

To investigate Leeds retail stakeholders' perceptions of a proposed sustainable retail marketing benchmarking framework

Abstract

Retail has been a key driver of the UK's transition from a manufacturing economy to one based mainly on services, experiences and activities. Retail is a complex, fast changing industry that must recognise, and react to, changes in consumer values and behaviour. Consumers are, however, increasingly aware of ethical and/or environmental issues and their increasing awareness of greenwashing may render merely stating green credentials as insufficient (Ramus & Montiel, 2005).

The conjunction of Hart's 'sustainability' and Elkington's 'Triple Bottom Line' (TBL) paradigms acted as a Schumpeterian step change for large UK retailers. However the key UK retail studies make little reference to Sustainable Marketing based on TBL despite the Co-operative movement having operated in a sustainable way since 1840s. There is growing acknowledgement that marketing's extant definition of sustainability is too narrow.

Leeds has undergone a retail renaissance over recent years with many commentators referring to it as the 'Knightsbridge of the North'. Testament to this is the £750 million redevelopment of the East Gate area of Leeds City Centre, covering 1.2 million square feet and ultimately creating a new Shopping Quarter due to open in 2012. The Leeds City Partnership intend to build the greenest development in the UK. These intentions are laudable however they cannot accurately forecast the determinants regarding consumer choices in 2012. Why would shoppers visit one shopping centre rather than another? Answers to such questions can be of crucial importance in the development and management of shopping centres (Dennis, 2005).

Retailers are on the sustainability continuum and they may be at a disadvantage if they do not know their customers' perceptions of their position. To-date they have struggled to benchmark themselves sustainably hence this paper uses a definition of Sustainable Retail Marketing (SRM) and a potential framework which could provide the first attempt at benchmarking SRM.

This exploratory paper considers the key stakeholders in the Leeds retail marketing arena and seeks to ascertain initial reactions to the suggested platform for SRM benchmarking. As a relatively new area of social science a qualitative approach will be used to identify the thoughts, feelings and concerns of key stakeholders. The paper also seeks to partially redress the imbalance amongst the key sustainability studies which are predicated on supply-side approaches and largely ignore the key role of customers.

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Introduction

The paper seeks to identify the extent to which the key stakeholders recognise increasing consumer awareness of ethical and/or environmental issues and their resulting awareness of green-washing, which may render merely stating green credentials as insufficient (Ramus & Montiel, 2005). Also how conjoining green issues with CSR is not enough and sustainability will increasingly be adopted by UK companies. Hence this paper seeks to identify how the key stakeholders perceive sustainability and the role marketers may take in terms of how retailers position themselves sustainably.

This paper focuses on key stakeholders who substantially affect retailers however it does not include the consumers or the retailers. This paper seeks to identify how stakeholders react to a proposed framework for Sustainable Retail Marketing.

Why Leeds?

Leeds has undergone a renaissance over recent years with many commentators referring to it as the 'Knightsbridge of the North'. Testament to this is the redevelopment of 1.2 million square feet by the Leeds City Partnership triumvirate featuring Hammersons Plc, Town Centre Securities and Leeds City Council. They are investing £750 million developing the East Gate area of Leeds City Centre ultimately creating a new Shopping Quarter which is scheduled to open in 2012.

The Leeds City Partnership is building what is intended to be the greenest retail development in the UK. Further to this Leeds City Council has published

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environmental policy which promotes good practices. The Partnership's East Gate development strategy also aims to satisfy the needs of the ever increasing diversity of Leeds shoppers, by including 'cheap and cheerful' basic goods to more specialised up-market products. These intentions are laudable however they cannot accurately forecast the determinants regarding consumer choices in 2012. Why would shoppers visit one shopping centre rather than another? Answers to such questions can be of crucial importance in the development and management of shopping centres (Dennis, 2005).

Why Retail Marketing?

Retail has been a key driver of the UK's (continued) transition from a manufacturing economy to one based mainly on services, experiences and activities. In 2007 the proportion of the UK GDP derived from services has risen to 85% (ONS, 2007).

Indeed with turnover exceeding £250 Billion UK retail now eclipses the economies of many EU member states (BRC, 2007). Retail is a ferociously competitive service based industry that's inherently complex being both multi-variate, inter-disciplinary (Jobber, 2007, p203). Retail is also a fast changing industry that must recognise, and react to, changes in consumer values and behaviour.

