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Understanding and Engaging in the Customer Experience

Assignment Title: Marketing Ethics and Sustainability at ASDA

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Executive Summary

The following report will examine the meaning of customer experience, with an investigation of ethical and sustainable marketing issues at Asda to understand the implications on the customer experience, satisfaction and loyalty. The report will also include a look at customer relations management and a discussion of a variety of quality models and theories such as the Deming PDCA cycle and Juran's Quality Trilogy. The report will discuss what these quality theories/models are and how they can help organisations improve their customer relation management. The report will conclude with recommendations for Asda in improving its customer relation management and experiences through better ethical practices.

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Introduction

Asda stores Ltd is one of the UKs largest supermarkets and is owned by the American based retailer Walmart, which is one of the largest retailers in America. From 2003 to 2014 Asda was the second largest supermarket in the UK. It currently has the third largest market share after Salisbury's and Tesco. With the growth of discount supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl, the market share of Asda has become more volatile. There are also issues regarding its ethical and sustainable marketing practices that may result in further slumps in the market share of Asda and impact customer experiences. The report will include examples of positive and negative marketing ethics surrounding Asda. Included in the report is comparisons of competitor behaviour on ethical and sustainability. Section two of the report will look at customer relation management, quality, and how they can be affected by ethical or sustainable marketing. The report will conclude with recommendations for Asda on improving its customer relation management and customer touch points which could lead to improved growth in the UK supermarket sector.

Section 1: Marketing Ethos and Sustainability

1.1: Marketing Ethics

There are many definitions of marketing ethics. It can be seen as marketing activities conducted with moral values and principles. A simple way of thinking of what it means is that it is doing the right thing. For example, labeling products with clear and correct information, not misleading consumers with misleading statements, not using packing that harms the environment, deceptive pricing or price fixing. According to Rajan (2016) marketing ethics can be defined as the basic principles and values that are used in engaging goods or services of a business. These principles and values can be as follows;

- *Honesty*: Offer value and integrity, honour commitments and promises.
- *Responsibility*: Serve the needs of the customer and accept the consequences of decisions and strategies.

- *Fairness*: Representing products in a clear way, avoiding deceptive promotions and rejecting sales tactics that harm consumer trust.
- *Respect*: Listen to the needs of consumers, avoid stereotyping or depicting demographic groups in a negative way.
- *Transparency*: Communication with consumers in a clear transparent way and accepting constructive criticism.
- *Citizenship*. Fulfill all legal, economic, philanthropic and societal responsibilities to all stakeholders.

1.2: Marketing Sustainability

Marketing sustainability can be seen as the business philosophies of a company. It can be thought of as collective management techniques that are oriented on providing value to the consumer while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their needs. According to Belz and Peattie (2012), marketing sustainability refers to marketing resources and programs to satisfy consumers wants and needs, as well as considerations for social and environmental factors. Environmental and social sustainability are key factors that are shaping today's marketing behaviour of organisations. Companies are engaging in more and more marketing sustainability to differentiate themselves from competitors and enhance the company's brand and reputation (Jones *et al.*, 2007).

Sustainable marketing goals can be achieved only through ethical marketing. This means that ethical marketing is the cornerstone of marketing sustainability (Kotler *et al.*, 2017).

1.3: Sustainable Marketing Principles

- ★ **Consumer orientated marketing**: marketing activities that are from a consumer point of view.
- ★ **Customer value marketing**: creating value for customers.
- ★ **Innovative marketing**: seeking real product and marketing improvements.
- ★ **Societal marketing**: considering customer wants, interests and societies long term interests.
- ★ **Mission marketing**: defined missions on broad social terms.

