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Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science

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Untapping value in the John Lewis Nursery Department

Background

John Lewis (JL) is popular British department store, with 50 shops and an online platform. JL was founded in 1929 and operates on an employee ownership model (Cathcart, 2013). In its continuous evolution it has kept pace with the changing consumption needs of the British public; yet whilst evolving it has maintained a trusted and traditional identity (Samour et al, 2020). Customers are attracted by its stock of products carefully selected to balance function, design and price (Miller, 2000). JL's customers are predominantly middle-class and shop with John Lewis throughout their lives, provoking a close consumer-brand relationship (Samour et al, 2020). The Nursery Department is popular with new parents, particularly for the trusted expertise of staff, including a dedicated Nursery Advisor, and a dependable returns policy.



JL Nursery Advice Service, Cheltenham branch

The nursery and childrenswear sector in the UK consists of a competitive formal market and a lively informal market (Ritch, 2018). In the informal market, used items are redistributed via on or offline trading platforms, or donated to social networks or charities (ibid). This

informal, collaborative market was traditionally driven by the frugality concerns of parents, alongside altruism towards other new parents in the community (Albinsson and Pereara, 2009, in Ritch, 2018). Qualitative research suggests that in recent years parent's involvement has also been fuelled by sustainability concerns. Other research indicates that during child bearing women become more interested in sustainable consumption (Prothero and Fitchett, 2000, in Ritch, 2018).

JL's Corporate Responsibility Strategy (CRS) presents imaginative initiatives to reduce waste, operate sustainable production lines and promote global workers' wellbeing (JL CR Report, 2019). It is commendable in its scope and ambition, for example, to recycle 85% of waste by 2025 and have zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, strategies are predominantly orientated towards a linear-flow consumption economy, whereby materials and energy are extracted from the earth and eventually discarded. Overwhelming evidence indicates linear flow models are fundamentally unsustainable (Kornhonen, 2017) and a radical revaluation of the production-consumption system towards a circular economy is needed (WRAP, 2017). JL's Sustainability Department (SD) is acutely aware of this and has the support of senior stakeholders to transform elements of their CR strategy towards circularity. For example, since 2018, JL has scoped the viability of offering buy-back schemes and launched two buy-back initiatives, the latest launched in March 2020, buys-back children's coats for resale. Caroline Bettis, head childrenswear buyer, said:

"We're proud of the quality of our clothes and want them to have a really long life and be handed down again and again. We hope these new labels will help to grow the culture of handing down clothes which can be worn again by other children."

(Rebecca Smithers, The Guardian, 29 February 2020)

George Barrett, JLP Sustainability Manager, kindly provided comment by telephone on the performance, successes and challenges of these initiatives. His feedback has been used to shape the three proposals in this assignment, which I hope will support JLP's Nursery Department into a beacon of sustainable consumption.

Sharon White

Chairman

John Lewis and Partners Head Office

171 Victoria St

SW1E 5NN

5 May 2020

Dear Sharon White,

I would like to congratulate John Lewis on your dedication to protecting the earth's scarce resources, reducing waste and supporting workers across global supply chains. As the UK's principle department store you lead the retail sector with innovative sustainable initiatives which promote a longer commodity lifetime through reuse and repurposing. The ongoing fashion buy-back scheme trailed in Oxford and the recently launched initiative to buy-back children's coats demonstrates commitment in this area. I understand from a discussion with George Barrett of your sustainability department, that sustainability is a priority for leadership, with several initiatives under discussion. With a workforce of 80,000 and the livelihood of thousands of global workers dependent on your supply chains, you have the intimidating challenge of balancing ecological sustainability whilst ensuring business feasibility. I would like to propose three initiatives which I believe will help find synergy within these dual objectives in your Nursery and Childrenswear Department.

The schemes' attractiveness to customers rests on core symbolic features of your brand identified by social scientists, coupled with increasing demand from UK consumers for sustainable options. The strong reputation of the brand means customers trust the quality of John Lewis products and trust the advice of staff, hence shopping at JL reduces the problem of choice consumers face. John Lewis is perceived as an innovative brand, whilst maintaining a traditional identity. Your range of creative sustainability initiatives, such as the popular Waitrose UNPACKED which sells loose items for customers to put in their own reusable packaging, demonstrates that JL continues a legacy of innovation. Holding fast to these symbolic values is, in my view, essential for JL to continue to harness customer loyalty.

