did not tally with positive results collected by using their traditional feedback mechanism. It is at the same time that the business faced a decline in profits from around £451 million worth to around £110 million of profit in a time span of 4 years (argos.co.uk, 2018).

Previously there was a slogan related to the brand image of Argos. The slogans were finding it and get it. However, there was always a huge gap between the promises made through slogan and the experience being delivered to the customers. As observed by Yu *et al.* (2014), the brand promise needs to be totally different, but importantly, it has to be embodied in the service experience provided by the organization. As critiqued by Pappas *et al.* (2014), buyer-seller

relationships get negatively affected when companies fail to engage with their customers. As observed on various occasions Argos did announce on going digital by ditching the laminated catalogue of products (argos.co.uk, 2018).

It can be well stated that Argos Pvt Ltd has taken great care to modify its range of products and services. However, there is a lack of customer engagement, where customers are allowed to address their grievances or queries. As opined by Forsyth (1999), a lack of customer engagement results in loss within a business organization. This generally happens due to lack of long-term focus that creates a barrier to the prospect of engaging customers. Based on the social cognitive theory as argued by Lent (2017), based on the acquired information regarding customer feedback it is important to understand the robust nature of customer engagement of Argos Pvt Ltd

2.3 Value and purpose of customer relationship management

Retail sector is a service-oriented industry so choosing the right candidate is always a preference to enhance customer relationship. There is no candidate shortage applying in this sector more due to the enhanced brand image and impeccable training. As opined by Payne (2012), identifying the suitable candidate is a tough job since the sector is keen on maintaining the diversity in job roles. The challenge gets doubled due to the competitive nature of the industry market. Additionally, with the limited resource the priority of the position has increased, this helps in making proper workplace planning to deliver unblemished customer relationship.

This retention of perfect services is seen to increase business profits, better financial growth, and brand promotion. The main purpose of customer relationship management lies in the nature of targeted human resource strategy. This targeted resourcing strategy helps to address the gaps related to management succession, development of care, hiring and learning about customer satisfaction through engagement. As stated by Piercy (2009), the government of UK has initiated various initiatives to implement the method of customer relationship management in the retail sector of the country. In this regard, it has been discovered that highly skilled workforce is the immediate need of the retail sector. The cultivation of skills must be readily transferable initiating the scope of innovation in the mentioned field. Based on the long-term plan of the economy, the gap in the productivity can be closed by making use of skilled labour.