1.4: Customer Experience explained

Consumers now interact with companies in many multitude of ways and channels, for example, through media, internet, advertising, and social media platforms. All these interactions influence the overall customer experience. The customer experience can be seen as a journey through stages of interaction and touchpoints, for example, of pre-purchase, purchase and post purchase stage. The emotions perceived by the customer can be understood as the customer experience (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015). Customer experience can be emotions that are felt from a customer point of view, that comes from associating with a particular company. For example, if a company has good ethics, an individual will feel positive interacting with it. According to Liljander and Strandvik (1997) it is vital for companies to create positive customer experience because it leads to good customer satisfaction, loyalty, brand recognition and customer confidence. As a service provider, it is imperative for Asda to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage through customer experience, customer satisfaction, and by creating perceived value to customers. This is because a service is intangible, can be replicated by competitors, and cannot be protected by patents like products can. Service providers must create loyalty and satisfaction through good customer experience. These are aspects of the service profit chain that lead to profits and growth.

1.5: Discussion on the Importance of Ethical and Sustainable Marketing

In today's fast paced information availability and sharing, even a negative Facebook post about unethical activities of a company can ruin its reputation. This is one of the reasons a company should show it practices good positive ethical and sustainable marketing. A company that practices good ethical and sustainable marketing will gain trust and loyalty of customers because consumers have a natural tendency to go to a company that shows good ethical practices. Companies need to meet legal requirements on ethical marketing and at the same time fulfill the basic human needs of honesty, integrity and fairness. This will help achieve customer satisfaction creating good customer experience and thus lead to customer loyalty and word of mouth publicity, leading to improved performance and business growth. According to Sharma *et al.* (1999) achieving, maintaining customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is one of the most significant goals of a company for achieving success.

This is because dissatisfied customers leave or do not repurchase and give a negative word of mouth. In contrast, satisfied customers return, and generate positive word of mouth which in turn brings in increased revenue and more potential profits (Donovan, 1994).

The following table shows some of the advantages and disadvantages of ethical and sustainable marketing:

Table 1.1: Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages of Marketing Ethics and Sustainability	Disadvantages of Marketing Ethics and Sustainability
Improve brand reputation. Avoid public backlash or bad publicity. Avoid legal punishment, fines and legal costs. Improve workplace culture, for example, equal opportunities for all employees. Customer loyalty because of better public image. Better employee retention because people prefer to work for an ethical company. Increased revenue through customer satisfaction and word of mouth.	High costs. Ethical marketing can be expensive to maintain, implement and deliver. Regularly updated. Laws are constantly changing on ethical or environmental issues, for example, Brexit. Management support. Specialist management support may be required to implement ethical guidelines.

1.6: Investigations on Ethical and Sustainable Marketing at Asda

Investigations on the ethical and sustainable marketing practices of Asda supermarket chain has shown that there is plenty of room for improvement and it is lagging behind its competitors. The following are some examples of its practices, positive and negative.

1.6.1: Transparency

In recent years Asda has come under scrutiny for its ethical and marketing sustainability approaches. In a report by Butler (2017) Asda has been named as the worst of the UK's major supermarkets in its treatment of suppliers. In the report, there are claims from suppliers that Asda did not comply in accordance with the Grocery Supply Code of Practice. Asda was accused of taking incorrect deductions from invoices without notice, requesting lump sums to make up profit margins, and conducting "abusive" forensic audits of suppliers' accounts. This is an example of unethical behaviour that has given Asda a negative image. This shows to consumers that Asda was not transparent in its marketing practices. Although Asda was named the worst of the major supermarkets on this issue, overall Iceland supermarket was named the worst in this report. The report carried out in the article found that Aldi offered the best compliance with the Grocery Supply Code of Practice for the fourth year in a row, followed by Sainsbury's.

1.6.2: Low wages at Asda clothing factories

An investigation by ActionAid (2011) found cases of poverty and abuse at the clothing range of Asda which is called George. Factories in Bangladesh which supply the clothing range of George were found to have low paid workers, physical abuse of workers and excessive hours being worked. The investigation found that workers were being made to work far more in excess of the already exhausting 48 hours per week. Employees at the factories were being paid in the range of only £33 per calendar month. The average living wage in Bangladesh is in the range of £100 per month. Although Asda claimed it had increased wages by 14% , this is still woefully short of a living wage in Bangladesh. This is a very negative image for Asda which shows consumers that Asda is failing in its marketing responsibilities and societal responsibility by using cheap labour to increase profits.