Research on informal exchange networks amongst UK parents indicates frustration at the limited opportunities to engage in sustainable consumption within the massmarket. Parents, particularly from the socio-economic cohort of JL customers, are motivated by the moral imperative of sustainable purchases. However, although informal schemes offer more ethical options, parents are often deterred from utilising them because of concerns about the quality of second-hand products and discomfort with the associated retail environment, which often override ideological motives. In my view, JL is uniquely positioned to fuse parents' proclivity for sustainability with their demand for product quality and price.

Ecological economists propose sustainable consumption is achievable only through widespread transformation of the mass retail sector, from linear production-consumption models, to a circular framework. The CE envisages a, "cradle-to-cradle life cycle in which product lifetimes are vastly extended and worn products are repurposed back into the system. Retailers can employ a range of circular options, including collaborative consumption models which depart from traditional ownership-disposal, in favour of repurposing and access-based schemes, such as hiring products and services. Competition in this space is growing with the global second-hand market valued at \$24 billion and set to double by 2025 (Finnigan, 2020). Formal retailers are gradually engaging in buy-back and resell schemes, so this is an important area for JL to continue investment in. The following proposals involve collaborative consumption and access-based schemes, and are designed to appeal to parents' ideological, practical and economic interests, whilst remaining financially viable for JL.

The Better World Nursery and Babywear Collection (BW Collection)

This scheme buys-back and resells used products and clothing under the label BW Collection. Products will be accepted whatever their condition, and allocated for resale, charitable donation or fabric recycling. Customers receive a financial reward per item, dependent on the item's condition, to be spent within the JL Partnership. At resale, the BW Collection will be displayed alongside new items; quality-checked, cleaned, ironed, and arranged by age group, so browsing the BW Collection is as appealing as browsing new collections.

The Better World Voices (BW Voices)

This scheme supports the mental wellbeing of new parents and strengthens the consumer-brand relationship. JL shops will host parent-baby, action-orientated groups from the local community. The groups' objective will be to support the BW Collection and Library, whilst developing a network of individuals with shared social values. Group activities will involve unpacking items provided for resale by other group members, packing charity-donation items into bundles and reviewing products from the BW Library. To foster a sense of learning, JL staff from across the business would provide 'show and tell' talks about retail sustainability and be joined by external speakers, such as sustainable manufacturers from the global supply chain and ecological economists. In return, JL would benefit from eliciting the groups' views on new sustainability initiatives.

Membership will be free and open to expectant and new parents. Group cohesion will be supported by a website for members to communicate together outside of meetings.

Meet-ups will be held monthly in the in-store cafes, with discounts offered on purchases and a play area provided for infants.

JL would benefit from increased in-store footfall, customer spend, an enriched customer relationship and feedback on new sustainability initiatives.

The Better World Nursery and Toy Library (BW Library)

The third scheme is an access-based scheme consisting of a rental library of high-value toys and nursery items. Membership would be free and products hireable at a cost. Parents would appreciate the flexibility to return the product once outgrown and access high-value products for an affordable monthly fee. Toy Libraries have been in existence since 1935 and gained popularity by consumers favouring anti-capitalist systems; in the UK today, Toy Libraries are generally managed by charities or social services, but research indicates demand for them is growing, alongside increasing desire for access-based consumption (Ozanne, 2010).

Sustainable initiatives will succeed only if accompanied by stakeholder behavioural change. Overleaf is a brief review of relevant anthropocentric social psychological and behavioural change theories. I hope they may offer a useful contribution to further enmesh sustainability initiatives into the heart of JL, and obligingly ease customers' burden of choice.

Best wishes,

Justification

This section focuses on the social psychological processes underlying consumer behaviour. It starts from the premise that consumer choice is influenced by emotional, normative and habitual drives rather than purely cost and convenience (Airely, 2009). These drives are continuously shaped by the social and physical environment (Lahlou, 2009; Lofthouse and Prendeville, 2018). An effective Behavioural Change Models (BCM) or design model, will place the user's experiences at the core of its practices to create meaningful innovative initiatives (Lofthouse and Prendeville, 2018). Effective designs and behaviour change models must be straightforward for application by lay practitioners (Michie et al, 2011) and be designed for enduring change, which shapes the cultural value systems (K 2008), in turn shifting social norms. There has been a tendency for designers within the Circular Economy (CE) concept to focus wholly on engineering durable products, rather than taking a user-centric approach, likely because the CE discussion has been led by business practitioners and ecological economists (Lofthouse and Prendeville, 2018; Korhonen, 2018).