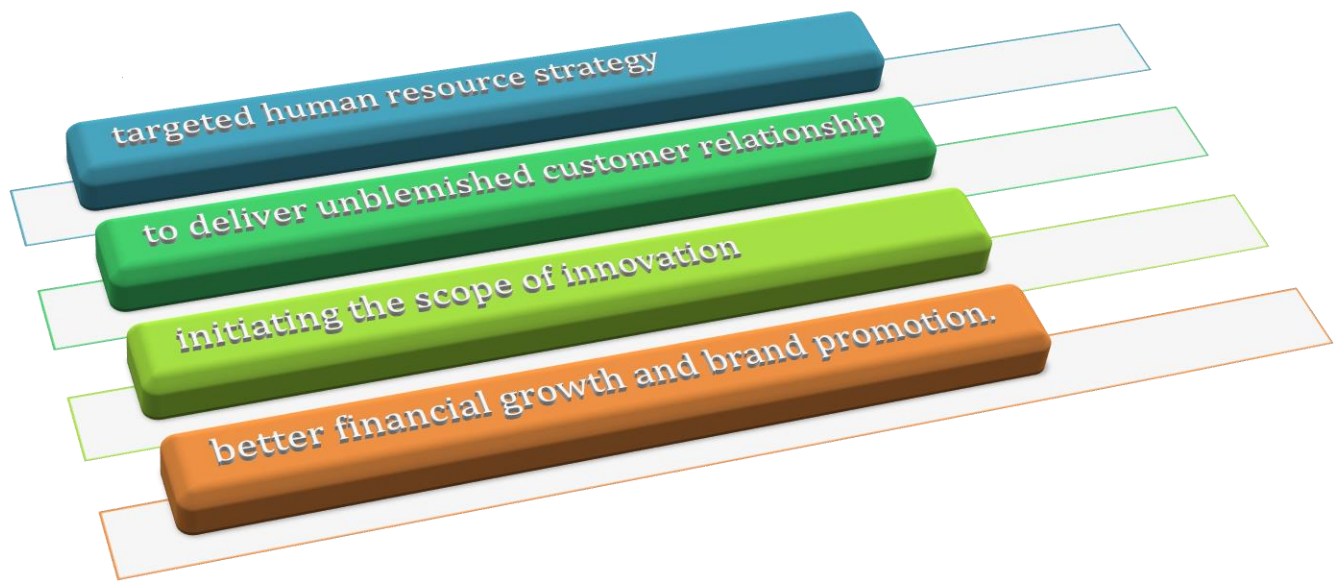


Figure 1: Value and purpose of customer relationship management

(Source: Created by the author)

Additionally as opined by Jones and Livingstone (2015), the customer relationship management includes linking the retail industries strategies to the individual's competency. This linking of both the prospects exhibits important outcome in creating profiles for the required queries placed by the customers. **[Refer to appendix 3]** The purpose of relationship management is to increase profits in business. This can be achieved by training employees or implementing modern technology or both. As observed by Håkansson and Snehota (1995), the chosen candidates are then provided with training. Providing training to the deserving candidates reduces wastage of time. This, in turn, as critiqued by Foxall *et al.* (1994), helps in giving out more better and enhanced quality of services and retaining more customers for the business. For example, customer relationship management can be monitored using software such as Nimble, Zoho, SugarCRM etc.

2.4 Critical understanding of a quality process in Argos

As mentioned by Goodman (2009), quality process is a critical factor for success within the retail sector. As argued by Gummesson (2002), successful retailers are those, who keep up with the

dynamic nature of quality process according to the changing demands of customers involved. In the chosen organization, the quality process proceeds as follows:

Understanding the behavior of customers is an important value of quality process. As opined by Wellington (2010), retailers have an excellent opportunity to predict consumer behavior through data produced through sales and purchase history by customers (Bishop, 2012). Another aspect that contributes to the quality process in Argos is operational efficiency of multi-channel strategies. As opined by Ruskin-Brown (2005), operating on online platform improves the chances of getting more shares from the wallet of customers. Moreover, apart from online market stores, Argos Pvt Ltd operates on store based on physical aspects such as neighborhood stores. Enhancing the experience of customers is the main motive of all the industries operating within the retail sectors. As observed by Mooij (2004), customers expect facilities such as clear layout of products available and related services to it. In Argos Pvt Ltd, the business is very clear about the warranty, guarantee, and refunds of the purchased products. On the other hand, while operating on the online store's customers often crave for friendly website. As stated by Shin (2015), to meet the demands of customers' navigation friendly websites have been designed by Argos Pvt Ltd to enhance customer experience. Lastly, the improvement of operational efficiency is an important entity in the course of quality process management. As stated by Blázquez (2014), operational excellence is a key aspect of success among the business operating in the retail industry. In Argos Pvt Ltd. checkout processes streamlining and introducing facilities such as payment through digital devices and self-scanning can increase efficiencies. This will also improve convenience for the customers. Introduction of inventory databases enables greater control over stock levels and simplifies orders that are being placed.



Figure 2: Critical understanding of a quality process in Argos

(Source: Created by the author)

Apart from that quality process in Argos Pvt Ltd also comprises of looking over quality Function of all financial service assessments. Additionally, it also identifies the trends within the areas of fraud and underwriting and customer service, customer payment solutions and care of customers to drive continuous improvement in collaboration with better customer experience.