1.6.3: Marketing Sustainability at Asda

In a recent report by BBC news (2020) it was reported that Asda is launching a "sustainability store" where shoppers can fill their own containers with food. Asda is also trialling selling loose fruit and vegetables without any plastic packaging.

This is in addition to its pledge to reduce its plastic footprint by 15% within a year, as well as making all of its own brand packaging fully recyclable by 2025. This is in response to heightened consumer concerns about the environment. This is a positive move by Asda and will help its image on sustainability and environmental issues facing supermarkets. This can be effective in improving Asda compared to other supermarkets, which at this moment are ahead of Asda when it comes to plastic recycling. Asda at present was ranked ninth out of the UK's 10 biggest supermarkets for its plastic footprint. Competitive rivals of Asda have also made pledges to reduce plastic packaging from their stores. Morrisons have gone further than Asda and pledged 100% recyclable, reusable or compostable packaging by 2025 and offer paper carrier bags in its stores. Another competitor of Asda, Tesco has announced that it will remove hard-to-recycle materials, including PVC, from its own brand products.

Another step taken by Asda to reduce its plastic footprint was to join the European Microfibre Consortium. According to an article by Bairstow (2018) Asda was the first supermarket to do this. Asda has joined a consortium aiming to reduce the impact of plastic microfibers from clothing polluting the environment. Being the first supermarket to do this is an effective way of improving its image on marketing sustainability. This shows to consumers that Asda is showing initiative and is concerned more than others about sustaining the environment.

1.6.4: Sustainable Fishing

The fishing policies of supermarkets are having a big impact on the environment and fish numbers as a whole. These policies are having detrimental effects on the environment and infrastructure. According to Piacentini *et al.* (2000) this is one of the major issues facing the retail industry which needs urgent action to reverse decades of damage done. A survey by Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment or the ACCPE (2005) reported that global fish stocks are being over exploited and that Asda was one of the worst performing supermarkets on seafood sustainability. Table 1.2 below shows a comparison of supermarkets on seafood sustainability issues and policies.

Table 1.2: Seafood sustainability rankings

Supermarket	1. Sustainable seafood sourcing policies	2. Support for sustainability initiatives	3. Labelling & promotion of sustainable seafood	4. Selling the most destructively fished species	Total score (out of 20)
M&S	5	5	4	3	17
Waitrose	5	3	4	3	15
Sainsbury's	3	4	3	0	10
Co-op	2	2	2	1	7
Somerfield	1	1	2	2	6
Tesco	2	1	1	1	5
Iceland	0	0	0	3	3
Safeway/Morrisons	1	1	0	0	2
Asda	0	1	0	0	1

Source: Advisory Committee for Consumer Products and the Environment report (October 2005).

A more recent survey by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) found that Aldi was the best on fish sustainability issues with 80% of the fish sold in their stores certified as sustainable seafood. Table 1.3 below shows the comparisons between supermarkets of that survey.

Table 1.3: Supermarket rankings on sustainable seafood

Rank	Supermarket	Percentage of sustainable fish sold
1	Aldi	80%
2	Sainsbury's	76%
3	Lidl	72%
4	Waitrose	67%
5	Co-Op	61%
6	Tesco	48%

7	Asda	38%
8	M & S	19%
9	Morrisons	4%
10	Iceland	3%

Source: Smith. L / Eco-Friendly Living (2019).

According to the survey by the MSC (2018), Asda has increased their certified sustainable seafood range for its customers from 17 to 52 products, now totalling 38% of its range. This is a big increase in a positive way but there is room for further improvements on the sustainable seafood issues it faces. Consumers are aware of the fact that world fish stocks are dwindling, so further improvements of sustainable seafood practices will show that Asda cares for the environment and future generations.