A Historical Retail Sustainability Precedent?

The UK Co-operative movement (hereafter called the Co-op) can trace its principles and trading practices back to the Rochdale Pioneers in the 1840s (Birchall, 1994).

Amongst their guiding principles were education, training, information and concern for the community through sustainable development (Davies & Burt, 2007). Often they have been market leaders in terms of actions including product labelling, health

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education, fair trade, changing the attitudes of local workers towards taking responsibility for their own welfare. Indeed co-operatives not only channelled funds (into the community) but existed "to serve the community in which it traded" (ibid, p159).

Co-ops have important cultural, industrial and historical origins (Hess, 2004) that combine to create forms of embeddedness namely 'societal' 'network' (the composition and structure of the network relationships) and 'territorial' (the relationships in "place" with local firms, consumers and regulations) (ibid). These values form the foundations of the Co-op's '**Sustainable**' approach to mutually beneficial business practices. Whilst other companies may not want to share all of the Co-op's 'altruistic' aims, the notion that their longevity, differentiation and customer retention may be attributed to being 'embedded' suggests their approach merits consideration.

If, for a moment, one considers the challenges facing retailers, a key question is "Why would consumers visit one retailer rather than another?" Answers to such questions are of crucial importance for retailers (Dennis, 2005). Simply put all progressive companies should seek to align product offers with what customers want hence ensuring all investment and resources add customer value; value cannot be created by the retailer. Retail also is worthy of consideration because other laudable service providers who carry out sustainable business practices, say those in the FTSE4GOOD index, are unlikely to have the complexity of hundreds of sites with literally millions of transactions taking place.

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However a driver for this study is the large-scale absence of 'customers' in many key sustainability studies which tend to offer supply-side solutions. It is inarguable that "*customer attraction, retention and satisfaction are imperative to the survival and success*" of most retailers (Pal & Byrom's 2003, p523). Also "*understanding customer needs and meeting and exceeding expectations have become part of the lexicon*" of progressive companies (ibid).

Retail Marketing and Sustainability

The notion of companies being motivated by more than economic profit is not new. In the 1960s Kotler was central to the efforts of incorporating social and moral concerns into marketing 'science' (Crane & Desmond, 2002). He proposed the notion of 'social marketing' for social ideas and causes in 1969 followed in 1972 by the 'societal marketing concept' predicated on a more ethical approach to marketing. Despite 35 years of extensive studies and academic debate on the efficacy of societal marketing, practitioners and academics are increasingly concerned that the social, ethical and environmental issues have not been redressed and if anything have deteriorated (ibid).

In 1997 Hart's "Beyond Greening" brought the issue of sustainable development to the wider business community (Starkey & Welford, 2001). 1998 saw the traditional economic focus being challenged by the 'Triple-Bottom-Line' (TBL) utilising the new foci of social, environmental and economic responsibility (Elkington, 1998). The Hart and Elkington texts are considered to be two of the most important recent contributions on the subject of business sustainability development (Starkey & Welford, 2001). The combined impact of these texts represented a step change in how

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businesses would be expected to operate. This approach, often paraphrased as 'People-Profit-Planet' (ibid), represents an emergent branch of social science.

The advent of TBL was Schumpeterian as it brought about a process of 'creative destruction' where incumbents' competences and perceptions were challenged by the new paradigm of sustainability (Schumpeter, 1942). Sustainability's step change fundamentally changed retail's knowledge base leading to new opportunities and in turn market growth. Market boundaries were redefined as retailers sought to differentiate product offers or to create and target new segments. New entrants to the enlarged market had a greater incentive to innovate (McGee, Thomas & Wilson, 2005).