- Execution of customized frameworks and drive initiation through created frameworks
- Maintenance of a streamlined and controlled check
- Influences a culture where importance of customer experience and effective business is supported by employees
- Developing of stakeholder relationships to show continuous improvement

3. Analysis:

3.1 Evaluation of quality system and controls in Argos

In Argos Pvt Ltd loyalty cards, for instance, provide data on consumers' buying behavior, this additionally helps employees in the company to make personalized offers for their customer to increase the foundation of customer satisfaction. Based on this they make every day better for

customers associated with Argos. Thus it helps customers afford and protect what they want by offering products and services including attributes of credit, guarantees etc.

For example stores of Argos Pvt Ltd that is located near residential areas or gas station outlets capture last-minute purchases made at sudden impulse. Here the retail sectors get maximum benefits of profits (Greenberg, 2010). Alternatively as observed in the online stores of Argos Pvt Ltd the transactions carried out by online platforms accounts for roughly 8.23 percent (argos.co.uk, 2018). So business that is being carried out by the chosen organization mainly gets its revenues from competitive prices in addition to quick delivery of purchased products (citywire.co.uk, 2017). In addition to that operational efficiency enable control over stock levels by introducing inventory databases. By improving operational efficiency, retailers maintain a balance of their costs, allowing them to offer lower prices and compete efficiently against their leading competitors. **[Refer to appendix 4]**

As opined by Cohen and Olsen (2015), consistency in operational processes can help service agents reach their full potential. Alternatively, it significantly improves the reputation of chosen brand. On the other hand, Argos Pvt Ltd makes use of incentives to motivate employees to give their best performance. A proper conceptual analytical tool can help the organization to make plans accordingly. The use of this conceptual framework thus helps in increasing the customer experience to a greater level. Hence it can be said that while various research literature advocates the quality system and controls on the global platform of the retail sector, important challenges act as a constant threat. As stated by Assael (1995), the concept of quality system and controls is a new thing in this arena. The application of the same is not widespread till yet.

3.2 Determining the impact of quality system on the customer experience

The robust nature of quality system is not limited to operational functionality of Argos Pvt Ltd. The subject of quality system extends beyond it reaching up to customer experience. A good planning of quality system is focused on consistently meeting requirements of the customers. Thus it helps in enhancing satisfaction of the acquired customers. When this objective is aligned with purpose and strategic direction of Argos Pvt Ltd. shows positive outcomes in customer experiences.

For example, Argos Pvt Ltd not only stresses on improving the quality of the services provided by their employees so that they can manage the expectations of the customers. Based on the ethical considerations made by Argos Pvt Ltd the staff makes sure that products that are offered

are of supreme quality made with sustainable use of available resources. Using the concept of customer value the customers are made happy. This is done by making sure that their quality system management is unblemished. Moreover, the quality system executes customized quality frameworks and drive initiation through created frameworks. This also includes aspects such as guarantee, warranty, and a return of purchased products. When a customer is provided with such flexibility then there is a marked increase in customer loyalty as a result of customer satisfaction.

Comparative studies by Dabija and Grant (2016) have shown a spike of 7% increase amongst the organizations following customer satisfaction. Employees should have a clear knowledge of the company policies to serve the customers in a better way. A clear understanding of the result at end of the task offers better functioning. Empowerment maximizes customer participation and retention rate clearly stating the presence of customer satisfaction. According to Wright *et al.* (2015), commitment to giving the best to customers through quality system create an efficient team resulting in enhanced performance in employees and satisfaction of customers. When customers feel empowered they feel inclined to visit the same store often resulting in decreased turnover rates. As opined by Holliman and Rowley (2014), a lot of conflicts happen when the management makes decisions and the customers reluctantly stomach it. This reluctance leads to dissatisfaction amongst the customers.



