Fair Trade and Consumer Social Responsibility: Exploring consumer citizenship as a driver of social and environmental change

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to examine the historical position of the ethical consumer as a driver of change within the Fair Trade movement. Fair Trade was originally envisaged as a model of South-North trade; however, with Fair Trade labels now available to consumers in India, Brazil, South Africa and Kenya, the geographies of production and consumption appear increasingly fluid and dynamic.

Design/ methodology/ approach - Using a historical comparative case study approach this paper draws on the records and archives from eight leading Fair Trade organisations based in the UK.

Findings - The paper develops an exploratory framework based on an assessment of Fair Trade's theory(ies) of change and the role of the ethical consumer as an agent of change. Four consumer narratives are identified: 1. Simpler living and moral action, 2. Co-operation and solidarity, 3. Consumer demand and choice, 4. Citizen-consumers. The paper concludes by considering the implications for globalising the concept of the 'citizen-consumer' and the (re)politicisation of Fair Trade consumption.

Research limitations/ implications - Primary data collection was mainly based on UK organisations. Additional comparative studies could develop an understanding of the context and geographies of Fair Trade practices.

Practical implications - New and emerging Fair Trade markets may offer valuable areas of further study.

Social implications - Increased understanding of the drivers of social change may lead to improved decision-making by Fair Trade organisations and policy-makers.

Originality/ value - The paper contributes to the development and understanding of Fair Trade's theory of change model by offering an historical dimension that is absent from the majority of existing studies.

Keywords - consumer citizenship, consumer social responsibility, Fair Trade, theory of change

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

In recent years, Fair Trade has enjoyed considerable success as demonstrated by strong retail sales, consumer recognition, and public support (at both a policy and community level).[1] But as Fair Trade looks to 'tip the balance' and move further into mainstream markets, its alternative trading model and theory of change have received increased critical attention, both from academics and practitioners. This paper examines the consumer narrative employed in Fair Trade's theory of change and argues that the complex and dynamic nature of ethical consumption has largely been overlooked by Fair Trade organisations. In the academic literature, consumer studies have tried to explain trends in ethical consumer behaviour and practices, as well as the apparent failure to 'walk their talk' (Carrington et al., 2016). While there has been progress on understanding some aspects of individual consumer behaviour, there is a need for greater attention on the political and collective dimensions of Fair Trade consumption (Andorfer & Liebe, 2012; Raynolds & Bennett, 2015).

Trade often fails to deliver sustainable livelihoods and development opportunities to small-scale producers and workers in the Global South. Fair Trade was established to contribute to civil society efforts to correct this failure. Fairtrade International's objective is 'a world in which all small producers and workers can enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods, fulfil their potential and decide on their future' (Fairtrade International, 2015, p. 6). The founders of the Fair Trade movement articulated a bold vision for a new approach to trade and economic development. For Francisco Van der Hoff Boersma, co-founder of the Max Havelaar certification label, Fair Trade represented 'one of the means to surpass the contradictions of capitalism. It acts on capitalism as a kind of catalyst or regulator' (Van der Hoff Boersma, 2012, p. xvii). However, in consumer markets retail sales soon became the most tangible measure of impact, and in turn this reinforced the idea of Fair Trade as 'a market-led commercial success story' (Nicholls & Opal, 2005).

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[1] A note on terminology: 'Fair Trade movement' refers to the collection of civil society groups, producer organisations, certification bodies and consumers that work on, or participate in, Fair Trade initiatives involving agricultural products and also non-food items including handcrafts. 'Fairtrade' or 'FAIRTRADE Mark' relates specifically to Fairtrade International (the product certification body) and its 25 national labelling initiatives.

Research Background and Theoretical Framework

There has been a growing scholarly interest in the role of consumers in activating corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Vogel, 2005; Caruana & Crane, 2008). This has led to the emergence of the term consumer social responsibility (CnSR) as a way of conceptualising how consumer utility has been extended beyond price, convenience, reliability and availability - to include social issues of justice, fairness, rights, virtue and sustainability. Caruana & Chatzidakis (2014) define CnSR as 'the application of instrumental, relational, and moral logics by individual, group, corporate and institutional agents seeking to influence a broad range of consumer-oriented responsibilities' (2014, p. 578). Schlaile et al. (2016) (re-)conceptualise CnSR in terms of a combination of two central elements a) social action and the ethic of responsibility and b) the notion of shared social responsibility. Reviewing a range of consumer studies that investigate cause-related marketing, carbon labelling, 'green' advertising and Fair Trade, Vitell (2015) highlights the centrality of consumer responsibility to the success of corporate social and environmental programmes; he argues that 'CSR can often be difficult, and perhaps even unprofitable, without CnSR' (p. 772).