Fig 1: Potential impact of emergent TBL factors leading to strategic drift

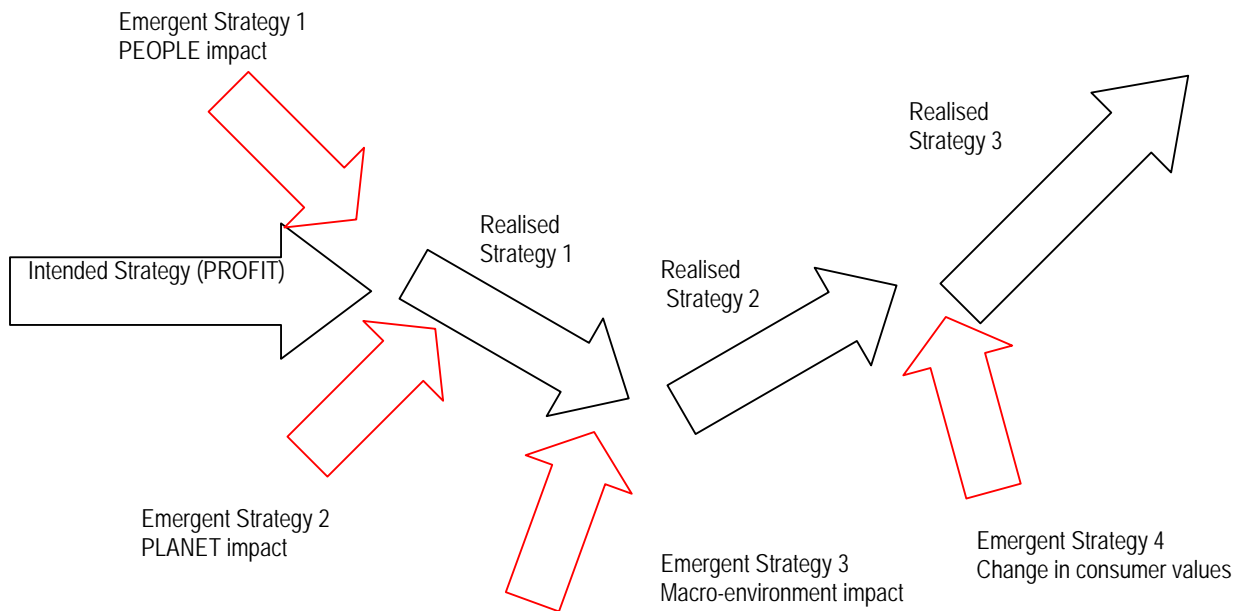


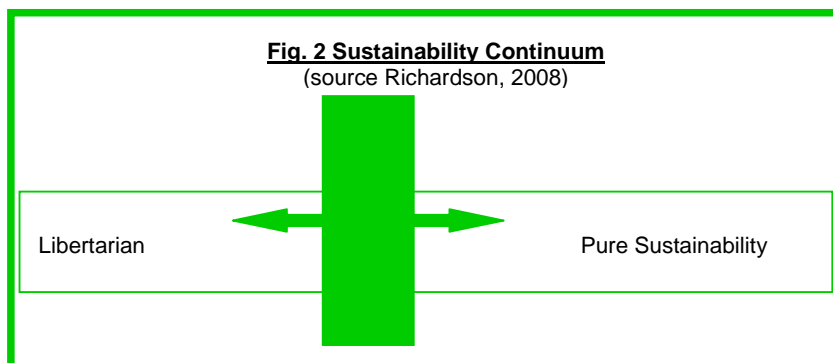
Fig 1 illustrates how retailers' best strategic intentions could be deflected by the failure to adopt or react to emergent elements of TBL and/or macro-environmental

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changes and/or changes in consumer values such as the growth in ethical or green goods. Retailers following the traditional profit-driven business model may find themselves reacting to emergent TBL factors (Fig 1) ultimately leading to strategic drift (Mintzberg, 1990)

Retailers' Positioning

All consumption is social as spending is conditioned by a socialised process in which consumers' thoughts, feelings and actions are subject to social and cultural factors (Petrick & Sheehan, 2007). Hence consumers take on attitudes, beliefs, opinions and values of others (ibid) and those service providers who are not aware of changes in society run the risk of alienating customers. As retailers need to be able to position



themselves within their markets in order to make effective

decisions it is safe to assume that they (knowingly or otherwise) are located on the Sustainability Continuum (Fig 2) and need to be aware of their customers' perceptions of their position. Retailers need to be able to position themselves within their markets in order to make strategic, tactical and operational decisions. Hence retailers need to reflect on where they (are perceived) to stand in terms of sustainability.