Figure 3: Determining the impact of quality system on the customer experience

(Source: Created by the author)

3.3 Analysis of the customer experience in Argos Pvt Ltd.

Argos is one of the most unique chains of retailers in the UK market of retail sector. This uniqueness arises due to the fact that customers are not required to search a maze of aisles in order to get a specific product. It is seen that a simple digital interface enables the computer along with a smart catalogue enables customers to reach the item they are looking for. This in return avoids the inconvenience that arises due to long waiting lines. As stated by Kaynak and Herbig (2014), managing customer experience is one of the most important aspects of the sector of retailing business. As opined by Leppard and Molyneux (1994), customer satisfaction can be achieved in many ways but to create a successful experience is a challenging task. In Argos Pvt Ltd. the business creates and maintains a complete list of the profiles of existing customers. Then all the interactions with customers are personalized to get right information at the right time.

All the above tasks can be achieved by use of quality framework for the aspect of team development. By following the above-mentioned steps in the previous section customers will get a clear idea about the services that are being provided by Argos Pvt Ltd. In the chosen organization of Argos, Pvt Ltd customer experience is assessed based on the quality of email and phone communication. However, while discussing quality assessment the work involves a wide range of scope and variety. This wide variety of work involves tracking the performance of employees through learning and training them about customer experience. As observed by Lewis and Varey (2012), customer expectations in the recent era are higher than ever due to word of mouth marketing done by loyal customers due to enhanced customer experience. This can be clearly stated due to the fact that Argos recently experienced a sale of roughly \$7 billion (argos.co.uk, 2018).

So judging from the facts it can be well stated that Argos Pvt Ltd appreciates the importance of quality control simultaneously managing customer experience through enhanced services. However, it has been seen that Argos is likely to close down 76 of their stores. As opined by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), most customers know Argos as a retail merchant based on catalogue products operating a network of 750 retail stores. The journey of customers in store involves looking through the catalogs to find the product that interests the customer. This is followed by the entering of code to determine the availability of the product the customer wishes for. The customer has to pay for the purchased product and wait until the product is delivered by stock

pickers at the counter. Then the customer leaves with the purchased items. This ensures saving of time by the customer enhancing customer experience. The customer only gets to handle the product once it has been bought based on the description provided on catalogue. However as stated by Harrison (2005), this creates a sense of uncertainty and sense of doubt among customers. As argued by Epstein *et al.* (2015), this, in turn, causes decrease in customer experience among the customers availing services and products.

3.4 Scope of improvement in Argos Pvt Ltd

As stated by Yawar and Seuring (2017), change in strategy does not mean enhanced customer service in the business. Alternatively, as critiqued by Jones and Livingstone (2015), change in strategy does not always mean issues in customer experience. In the case of Argos, it seems the company is paying attention to trends currently running among the customers. As argued by Bilgihan (2016), based on theory customer value hierarchy it can be said staying at par with customer trends helps in knowing the behavior of customer shopping. *[Refer to appendix 3]*

So in the respect of Argos Pvt Ltd, it can be well stated that the news of store closing of Argos clearly indicated that there was a problem with their in-store experience. This can be done by having a sustainable business coupled with a unique range of products under one roof at an affordable price. It can clearly be stated that Argos Pvt Ltd is stressing on shopping experience rather than price range and buying decision-making processes. So while maintaining the quality modules and standards it is equally important to appreciate the importance of quality control and ethical considerations (Chell *et al.* 2016). It can also be seen that Argos failed to grasp the Chinese market in the recent times due to lack of understanding of the market. This can be overcome by providing premium services at an affordable price coupled with enhanced customer experiences.

4. Recommendations:

Now coming to the most important aspect of training part-time employees in Argos Pvt Ltd. while training can come with benefits it also accompanies some challenges.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Helps to keep up with change in	The cost suffered by training part-time employees is

industry	much high
Attract new talent to do new jobs	Managers and supervisors need to spend more than time required thus shifting their concentration from core competencies.
Increase job satisfaction levels thereby giving more profits to business.	Fatigue is also seen in certain employees that hinders them to perform better

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of training part-time employees in Argos Pvt Ltd

(Source: Created by the author)

To train the part-time employees it is important to concisely introduce the main aim to introduce the training feature. In the current scenario, the part-time employees in Argos Pvt Ltd should be made aware of the gaps that are present in customer engagement and experience in the chosen organization. After the part-time employees are aware of current scenario they should be provided with clear set of instructions. As opined by Sitzmann and Weinhardt (2015), providing trainees with instructions empowers them to take matters into their own hands thereby enhancing the experience related to training so that it can be aligned with their individual style of learning (Flanagan *et al.* 2015). The next step involves providing set of objects with a set of tasks and targets that facilitates transition of trainees from one phase to another.

