

Creating Brand Awareness In UK Retail Industry

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Introduction

Brand awareness is a central asset in UK retail because consumers choose among many stores, own-label products, digital platforms, and delivery services that often offer similar functional benefits. Awareness is more than recognizing a logo. It includes the ability to recall a retailer in a buying situation, connect the name with relevant associations, and distinguish it from competitors. The original proposal identified ASDA and the grocery market as a useful setting but used “marketing” where “branding” was intended and mixed research rationale with promotional claims. This revised proposal investigates how UK retailers create brand awareness across stores and digital channels, with ASDA as an illustrative case rather than an organization to be promoted. It defines the research problem, establishes questions and objectives, explains the contemporary retail context, and proposes a mixed-method design capable of measuring both consumer awareness and the organizational practices that produce it.

Research Problem

UK retailers operate in a fragmented media environment in which consumers move between physical shops, websites, apps, marketplaces, social platforms, search engines, and comparison tools. A retailer can achieve high name recognition while possessing weak differentiation or inconsistent associations. Price promotions may create short-term attention without strengthening memory, trust, or preference. Conversely, internal decisions concerning employees, store layout, service, availability, private labels, and digital experience can shape the brand even when they are not classified as advertising. The research problem is therefore to explain how integrated retail activity produces meaningful awareness rather than temporary exposure. ASDA provides a relevant case because it competes with Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Morrisons, discounters, convenience formats, and online services, but the study should produce findings that illuminate UK grocery branding more broadly.

Contemporary UK Retail Context

The UK retail sector continues to combine substantial store-based activity with established online purchasing. Official retail-sales data distinguish value and volume and show why researchers must separate nominal spending from the amount of goods bought, especially during periods of changing prices (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2026). Grocery retailers also face cost pressure, shifting

household budgets, demand for convenience, loyalty schemes, delivery expectations, and scrutiny of value claims. These conditions make brand awareness strategically important but difficult to interpret. A consumer may recall a retailer because of price, proximity, advertising, private-label quality, a loyalty app, or a negative service encounter. The study must therefore measure the content and strength of awareness, not simply ask whether respondents have heard of a brand.

Conceptual Foundation

Keller (1993) locates brand awareness within customer-based brand equity and distinguishes recognition from recall. Recognition occurs when consumers confirm prior exposure after seeing a cue; recall requires retrieving the brand from memory when given a product category or need. Salience also depends on the range of situations in which the brand comes to mind. Aaker (1991) similarly treats awareness as a foundation that supports associations, perceived quality, and loyalty. Retail brands add complexity because the organization, store environment, employees, product assortment, and own-label goods communicate simultaneously. Corporate identity and organizational culture can affect external image (Hatch & Schultz, 1997), making internal marketing relevant to a consumer-facing research question. The study will use these ideas to distinguish awareness as memory from the broader outcomes of image, trust, preference, and loyalty.

Aim and Objectives

The aim is to evaluate how integrated branding activities create and sustain consumer awareness in the UK grocery-retail market. The first objective is to measure aided recognition, unaided recall, and the associations attached to selected retailers. The second is to identify which touchpoints—advertising, stores, price communication, private-label products, apps, loyalty programs, social media, sponsorship, and word of mouth—consumers remember most strongly. The third is to examine whether awareness differs by shopping frequency, age, region, household circumstances, and primary shopping channel. The fourth is to explore how managers and frontline employees understand and deliver brand positioning. The final objective is to compare ASDA's awareness profile with major competitors without assuming in advance that one retailer's strategy is superior.

Research Questions

The study will address four connected questions. First, what level and type of brand awareness do UK consumers demonstrate for ASDA and selected grocery competitors? Second, which retail and communication touchpoints are most strongly associated with recall and recognition? Third, how consistently do consumers connect ASDA with its intended value proposition across physical and digital channels? Fourth, how do internal branding practices influence the customer experience through which those associations are reinforced or contradicted? These questions preserve the

original interest in branding, competition, and internal marketing while converting the topic into an investigable project. A supplementary question will examine whether promotional incentives create durable awareness or only short-lived attention.

Proposed Analytical Model

The proposed model treats integrated brand exposure as the explanatory domain. Paid media, owned digital channels, store experience, employee interaction, product and packaging, pricing communication, and earned media contribute to recognition and recall. Awareness may then support brand associations, consideration, and repeat patronage, but those outcomes are not assumed to be automatic. Perceived value, trust, availability, and experience quality may mediate the relationship. Shopping frequency and channel preference may moderate it. For example, an app user may remember loyalty offers while a store-based shopper may associate the retailer with location, queues, or staff. This model prevents the research from equating awareness with loyalty and allows the study to identify inconsistent touchpoints.