Barriers affecting sustainability adoption

Key UK retail marketing studies make little reference to Sustainable Retail Marketing (SRM) based on TBL despite the Co-operative movement having operated in a

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sustainable way since 1840s (Richardson, 2008). There is growing acknowledgement that marketing's extant definition of sustainability is too narrow and academics in consumer-centric disciplines such as retail marketing are often trailing their peers in other disciplines as a result of having largely ignored TBL and sustainability. Other disciplines (and practitioners) have responded to Hart and Elkington's Schumpeterian effect however they often ignore the single most important factor- consumers.

The aim of this paper is to identify how key stakeholders (who do not include the consumers or the retailers) react to a proposed sustainable retail marketing framework. Part of the problem is the challenge of defining sustainability so consider the following:

“Sustainable Retail Marketing (SRM) is predicated on the tenets of the Triple Bottom Line. Hence SRM decisions should be ethical and guided by sustainable business practices which ultimately are the only way to resolve the tensions between consumers' wants and long term interests, companies' requirements, society's long run interests and the need for environmental balance”.

(adapted from Gosnay & Richardson, 2008)

Retailers are on the sustainability continuum and may be at a disadvantage if they do not know their customers' perceptions of their position. Hence, prior to addressing methodological issues and synthesising findings with the extant literature, it is apposite to consider some of the background factors which may contribute to retailers' resistance to adopting SRM (Richardson, 2008), as follows:

- retailers have many stakeholders with 'interests' such as employees, unions, suppliers, intermediaries, government and most importantly customers. Each of these may have agenda and/or be motivated by self-interest. “*shareholder value may come at the expense of customer value and satisfaction. It may also leave in its wake diminished job security, higher unemployment and poorer products and services*” (Payne, Holt & Frow, 2000).

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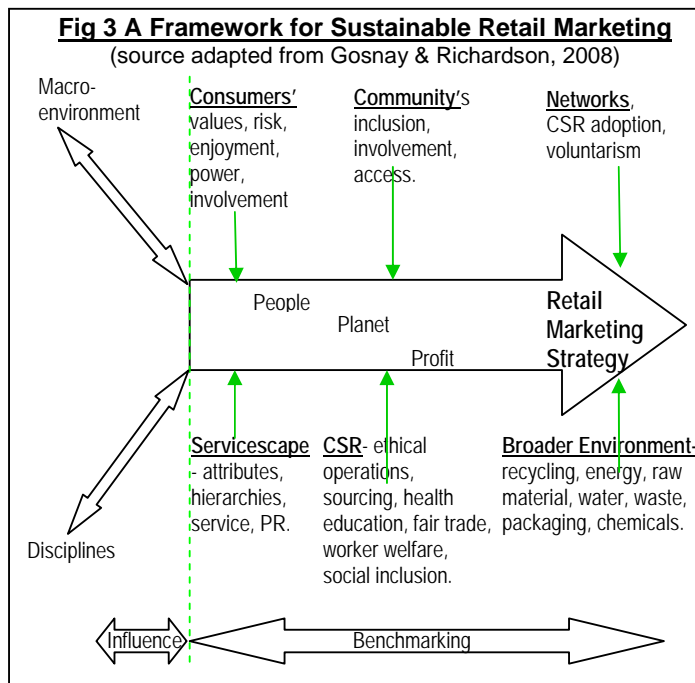
- A large retailer may exist to advance the pursuit of shareholder value however it *“affects the lives and well-being of its employees, those of suppliers and the inhabitants of the area in which it is located”* (Barry, 2000, pp 8-12).
- all retailers have ‘**Sustainability**’ responsibilities however questions remain regarding who should take responsibility amongst the contested domains of the service provider, “the consumer, the community, the regulator, the legislator, the political executive?” Tilley (2007, p3)
- The term ‘retailer’ is somewhat nebulous representing many differing types of multi-stakeholder businesses namely *“single proprietorships, partnerships, co-operatives, non-profit enterprises and other types of commercial endeavour”* each of which has differing aims and objectives (Barry, 2000, pp 8-12).
- modern retail advocates ‘selling more’ whilst ‘**Sustainability**’ is about consuming less (Howell, 2006).
- Principals demand regular stable dividend payments however funds needed to pay dividends detract from the agent’s ability to undertake new (sustainable) projects; principals want to sustain dividends to maintain market value.
- some principals acquire shares specifically to affect the running or direction of the company, which may ultimately diminish returns and *“it is certainly possible for well-organised pressure groups to influence corporate policy in non-economic directions”* (Barry, 2000, pp10-20).
- Principals are aware that agents may act out of self interest and so they incur the cost of monitoring the behaviour of directors with annual audits, which have to be undertaken by all UK public companies.
- short-termism endemic in markets which encourages managers to ignore investments in longer run drivers of success (Hutton, 1999) eg sustainability.
- the (mis)use of the word sustainability; retailer shareholder sustainability does not equate to ‘**Sustainability**’. The difficulty of defining sustainability derives from the multi-disciplinary context with definitional ambiguities associated with each discipline (Parris & Kates, 2003).
- Proponents of sustainable development differ in terms of emphases eg what to sustain or to develop and when?