The objectives are usually defined using module content that includes videos, static texts, and images. As stated by Aryee *et al.* (2016), module content acts as an excellent source of learning among the trainees. To assess the learning outcomes of the trainees it is important to present them with quizzes or carry out surveys. As opined by Cox *et al.* (2016), feedback from trainees sheds light on how the improvements should be made. Lastly, a tracking system is introduced to measure the performance of the trainees and see the outcome of the same in the mentioned organization.

Discussing the challenges in developing and good customer relationships it can be achieved if Argos Pvt Ltd works on building good customer relationships. As opined by Chang *et al.* (2015), relationship with customers can be built by rewarding loyalty with incentives. However, it can also be stated that lack of proper teamwork acts as a barrier to maintaining good customer

relationships. As opined by Bowen (2016), delayed response to problem resolving is seen to act as a hindrance to maintaining a good customer relationship. So based on the application of contingency theory it can be well stated that not every aspect is in coordination with another when it comes to discussing benefits and challenges in customer relationship management.



Figurr4: Training process to be undertaken for part time employees

(Source: Created by the author)

5. Conclusion

Hence it can be concluded that the current report gives an idea about how customers can be engaged by training the part-time employees. Additionally, the report also stresses the importance of training part-time employees to meet the growing expectation of customers. The report makes use of management theories to understand the behavior of customers and trainees. It also helped in understanding the issues currently disrupting the operational attributes in the chosen organization and ways to mend them.

In addition to that, the report carried out a descriptive analysis of quality process in Argos that helped in understanding the purchase behavior of customers and operational pattern of the business organization. Moreover, an in-depth analysis has been carried out to determine the impact of quality system on enhancing the experience of customers. The experience of customers is also analyzed that helped in finding the gaps and scopes that can serve helpful in the near

future. Based on these gaps a set of recommendations is made along with an employee training plan to ensure better services to customers.

Does the module contribute to ESD

Yes, this module contributes to ESD as this actively contributes to the knowledge acquired for understanding by providing scope of applying skills and theories that can be used in future. The use of skills can be implemented to safeguard the social well being of the employees being trained. Moreover abiding by the standards of Education for sustainable development this module contributes to ESD as it safeguards the economic well being of customers in the current time as well as in near future.

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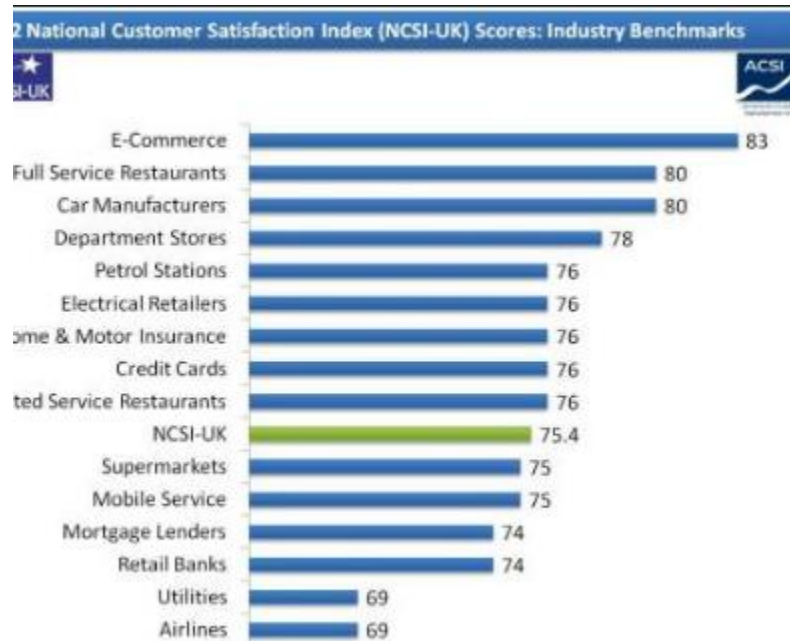
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Customer satisfaction