There is evidence of Asda addressing issues placed on it of ethical and sustainable issues. Asda has stopped using single use plastic carrier bags and now offers reusable carrier bags to its customers. But more needs to be done. Asda has to take more responsibility on waste management issues and recycling regulations. The issue of exploitation of cheap labour in Bangladesh is another ethical issue that needs urgent attention and resolving. These issues are having a negative impact on the CRM of Asda, negative impact on customer experience, and causing distrust of consumers towards Asda.

Section 2: Improving Customer Relationship Management

Customer relation management is about building relationships with customers through trust by offering quality and a positive customer experience in the journey of a customer's buying process. To understand more about this, what is meant by customer relation management needs to be covered first.

2.1: Customer Relation Management (CRM)

Having knowledge on customers, or knowing the needs of customers will enable an organisation to better serve customers and also keep them as loyal customers. This is the main theme of customer relation management or CRM. It can be seen as a business model or philosophy, business processes or a tool for better business strategy. For example, CRM can be seen as carefully managing customer touch points to maximize customer loyalty and satisfaction. Touch points are referred to as the direct or indirect interactions between the company and individuals during the customer experience journey (Homburg *et al.* 2017). Customer experience through touch points and quality levels play a key role for customer satisfaction. According to Rawson *et al.* (2013) these customer interactions or touch points are crucial moments from first contact with the company, then purchase, and after purchase, which forms the customer experience and how loyal the customer will be. Touch points can be any kind of contact between customer and company or vice versa including visiting the company's website, looking through social media web pages, tv or radio advertising, and visiting the company store. The quality of these touch points determine how the company is perceived, the customers willing to buy and level of satisfaction. According to Meyer and Schwager (2007) each touch point can generate either a positive or negative customer experience, for example, a longer than expected waiting time in store, slow or non user friendly website, lack of customer care services, unprofessional employees, faulty or unreliable product.

According to Ryals and Knox (2001) CRM can be thought of as a management process for creating customer value and customer retention. It is a customer-focused business strategy that aims to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by giving more responsive and customized services to each customer (Croteau and Li, 2003).

CRM can also be about managing detailed information about individual customers and carefully managing customer touch points to maximise customer loyalty.

The instrumental aspect that affects CRM is the quality of products or services offered to customers. According to Pryor, et al, (1998, p. 2.3) quality can be seen as the level of which product or services are free from defects that will not add value for the customer. Without high levels of quality, CRM foundations of customer retention and customer loyalty cannot be gained.

Improvements in quality will also lead to improvements in productivity and competitive advantages. Thus it is imperative for organisations to improve quality levels of products or services. This can be achieved through the implementation of quality models and theories.

There are various quality models and theories that can assist organisations to enhance or improve CRM. These quality models and theories include;

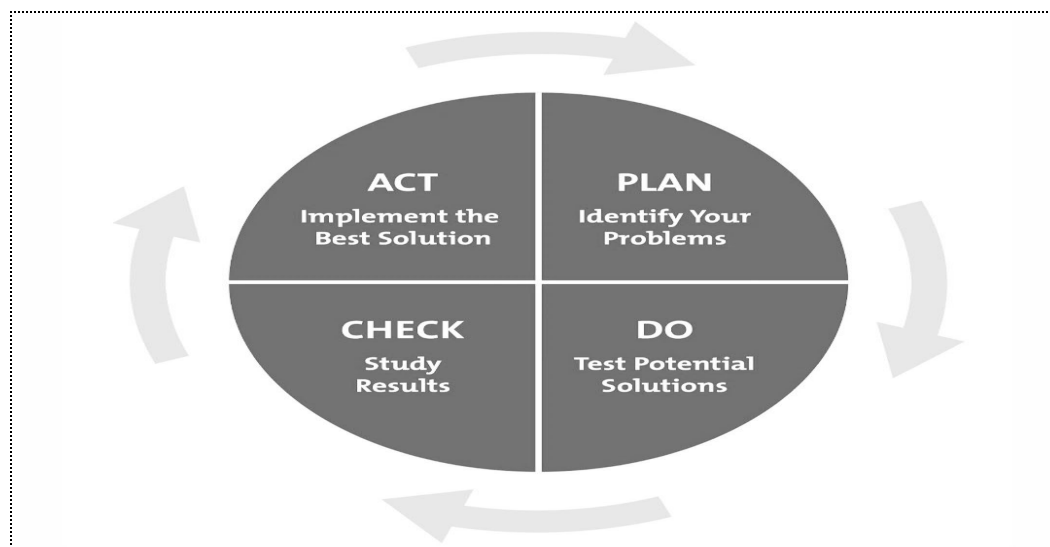
- ❑ Deming PDCA cycle.
- ❑ Juran's quality trilogy.
- ❑ Crosby's cost of quality.