Installation Theory (IT) is a framework for designers which proposes successful design captures the in-situ, phenomenological experiences of the user across psychological, social and physical contexts (Lahlou, 2011; Lahlou, 2009). A similar conceptual framework underpins the COM-B model, a BCM which derived from synthesising existing BCMs into one model (Michie et al, 2011). Its value lies in it being designed to be accessible and convenient for use by non-academic practitioners. The two models correspond and complement one another; hence I use both throughout this analysis. I employ a hypothetical user, or 'change-agent' to demonstrate the principles. COM-B proposes practitioners start with a clear concept of their change-agent and the desired behavioural outcome. In this case, she is an existing JL customer, pregnant with her first child. The desired outcome is that she hires an item from the BW Library and purchases infant clothing from the BW Collection. As directed by IT, a stakeholder analysis has been completed:

IT Stakeholder Analysis

	Existing behaviour	Target behaviour
Existing customers	Shops regularly at JLP for fashion and food items. Purchases new items.	Shops from the BW Collection and uses the Nursery Library. Creates demand for circular consumption model.
Sustainability Department	Seeks to demonstrate commercial viability of increasing circular consumption models across the business	Has evidence that the circular model is viable, and transforms JL into a truly sustainable retailer
Senior Leadership	Balancing competing business needs	Transforms JL into a truly sustainable retailer
Existing supply line personnel	Work on established supply lines which may not be sustainable	Converts supply-lines towards circular production
Potential new supply line personnel	Not currently partnering with JL	Compete with existing supply lines on sustainability
In-store Nursery Department staff	Familiar with existing ways of working	Understand and support BW initiatives, promotes with customers
Competitors	Compete for market share with JL online-disruption particularly winning market share	Reduced ability to compete with JL as customer demand shifts to prioritising circular consumption models. Wide-spread retail sector reform.

The table shows that to achieve enduring systematic change requires attitude and behavioural change across multiple stakeholders. Like all social systems, the production-consumption system is both the *product* of continuous reconstruction by participants and their actions, and also, *produces* these actions and participants (Giddens, 1984 in Lahlou, 2009). Our change-agent is in the first category, existing customers.

The specific behaviours that would be seen if the outcome was achieved are presented in Figure one.

Who needs to perform the behaviour?	Pregnant JL customer due to have her first child.
What do they need to do differently to achieve the desired change?	Choose to hire from the Nursery Library Purchase infant clothes from the BW Collection Take home and read a leaflet about BW Voices
When do they need to do it?	Before or after the birth
Where do they need to do it?	John Lewis store
How often do they need to do it?	Initially once, but then repeat behaviour for future nursery or childrenswear purchases
Who else do they need to do it with?	Behaviour can be done alone or with friends/family. JL staff are required to offer advice.

Figure one: specific target behaviour

At the heart of behavioural change in a retail context is the need to change habitual behaviour; despite intentions, in this context individuals often employ their emotional or habitual, fast, processing system (Kahneman, 2011). Advantageously for our hypothetical change-agent, research indicates that lifestyle changes in an individual's local environmental can make them more receptive to changing habits (Verplanken, 2006). Motherhood provides a window of opportunity because it is accompanied by biological, environmental and social changes, provoking an inclination for change which needs to be supported by social and institutional context, or habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Boldero, & Binder 2013). I will now outline a systematic method to analyse environmental, social and psychological contributors to change, using a COM-B framework. An overview is presented in figure two.

Levels of analysis



Figure two: COM-B analysis of contributing factors

Reflexive and unconscious motivations

Consumer psychologists have long recognised that choice can be cognitively uncomfortable (Schwartz et al, 2002). Parents face particularly difficult choices in balancing ideological desires for ethical consumption with their drive to prioritise safety and need for frugality (Ritch, 2019). Parents are instinctively attracted by products designed for safety, because infants are highly vulnerable and consumption gives a sense of control over real and imagined existential fears (Arndt, et al, 2002). However, during pregnancy, women also put

increased value on the moral imperative for sustainability. With concerns about product quality risk from informal trading networks, parents turn to the professional retail space but find limited affordable options to engage in ethical consumption within the mass market, an issue of frustration for many (Ritch, 2019).

This trade-off between competing values can result in a psychological quandary that leads to cognitive discomfort which may ultimately acts as a barrier to ethical consumption (Reczek et al, 2018; Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Individuals cope with the discomfort by ignoring or forgetting consumption choices that are incongruent to ideological aspirations (Reczek et al, 2018). Reducing consumers' burden of choice by offering products that combine value, quality and function traditionally makes JL attractive to customers (Miller, 2008), the BW proposals would add sustainable to this holistic value.