Methodological Approach

A Framework for Sustainable Retail Marketing

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All companies are positioned on the sustainability continuum (Fig 2) and to address



the positioning challenge they need to be capable of undertaking sustainability benchmarking. With this in mind a proposed framework (Fig 3) was presented to the respondents whose views were sought regarding its

relevance and efficacy. It was pointed out that TBL factors can impact on multiple elements for example adopting a CSR policy could impact on people and profit. As the drive to boost profits via traditional marketing techniques is well covered elsewhere this study only sought responses regarding areas (subject to Schumpeterian change) that either exert influence or need to be benchmarked (Fig 3).

Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive sampling technique was used with respondents identified by cold calling the organisations and having established contact using a snowballing technique to identify new contacts and/or organisations. This combination of techniques allowed the respondent based on appropriate characteristics required of the sample members (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2006; Zikmund 2003). In this case it was crucial to select respondents that could highlight the topic from different retail industry angles.

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The following sample was selected:

- *Town Centre Manager (TCM)*- senior officer in Leeds City Council
- *Senior Planner*- (SP) Leeds City Council
- *Local Retail Developer*- (RD) specifically an architect with retail responsibility
- *Area Manager for Leeds Ahead*- (LA) a quango whose remit is to facilitate business start-ups in Leeds and encourage inward investment
- *Head of Communities for Yorkshire Forward*- (YF) Senior manager responsible for community development with the regional development agency

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out among key stakeholders in Leeds, West Yorkshire. This research technique was open-ended and encouraged the respondents to answer in their own words. The respondents talked freely about each theme and a range of different issues emerged. The semi-structured approach was augmented by use of an interview guide (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2006; Jankowicz 2005) predicated on the proposed framework (Fig 3) thus ensuring the interviews remained focussed. The order was flexible so it could vary from one respondent to another depending on how each interview progressed (ibid). Different steering techniques including probing were used actively during the interviews to encourage the respondents to expand on one point or move over to another topic (Jankowicz 2005).

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour duration and were tape-recorded (with the respondents' permission) allowing the Author to concentrate on questioning, listening and responding. The tapes provided an accurate and unbiased record (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2006). The recorded material was transcribed and analysed using the content analysis technique. The interview guide (Fig 3) and transcripts were first used to devise a coding frame which was used to classify each utterance. The different utterances were compared and contrasted in order to identify similarities and differences across the sample. The findings were presented using quotes to illustrate different points being made (Wright and Crimp 2000; Jankowicz 2005).

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Analysis of findings germane to areas of 'Influence'

Macro-environmental (E^m)

The importance of the macro-environment is well documented however the tendency to monitor it and then simply react to changes is being challenged. SP, TCM & YF agreed that the term 'government' is somewhat nebulous and could cover local, national and international government. In terms of local government the issues are not only impacted by differing departments but the roles shift depending on the stage of the retail development. Porritt (2005, p240) argues that

“...the onus is increasingly on companies to be proactive rather than reactive, to anticipate inevitable change, to fill the space available to them for much more environmentally and socially responsible actions, and to lobby government for faster change”

Hence it's safe to assume that retailers' remits are becoming increasingly complex in that it's not enough that they compete but they're expected to lobby as well.