Research Design

A sequential mixed-method design is appropriate. The first phase will use a consumer survey to establish patterns of awareness and association. The second phase will use semi-structured interviews with retail managers and employees to explain how branding is planned and delivered. A small number of consumer interviews or focus groups may then explore ambiguous survey findings, such as why high recognition does not translate into consideration. The design is primarily cross-sectional, so it can identify associations rather than prove long-term causation. Where resources permit, the same awareness measures could be repeated after a defined campaign or at two points in the retail calendar to examine change. The project should remain analytically independent and avoid presenting research participation as marketing.

Consumer Survey and Sampling

The survey population will consist of adults in the United Kingdom who purchase groceries for themselves or their household. A stratified sampling approach should seek variation by region, age, gender, income band, household type, and shopping channel. Online panels offer practical reach but may underrepresent people with limited internet access, so supplemental recruitment near selected retail locations could improve coverage. The sample size should be determined through power analysis based on planned comparisons rather than an arbitrary target. Screening questions will identify grocery-shopping responsibility without excluding occasional shoppers whose low awareness may be informative. The report will disclose recruitment, response rates, weighting, and remaining limitations.

Measuring Awareness Without Leading Respondents

Unaided recall should be measured before displaying brand names or logos. Respondents might be asked which grocery retailers come to mind and which they would consider for a weekly shop, convenience purchase, or online order. Aided recognition can then present a randomized list or visual cues. Association questions can ask respondents to select or generate words connected with each brand, followed by ratings of value, quality, convenience, trust, innovation, and social responsibility. Touchpoint exposure, recent shopping behavior, and campaign recall should be measured separately. Asking “Is ASDA a well-known value brand?” would lead respondents and inflate agreement. Neutral wording and randomized order reduce this risk.

Manager and Employee Interviews

Interviews will examine how the brand promise is translated into operations. Managers can be asked about target segments, channel integration, campaign objectives, private-label strategy, measurement, and competitive positioning. Frontline employees can describe training, communication, service expectations, and gaps between official messages and operational reality. Employees should not be interviewed in the presence of supervisors, and participation must not affect employment. The goal is not to audit individual performance but to understand internal alignment. Comparing internal accounts with consumer associations can reveal whether intended positioning is reaching the market or being contradicted by store and digital experience.

Competitor and Content Analysis

A structured comparison of ASDA, Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Morrisons, and relevant discounters can strengthen interpretation. The analysis may code websites, apps, loyalty communications, selected advertisements, social posts, in-store signage, and private-label presentation over a defined period. Coding categories should derive from the conceptual model and be tested for reliability. The study should not count every mention as equivalent. Prominence, consistency, emotional frame, price claim, service promise, and call to action may matter more than raw frequency. Competitor analysis supplies context for survey recall and avoids evaluating one retailer in isolation from the messages consumers encounter.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics will summarize unaided recall, aided recognition, awareness depth, and dominant associations. Cross-tabulations and regression models can test whether awareness varies

with demographics, exposure, frequency, or channel use. Factor analysis may identify clusters within association measures if the sample is adequate. Qualitative interviews will be coded thematically, with attention to internal alignment, operational constraints, and consumer interpretation. The mixed-method integration will compare convergent and divergent findings. For example, managers may emphasize quality while consumers primarily recall price; the mismatch is itself an important result. Statistical significance should be accompanied by effect sizes and confidence intervals.

Ethics, Limitations, and Research Quality

Participants should receive clear information, give consent, and be able to withdraw before anonymized analysis. Personal data must be minimized and stored securely. Employees require particular protection from perceived managerial pressure. The researcher should disclose any relationship with a retailer and maintain separation between academic analysis and commercial advocacy. Limitations include self-reported exposure, recall bias, rapidly changing campaigns, and the inability of a cross-sectional study to establish causation. Reliability can be improved through pilot testing, consistent coding, pre-specified hypotheses, transparent instruments, and triangulation of consumer, employee, and content evidence. Brand-awareness results should not be generalized beyond the sampled population without appropriate caution.

Expected Contribution

The project will clarify which activities create recognizable but shallow awareness and which produce relevant, differentiated memory. It will show whether internal branding and service delivery support external communication, and whether awareness varies across retail channels and consumer groups. For academic research, the study connects corporate branding, customer-based brand equity, and retail experience. For practitioners, it offers an evidence-based diagnosis rather than a promotional recommendation. The findings may indicate that a campaign should be strengthened, but they may equally show that availability, service, or digital usability is the more important source of brand meaning. The value of the research lies in allowing evidence to determine that conclusion.

Conclusion

Creating brand awareness in UK retail requires coordinated experiences rather than repeated exposure alone. The proposed research retains the original focus on ASDA, grocery competition, internal marketing, and consumer awareness while replacing unclear terminology and unsupported assumptions with a defined mixed-method study. Unaided recall, aided recognition, associations, touchpoint exposure, employee alignment, and competitor communication will be examined as distinct forms of evidence. This approach can explain not only whether consumers know a retailer, but what the retailer means to them and why. Such knowledge is necessary before claims about loyalty,

competitive advantage, or promotional effectiveness can be justified.

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