The binary opposition of consumer/citizenship has been challenged in recent years by sociologists who have shown that cultural norms and values shape market behaviours (Zelizer, 2011; Cabrera & Williams, 2014). However, 'Citizen' and 'Consumer' remain difficult terms to define and exist in a complex relationship (Gjerris et al., 2016). Kallhoff (2016) argues that duties and rights receive a distinct shape when debated in terms of consumer citizenship. From a philosophical and moral theory perspective, this qualified notion of citizenship recognises that 'as citizens, consumers are not free to choose as wish' (Kallhoff, 2016, p.24). Historically consumer citizenship has been associated with entitlement and choice of affluent societies, however recent studies have shown the ability of consumer activists in the Global South to redefine consumer rights and responsibilities (Hilton, 2009). In Malaysia, Anwar Fazal one of the founders of the Consumers' Association of Penang, rose to prominence as regional director from 1974 and then president of Consumers International from 1978 to 1984.[2] Fazal (2011) proposed a five-point characterisation of consumer responsibility: 'to be critical; to act; to care for fellow human beings; to live in peace with the environment; and to join hands and create the solidarity, the spirit, the strength of many voices acting together'. For a short period the Penang office, led by Fazal, became the epicentre of the world's consumer movement and encouraged a reorientation of consumer politics towards the needs of the poor rather than the desires of the affluent (Hilton, 2008).

Scholars of Fair Trade have identified key conceptual dimensions and challenges to consumer citizenship, such as notions of caring at a distance (Barnett et al., 2005) an apparent attitude-behaviour gap (Shaw et al., 2015; Caruana et al., 2016) and distinctions between ethical and political consumption (Clarke, 2008; Barnett et al., 2017). More broadly scholars have also questioned assumptions about homogeneity of purpose in ethical consumption and offered a reminder that, 'we should not be surprised that consumption practices and political activity, consumerism and citizenship, frequently do coexist as well as clash' (Newholm et al., 2015, p. 302). Fair Trade is now competing in an increasingly complex and divergent market of social and environmental certification schemes (Jaffee, 2016; White & Samuel, 2016). This presents new challenges for the social movement and raises questions about how Fair Trade certification maintains consumer support (Chatzidakis et al., 2016), builds networks with like-minded social enterprises (Cater et al., 2016) and engages with corporate retailers (Nicholls & Huybrechts, 2016). These discussions have also prompted wider academic consideration about the ethics of Fair Trade (Staricco, 2016) and why it matters (Miller, 2016).

Recent studies of ethical consumption and Fair Trade have applied a range of perspectives and theoretical frameworks to this field of research including: sustainability and social change (Hudson et al., 2013),

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[2] Consumers International, formerly known as the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU), was started in 1960 by a group of five consumer organisations from the US, Western Europe and Australia. By 2000 membership numbers increased to more than 225 from 115 countries.

consumer activism (Gabriel & Lang, 2015) and value chain analysis (Doherty et al., 2013). Scholars have also considered the conceptualisation of consumption ethics through a longer historical lens and raised the debate between those that see evidence of decades of social concern and those who see centuries (Newholm et al., 2015). For instance, studies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century consumer boycott against slaved produced sugar have offered a useful reference point for discussions of a modern ethics of consumption (Hochschild, 2006; Midgley, 2007; Trentmann, 2008). What is absent from the extant literature is an evaluation of a consumer narrative that engages with the question of how Fair Trade change happens? While acknowledging that consumption ethics is not solely a recent phenomenon, this paper considers the emergence of a recognisable contemporary social movement of Fair Trade activism during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

This research adds to existing knowledge by moving from a focus on individual consumer practices to a broader investigation of the concept and narrative of ethical consumerism as it was formulated by Fair Trade organisations in setting out the vision, purpose and principles of Fair Trade. This study has been guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How has the Fair Trade movement defined ethical consumption in relation to its theory(ies) of change?

RQ2. Which ethics and whose ethics are used to frame the politics of Fair Trade consumption?

RQ3. What happens when Fair Trade campaigns begin to engage with consumers in emerging markets?

Theory of Change

This article presents an exploratory framework based on an investigation of Fair Trade's theory(ies) of change and the role of the consumer as an agent of change. A Theory of Change describes the transformation or development that an organisation wishes to see in the world and its understanding of how it will contribute to that change. Duncan Green, Senior Strategic Adviser at Oxfam GB, describes how, 'theories of change locate a programme, project, or campaign within a wider analysis of how change comes about. They articulate and challenge our assumptions and acknowledge the influence of wider systems and actors' (Green, 2016, p. 236). In this context, the focus is on the drivers of societal change, rather than organisational change management. For Fairtrade product labelling, as certified by Fairtrade International, the Theory of Change captures what Fairtrade does as a system and relates this to desired immediate, mid-term and long-term changes. It provides a framework for identifying appropriate indicators for measuring the results of Fairtrade and progress towards Fairtrade's goals (Fairtrade International, 2015).