TCM, and YF sees sustainability as largely economic but recognise that other elements of the proposed framework would impact on the city's economic performance. This is underpinned by LA for whom a key economic aim is to “support the sustainable growth and reduce the failure rate of locally owned businesses in deprived areas”. That said economists strive to measure ‘**Sustainability**’ by emphasizing an accounting approach focusing on the maintenance of capital stocks (ESI, 2005). This focus neglects the People-Planet foci of SRM as earlier defined. That said YF “take into account all of these (SRM) issues” namely those in the Benchmark area of the SRM framework (Fig 1)

RD See benefits from a planning permission perspective in terms of generating good

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PR with the local communities. This chimes with existing studies that suggest the adoption of sustainable practices may improve prospects during planning processes not to mention underpinning any claimed green credentials (Parsons, 2002; Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003; McGoldrick, 2002, p267).

Retailers seeking development opportunities have cited a lack of co-operation by local authorities, causing severe delays in winning planning approval (Guy & Bennison, 2002). However SP highlights the key role of national government who provide "overarching policy statements...which local government work within". SP described how "since 1971 there has been no national statistics on floor space. All through the (subsequent) period when retailing has boomed there's been a virtual absence of national statistics". Hence the background of retailer decision making, rather than occurring within comprehensive informational frameworks, has often been based on "guesswork" (ibid).

Inter-disciplinary considerations

The macro-environmental interface (Fig 3) is compounded by retail's inter-disciplinary nature for example being between the domains of retail marketing and the built environment). SP was somewhat concerned about other disciplines namely marketing coming onto their patch as "everyone thinks they have ownership of sustainability, when they see another disciplines attempting to re-write it everybody gets jealous". SP expressed concerns that "in terms of (sustainable retail) marketing we won't be included in the loop".

SP sees sustainability from an urban geography perspective ultimately dictated by national government. Whilst recognising that a range of factors are involved it's more

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a case of location first and everything else second. This chimes with McGoldrick (2002, p240) who provides a detailed 'location checklist' which features no references to the host community. This attitude simplistically reduces the site to 'a plot' and something apart from the community in which it is located. Hence the macro-environment and other disciplines are to be closely monitored. This is inevitable considering its potential influence on the aforementioned complex, multi-variate service provision and the inter-disciplinary nature of the stakeholders (Jobber, 2007, p203).

Analysis of findings germane to areas to be 'Benchmarked'

CSR

The respondents broadly agreed with the role and need for good (CSR) practices (if not measurement) of companies in, and potentially locating to, Leeds whereas McGoldrick (2002) only fleetingly refers to the issue of CSR twice in his 650 page tome. McGoldrick (2002) He alludes to "some" retailers having CSR elements in their mission statements which may include 'green' issues, ethical supply policies and charitable links. He argues that short term advantages can be gained by the early CSR movers however "long-term, socially responsible stances...raise consumer expectations, leaving the companies vulnerable to a wide range of potential criticisms" (p420). YF, LA and TCM countered McGoldrick's argument suggesting they saw long term benefits of CSR as part of SRM framework or on a stand-alone basis. LA argued that a connection exists between CSR and corporate self-interest and that "CSR's an essential part of any sustainable business strategy".

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However RD argued that developers are not responsible for the CSR of clients who subsequently lease space to (as yet unknown) companies over the next 30 years. Also SP was somewhat cynical about contents of CSR reports from large retailers. He acknowledged that "all major retailers use corporate responsibility documents" however he takes them "with large pinch of salt". This seems to be in part due to the nature of planning in that they "are spatially planning the country. In terms of sustainability we (planners) have a different perspective".

Networks

McGoldrick (2002) recognises that socially responsible retailers may also engender trust in consumers and that trust can be grown, say through positive word-of-mouth. Hence it is logical to assume that there is a business case for measuring and developing trust within an SRM framework across a range of issues (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007). As discussed 'Network' embeddedness has contributed to the long term success of the Co-op (Hess, 2004) and retailers are undoubtedly networking organizations (Elg, 2003). Hence inter-dependent stakeholders therein will need to develop trust in their partners.

All respondents recognised the complexity of managing networks. They strongly agreed that the degree of voluntarism was a major issue (impacting on the adoption of CSR) however none suggested means for measuring CSR voluntarism in networks.

All respondents recognised that patterns exist in the adoption of CSR across differing organisations (Haberberg et al, 2007).