Social motivations

New motherhood is a time of uncertainty rooted in fears about the wellbeing of offspring and mother and fears about looming financial demands. Social Identity Theorists propose individuals manage the psychological anxiety of uncertainty by actively seeking group membership, to fulfil primary cognitive such as belonging and certainty (Tajfel and Turner, 1970; Haslam and Reicher, 2006). Membership of BW Voices would provide contact with others with shared social values to share knowledge about child rearing, thus alleviate some anxiety. Group belonging is a key reason why people engage in sustainable behaviours (Lahlou, 2009); group participation encourages commitment, which acts as an incentive for habitual change (Lewin, 1934 in Lahlou).

People are motivated by a powerful desire to conform (Asch, 1951). Conforming to shared values and expectations satisfies primary cognitive needs, such as belonging and acceptance. Furthermore, as individuals are motivated to be seen positively by others (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) attending BW Voices would encourage participation in more ethical behaviours. The presence of knowledge JL staff would create credible models for

the new sustainable behaviours (Michie et al, 2011). More broadly, habits and habitus influence and create one another (Binder and Boldero, 2010), so as each individual consumer that engages in the BW schemes, the social norm of consumer behaviour within the department will shift towards supporting circular initiatives.

BW Voices could further enhance new parent's emotional well-being as new mothers often feel their socially recognised value is threatened by parenthood, hence search for visibility and recognition (Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2017; Brighenti, 2007). This may be partially achieved by finding a new sense of public purpose: psychologists' advice that purpose is essential for emotional wellbeing (Dolan, 2015; Seligman and Csikszentmihaly, 2014). Action-orientated groups like BW Voices also equip members with social capital, that is, a sense of trust and collective efficacy (Lochner et al, 1999), which in turn would contribute to positive economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The Physical Environment



The Nursery Department, Cheltenham Branch

The physical environment provides affordances which guides individual behaviours according to the socially understood manner, or social representation, of *how* to interact with the environment (Lahlou, 2011; Lahlou, 2009; Gibson, 1967). Therefore, the BW Collection and Library should be integrated within attractive existing setting of the Nursery Department and displayed alongside new collections, so the same values of quality and trust are conferred upon the second-hand and shared items. This would contrast with the typical charity shop' environment which can be unattractive to consumers (Cooper et al, 2016).

Research indicates that the value that is most salient at point of purchase bears most influence on consumer choice (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). Very often, price is most salient, so people chose the cheapest option (Reczek & Irwin, 2015). Advantageously, items from the BW Collection and BW library will retail for a lower price than new items. Placing signals such as posters, that promote ethical ideologies within the Nursery Department will make salient to consumers the importance of ethical choices.



John Lewis Café, Cheltenham. Typical of the space for BW Voices meetings

Outside of the shop floor, with many consumers living in homes with limited storage space, many consumers increasingly prefer to pay for temporary access to goods rather than full, permanent ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881), hence the BW Library will be attractive.

Conclusion, Challenge and Caveats

Within the limited space available, this paper has sought to show how JL can continue its legacy of innovatively removing the burden of choice from consumers, whilst innovating to transform swathes of its business model toward a circular production-consumption system. It has argued that an integrated design model is essential for bringing about the required behavioural change and demonstrated how this may be done across elements of the physical, psychological and social spheres.

A number of practical challenges arise from these proposals. Firstly, it will be essential for JL to assure the quality of repurposed and hired commodities; technical audits can mitigate this risk, though costs may be prohibitive and JL may choose to collaborate with an external agency on this aspect. Secondly, the 2020 coronavirus lock-down has accelerated the decline of bricks-and-mortar retail in favour of online (in conversation with Barrett, 2020). JL will need to adapt these initiatives as the retail sector adjusts. Thirdly, COM-B has been used extensively in healthcare settings but not in commercial environments. This is likely due to the saturation of BCMs, rather than lack of suitability.

Scientific caveats are the fact that there is limited scientific research on the CE and access-based models in practice (Korhonen, 2018; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). JL should collect feedback from stakeholders and evolve the initiatives accordingly, they may consider the use of body-born video footage to collect data to truly understand consumers phenomenological experience (Lahlou, 2009). Additionally, data on alternative consumption models within the childrenswear sector come predominantly from adults; but children are important stakeholders (Ritch, 2019) and JL should collaborate with researchers to collect children's views.

There is significant debate amongst scholars about comparative environmental benefits of different collaborative and access-based schemes. For example, Belk argued that initiatives requiring financial reciprocity were not truly 'sharing schemes' and could mislead consumers (Belk 2014; Habibi, Kim and Laroch). There is also evidence that the CE can provoke further consumption (Korhonen, 2018). These debates are beyond the scope of

this proposal, but we recommend JL monitors the initiatives to ensure they are achieving desired sustainability outcomes.

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