2.1: Deming PDCA Cycle

The deming cycle is known as the PDCA process which stands for plan, do, check and act. First proposed by Walter A. Shewhart, it was further conceptualized by W. Edward Deming to understand and identify what affects quality by analysing business processes. It can be seen as a continuous process which gives organisations opportunities for evaluation and continuous improvement through analysis (Deming, 1952). This leads to better quality and improved CRM.

Figure 2.1 below is an illustration of the deming cycle:

Figure 2.1: Deming PDCA cycle



Source: Adopted from Deming (1952).

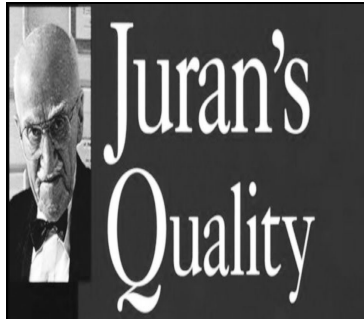
Figure 2.1 (Deming PDCA cycle) shows the four systematic steps which is a continuous loop process that management can undertake to improve quality levels. It enables management to identify and if required make measures of adjustment to parts of the processes that may require improvement (Sokovic *et al.*, 2010).

The four parts of the Deming process are ;

- **Plan:** Identify and establish processes required. Determine goals and make action plans.
- **Do:** Implement the plan to meet the targets and goals set. Collect and prepare data for evaluation required in the next step.
- **Check:** Analysis of data from the Do step, evaluate if goals and outcome meet requirements needed. Revise process if necessary.
- **Act:** Act on changes needed or set new goals and objectives. Continuously evaluate and improve.