LA actively seek to encourage new residents to take part in community programmes however this is difficult when the newcomer is an SME. They understand the concept

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of 'Network' sustainability rather than TBL inspired sustainability, which tends to limit the discussion to the network mechanism itself i.e. the formal or informal social arrangements which enable members to establish relationships and engage in joint activities (Wind 2005 as cited in Willard & Creech, 2006, p3)

Community

The reaction to community involvement varied across the respondents. SP was "somewhat concerned about role of community in distorting key issues...that the issue with plastic bags distorts the real issue of packaging and food waste. The plastic bag issue is miniscule. Plastic bags caught the public imagination". This correlates with research that identified reticence, on the part of larger UK retailers, to engage with the community (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007). RD, however, countered this viewpoint arguing that retail clients "are increasingly seeking to engage with communities and their representatives". Indeed retail clients looking to boost the communities by providing non-retail elements in mixed-use sites (ibid).

YF wants to "we make sure economic development includes those who've not got a foot on the ladder". Social exclusion refers to diverse groups such as those with disabilities, the elderly, those on low incomes and homeless people amongst others (Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003) and retailers need to recognise the potential benefit of an improved public relations role with the local community (ibid). LA argues that "vast parts of Leeds are not sharing in the recent boom. Too many people live within areas that fall within the most deprived areas nationally. With unacceptable disparities in educational achievement, skills and life expectancy, there is both an economic and moral case for change". Hence rather than simply complying with, say, disability law, companies need to be more sensitive to stakeholders' psychological needs and

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motivations if they are to gain and sustain a distinct differential advantage (Mitchell & Harris, 2005).

LA suggest most businesses want to "put something back" and help society to prosper and business involvement is vital if we are to succeed in tackling the hard issues of today. For YF it's "thinking about people's lives and supporting them in the right way...not just because it's a good thing to do but because of the benefits it brings" Sustainability is not merely an altruistic stance as consumers are more likely to prefer to shop in stores that match their self-image (Baker, Holland & Kaufman-Scarborough, 2007; Mitchell & Harris 2005,).

Many socially excluded groups may have access (to the service) impaired by lack of mobility (for both physical and financial reasons) which is an issue (Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003). Hence another key element of social inclusion and all of the respondents agreed that in terms of accessibility, while progress has been made there is still some way to go (Baker, Holland & Kaufman-Scarborough, 2007). Ultimately accessibility is more than widening doors and building ramps (ibid) and McGoldrick (2002, pp241-242) recognises that it "is still seen sometimes as synonymous with driving times and parking provision".

Consumers

SP recognised how consumers struggle to evaluate often contradictory claims. It is possible that the cognitive dissonance of claim and counter-claim has led to increasing perception of 'greenwashing' where simply stating green credentials is deemed insufficient (Ramus & Montiel, 2005)

The respondents work in non-consumer facing roles and naturally offered varying

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degrees of recognition of the significance of consumer involvement (Aldlaigan & Buttle, 2001) and also consumer power although it was unanimously recognised that consumer knowledge was cited as a cause of high power with retail patrons often being well informed (ibid). TCM linked sustainability to attraction and retention of customers and suppliers. She also felt strongly that sustainability should cover qualitative measures such as the enjoyment of the shopping experience.

The term service "is taken to mean more than just serving customers" (Pal & Byrom, 2003, p525). Indeed the production, delivery and consumption of services revolves around the interpersonal interaction between service providers and consumers and is among the most significant determinants of consumer satisfaction (Menon & Bansal, 2007). All respondents recognised that interactions between retailers and customers provide opportunities to portray the firms in a positive or negative light (Wong & Sohal, 2002). They all recognised that understanding a customer's specific needs and having the customer's best interest at heart can send a powerful signal to customers.

Broader Environment

All respondents recognised the need for sustainability to cover the broader environment and concurred with the elements in the SRM framework (Fig 3). Hence sustainability should feature the recognition of general areas such as recycling, energy use, raw material, water, waste, packaging and chemicals. The respondents recognised that consumers have a connectedness with the broader environment being subject to intense emotional commitments (Petrick & Sheehan, 2007) which can affect their patronage decisions (Carpenter & Moore, 2006).