(Source: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20130305005178/en/National-Customer-Satisfaction-Index-NCSI-UK-Results-Retail>)

Appendix 2: The retail companies

	UK top ten retailers (average score 52/240)
	Retailer
1	Asda
2	Harvey Nichols
3	Debenhams
4	Argos
5	Waitrose
6	<u>Morrisons</u>
7	Harrods
8	B&Q
9	Boots
10	John Lewis

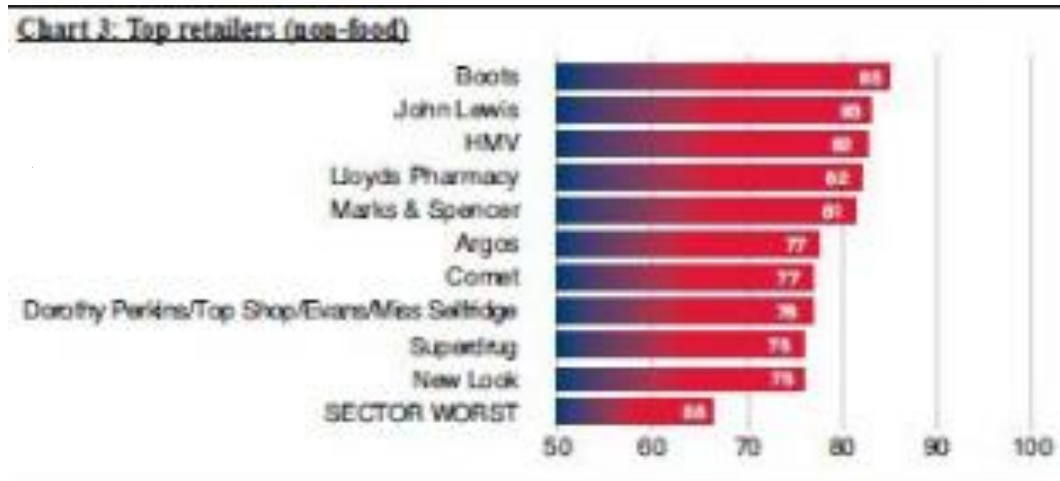
(Source: <http://internetretailing.net/2017/04/uk-retailers-lagging-behind-europe-usa-mobile-store-experience-study-finds/>)

Appendix 3: Rate of customer satisfaction

National Customer Satisfaction Index (NCSI) Scores	2013	2014	% Change
Amazon.co.uk	85	86	1%
Waitrose	85	86	1%
Apple Stores	84	85	1%
John Lewis	84	84	0%
iTunes	82	81	-1%
Argos	78	80	3%
Asos.com	81	80	-1%
eBay.co.uk	79	80	1%
Superdrug	76	78	3%
ASDA	76	77	-1%
House of Fraser	76	77	1%
Marks & Spencer	74	77	4%
Sainsbury's	76	77	1%
Boots	76	76	1%
Currys/Dixons	74	76	3%
Morrisons	76	76	0%
Debenhams	76	75	-1%
Lloyds Pharmacy	76	73	-3%
Tesco	74	73	-1%
The Co-operative Pharmacy	77	73	-5%
The Co-operative	71	71	0%

(Source: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20150326005842/en/National-Customer-Satisfaction-Index-NCSI-UK-Remains-All-Time>)

Appendix 4: Top 10 retailers



(Source: <https://www.tlfresearch.com/ukcsi-wave-3-results/>)