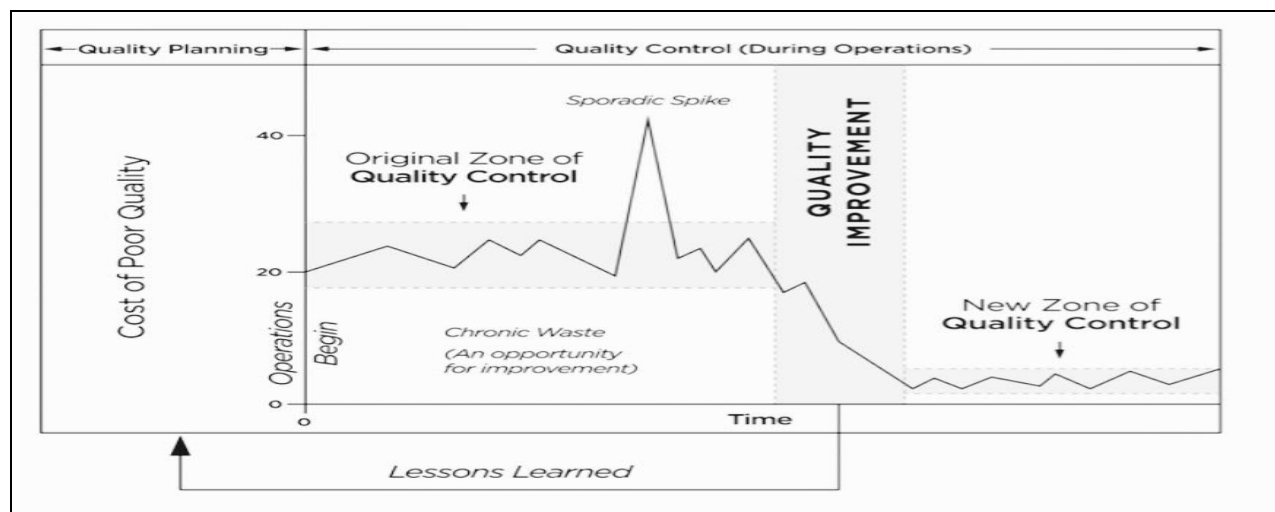
The Deming cycle can be used as a planning and testing process on a small scale before full implementation. An example of this is that of Asda supermarket launching a "sustainability store" where shoppers can fill their own containers with food and also trialling selling loose fruit and vegetables without any plastic packaging, as discussed earlier in this report. Asda first identified the need for a plan to improve its marketing sustainability. They implement the plan on a small scale by opening a single sustainable store. They now are collecting data for analysis and evaluation. After analysing data collected they will act on what is required, ie if the plan is ready for full implementation or if changes are needed to the plan. The plan is to improve the quality of sustainability and improve CRM, customer retention and customer loyalty.

2.3: Juran's Quality Trilogy



The Quality Trilogy, was presented by Dr. Joseph M. Juran (pictured left) in 1986 as a means to manage quality. According to Juran (1999) higher quality leads to increased customer satisfaction, increased competitiveness, increased market share, and to secure premium prices. Poor quality can lead to the opposite of these. The quality trilogy is a theoretical concept of processes that can be used as a quality system and also be used to support strategic quality management. It is often illustrated in graphical form with time on the horizontal axis and cost of poor quality on the vertical axis as shown below:

Figure 2.2: Juran's quality trilogy graph



Source: Juran (1999).

The quality trilogy is broken into three principal aspects which are :

Quality Planning

This stage involves establishing quality goals which can be to identify who the customers are and what their needs are. For example, developing specific features of products that meet customer needs. The process to develop these features needs to be developed, established, and transferred to operational forces once plans are formulated.

Quality Control

At this stage the actual performances are analysed and evaluated with quality goals that were planned. This stage can be referred to as quality inspection procedures to prevent further quality loss. This stage is for organisations to resolve issues found or act on differences.

Quality Improvement

This stage involves identifying the need of improvement and establishing projects for making improvements. This is when organisations establish the improvements needed, provide resources, provide training to teams, so that they can diagnose the causes and troubleshoot remedies for improvement. This will lead to a reduction in future errors and benchmark new levels of performance that is superior to previous levels of quality.

The following is a case study of an example of uses of the quality trilogy theory by the Amazon company, which is considered one of the big tech companies in the world.

2.4: Discussion on Amazon

Amazon is one of the most successful companies in the world, with year on year growth and improved innovation. They have gained competitive advantages and met shareholder expectations of performance by continuous improvement with the influence of Juran's quality trilogy theory. Amazon incorporates the quality trilogy processes to ensure quality planning, quality control and quality improvements year on year. This has meant that Amazon has excellent levels of customer satisfaction, customer retention and customer loyalty. An example of this is how Amazon incorporates quality control is that of its assurance of quality of product being delivered.

If customers are not satisfied with the quality of a product that was delivered, Amazon offers a very reliable return service which is a control aspect on quality control. Amazon is also constantly improving and upgrading its ecommerce website so that customers have a more satisfying experience when shopping online. This is the quality improvement aspect of Juran's trilogy. According to Juran (1999) satisfaction directly correlates to the quality, thus to achieve satisfaction, companies must be aware of quality standards being met and continuously improve standards by setting targets.