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All respondents agreed that the term 'environment' is used in varying ways which is reflected between differing texts and in some cases by the same author. These conflicting uses of nomenclature are problematic as environment and atmosphere appear to be influential in consumers' patronage decisions (Carpenter & Moore, 2006). There was evidence of green-washing with SP suggesting some retailers may simply "stick a couple of wind turbines on the roof and say we're green!" and he thought was, in part at least "all about spin". Addressing such communications issues will become more commonplace as retailers' lives

"will become more complicated. They must raise prices to cover environmental costs, knowing that the product will be harder to sell. Yet environmental issues have become so important in our society that there is no turning back."

(Kotler et al, 2006, p190).

Marketing may be part of the problem however Howell (2006) argues that the world needs to trade less and trade more carefully which is a task worthy of Sisyphus and without the involvement of customers. Particularly as consumers experience involvement when objects or events are connected to important goals or values such as a store being environmentally friendly (Mitchell & Harris, 2005). Supply-side approaches such as ecofootprinting (Howell, 2006) are undoubtedly useful measures, however they are flawed as consumers are wholly excluded from the process. YF, TCM, LA and RD all agreed that the cause of sustainability is furthered by having consumer involvement.

Servicescape

The task environment "comprises the business environments within which retail and others operate" (McGoldrick, 2002, p563). RD recognised the role of the servicescape in that "everything should be geared up to add value for the consumer" and saw value

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in the co-operation between retail developers and retail marketers which broadly fits with Baker, Holland & Kaufman-Scarborough (2007) who suggest that having a consumer focus elevates the servicescape above the (purely operational) task environment.

TCM, RD, YF and LA agreed it would be better if sustainability framework measured the extent to which developments reflect a degree of 'locality' which chimes with Hess (2004) who argued that 'Territorial embeddedness' helped to define retail relationships in "place" with local firms, consumers and regulations. TCM suggests "Leeds is seen as an attractive place" to locate a city centre retail operation and whilst there has been recent movement by large retailers towards addressing consumers' concerns regarding sourcing issues, namely ethical trading and Fairtrade, sourcing local and regional goods, food safety and animal welfare (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007), this is not perceived to have permeated the city's brand. LA makes it easy for business, acting as an independent connecting rod to help business identify where best to invest its resource and to help community partners link easily with businesses that want to support them.

RD argued that retailers who do not understand their customers' needs, risk perceived discrimination on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, or gender. Retailers need to appreciate that not all service dimensions contribute equally to customer's perceptions of overall relationship quality hence emotive elements such as sustainability may have higher values (Baker, Holland & Kaufman-Scarborough, 2007). SP argues that this is further complicated "because frequently a developer will come forward and they don't know who will occupy the box that they are promoting". That said retailers may be needed to help regenerate city centres as ultimately LA believe that ultimately "the public and

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voluntary sectors can't regenerate Leeds on their own"

Conclusion

More to service than being served- More to Sustainability than being green

All respondents recognised that the demand for sustainability components such as ethical goods and services is growing (Richardson, Eilertsen & Kenyon, 2007). They all also recognised that interest is growing in the ways in which such issues, say as part of CSR, can build and enhance retail brands (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2007).

None of the stakeholders could confirm whether their sustainability platform included TBL elements. Indeed when asked if Leeds City Council had a sustainability platform SP responded "Yes, we have several!" None of the respondents took issue with the proposed framework (Fig 3) and most recognised that it could form the basis of practical considerations or further research into benchmarking SRM. The benchmark elements germane to the model were considered in depth and no omissions were identified. However everyone recognised that retail will continue to be a complex, fast-moving industry and the proposed factors (Fig 3) may form a basis for stakeholders wishing adopt sustainability.

Further Research

Other key stakeholders were identified and approached however they were not available in the time-frame. These stakeholders (namely representatives of Leeds Chamber of Commerce, Leeds Voice, Business in the Community, the councillor responsible for development on Leeds City Council and a major Retail Developer involved with the Eastgate project) will be contacted in due course.

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Future research would seek to identify trends amongst the stakeholders and portray the findings graphically using sociograms and associative networks. This will be necessary as the research, which will be extended across the Yorkshire and Humber region, will be considerably larger.

Ultimately the complexities of benchmarking such a complex industry will have to be addressed. Quantitative work with consumers and retailers may be used to provide more representative studies.

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