Through its leadership principles, Amazon also encourages its employees to learn and show innovation, meaning workers should explore opportunities and constantly seek to improve and develop themselves (Amazon, 2016).

2.5: Crosby's Cost of Quality



Cost of quality theory was developed by one of the gurus of total quality management Philip Crosby (pictured left). Crosby (1979) emphasizes the need of management for improving quality. The theory focuses on the way businesses should focus on the attention of customer requirements and prevention of product defects. The theory dictates that quality is conformance to requirements and non-quality is nonconformance. According to Hafeez *et al.* (2006) what the Crosby cost of quality theory is about is how management can focus on the prevention of non quality by awareness of employees, reduction of costs, and emphasis more on controls rather than inspection. The theory is about doing things right the first time. What this means is that when a company produces a product right the first time, or a service with no errors, quality is free. But when a company needs to rework a product or recall a product because of poor quality, it costs more money. An example of this is when Hotpoint had to recall a certain model of washing machines due to faulty parts and standards of low quality. The article by Smithers (2020) the washing machines had faulty parts that caused a fire risk. The recall process was a very lengthy and costly task that also affected its CRM in a negative way because of the poor service offered by the company. This impacted customer satisfaction and Hotpoint received negative word of mouth publicity through social media. Negative word of mouth results in loss of potential customers and a reduction in revenues.

Conclusion and recommendation

With the rise of competition in the supermarket sector, providing exceptional service and customer experience has become essential to stay competitive and retain customer loyalty. According to Fornell *et al.* (2006) providing customers with positive experiences, quality, and satisfaction, has been proven to give companies with a clear competitive and sustainable advantage over competitors. But the customer experience at Asda can become fragmented and frustrating because of issues such as ethical and sustainable marketing policies. Many people are choosing to associate with companies that have sound ethical marketing and sustainability policies as their core policies. This report has shown that Asda needs drastic improvements in ethical and sustainable policies. For example, using seafood from sustainable sources, Asda ranks 7/10. Another example is that of its use of using cheap labour to source its clothing range from Bangladesh. These examples are giving Asda a negative image which will drive customers away that are concerned with these practices. This will result in loss of revenue and stagnant growth for Asda. Studies have shown that in the changing market, consumers respond more positively to companies that show efforts in implementing ethical and sustainable marketing strategies (Brammer *et al.*, 2007). Implementation of ethical and sustainable marketing will improve CRM of Asda because of improvements in customer loyalty, trust and improve growth of Asda.

One **recommendation** of how Asda can improve its CRM through ethical and sustainable marketing, is to sell or offer more items that are of 'fairtrade' sources. An item that is labelled fair trade means that it comes from sustainable sources. A recent report by Fairtrade (2018) showed that public support for fairtrade is at an all time high. The report showed that retail sales of fairtrade products was up 7% in 2017, while 93% of people in the UK are aware of the fairtrade products and its meaning. The report showed that Sainsbury's was the largest provider of fairtrade products, while Asda was languishing behind. Using more fairtrade products, Asda would improve its image on environmental sustainability. This would improve its CRM because of indirect interaction with individuals who prefer environmentally sustainable products. These individuals would prefer to shop at Asda and give positive word of mouth feedback that would generate more revenue.

Another **recommendation** would be for Asda to reduce its 'food miles'. This means reducing the amount of miles that it takes for Asda to import its produce. One of the ways it can do this is by buying more local produce, ie. local farmers for its fruit and vegetables. Not only does this save road miles needed to import food, but it is also environmentally friendly and would contribute to rural economies and communities. Labeling these products for example as "eco friendly" products would communicate indirectly to consumers that it cares for the local environment. This would increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by giving more customized service to each customer, which would enhance Asda's CRM (Croteau and Li, 2003). The systematic approach of the Deming's PDCA cycle could be utilized for this recommendation. Asda could trial this recommendation on a small scale first, then collect data to analyse its success, before deciding whether full implementation would be viable or if further improvements on the project was needed.

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