Consumer behaviour and practices are identified at each stage of Fairtrade International's current Theory of Change model and defined in terms of interventions, outputs and outcomes aimed at achieving the objective of 'making trade fair' (see Figure 2). The role of this new Theory of Change document (Fairtrade International, 2015) is to articulate to key stakeholders how consumers' purchasing power can be combined with an involvement in political grassroots campaigning in order to demonstrate the wider public concern about unfair trade practices. The anticipated outcomes of these actions are that more consumers will actively choose products verified as 'fairly traded', and that policy makers will respond in support of the Fair Trade movement's global agenda for change in the way trade is structured.

Fairtrade International's Theory of Change is based on an underlying assumption that, 'the fundamental vision, purpose and principles of Fairtrade remain constant, as does the basic approach' (Fairtrade International, 2015). Therefore, the Theory of Change focuses on aspects of Fairtrade which are assumed to remain relatively stable, for instance: support for democratic organisations of small producers and workers, use of voluntary standards and third party certification. This may fit when applied solely to Fairtrade International, and based on a relatively short timeframe, but this assumption needs to be tested when applied to the experiences of the wider Fair Trade movement and a longer historical assessment of Fair Trade principles and approach.

Methods

Using a historical comparative case study approach, this article draws on the records and archives from eight leading UK Fair Trade organisations.[3] Organisations were included in the study based on their stakeholder connections to the Fairtrade Foundation, the labelling initiative in the UK (see Table 1). Five organisations were members, and founding members, of the Fairtrade Foundation: Oxfam, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund[4] and New Consumer. Two additional organisations (Twin Trading[5] and Ethical Consumer) were included in the study due to their significant role in establishing pioneering Fair Trade companies and promoting the concept of ethical consumption in the UK. Working with more than one archive enabled a greater degree of source triangulation and also helped to identify organisational bias and potential 'silences in the archives' (Decker, 2013). The main focus of this article is the fifty-year period spanning from the second half of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The research utilises primary archive material and documentary analysis of key published strategy documents from 1965 to 2015.

For each organisation included in the study a search was conducted of files related to trading activities, commercial operations, international trade, overseas development, political lobbying and consumer campaigns. The research method involved documentary analysis of executive committee papers, correspondence, committee minutes, press cuttings and campaign literature. All relevant files were digitally photographed and indexed for subsequent coding, analysis and verification (Adorisio & Mutch, 2013). The focus was on comparative discourse analysis of the consumer framing and narratives used in the internal and external communications of Fair Trade organisations. Access to recent records was provided by individual organisations and supported by institutional archives held by university library special collections. The following archives were accessed: Oxfam (records held at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford); Christian Aid (records held by SOAS, University of London); CAFOD (records held at CAFOD head office in London); Traidcraft (records held at Traidcraft office in Gateshead); New Consumer (private collection accessed by author); Ethical Consumer Research Association (records held at ECRA office in Manchester), Twin Trading (records held at Twin Trading office in London and London Metropolitan Archives); the Fairtrade Foundation (records held at Fairtrade Foundation head office in London).[6]

The main objective of this research is to develop theory and conceptual understanding of Fair Trade based on empirical inquiry of case studies of key stakeholders (Yin, 2013). A case study approach is recognised as a valuable tool in theory building (Patton & Applebaum, 2005; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Theory building in this context is an iterative process based on understanding 'the fit between theoretical ideas and their complex implications, on the one hand, and the best empirical evidence, on the other' (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 318). An historical approach allows for multiple stakeholder analysis of key narratives and an evaluation of how these may evolve over time (Lawrence, 1984; Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Mills et al., 2016). This research methodology combines internal comparative questions with process tracing that highlights the temporal unfolding of institutional choices and policies (George & Bennett, 2005). The aim is to better understand processes of knowledge formation and contestation that shape practices within specific institutional contexts, and to trace how Fair Trade stakeholders have developed their role in relation to the market and wider social networks (Hutchens, 2009).

[Insert Table 1: Fair Trade Stakeholders and Consumer Narratives Promoted in UK Campaigns]

Research Findings and Discussion

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[3] Anderson, M. (2015) *A History of Fair Trade in Contemporary Britain: From civil society campaigns to corporate compliance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Excerpts reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.
[4] Tearfund became a member and charity shareholder of the Fairtrade Foundation in 2007. Traidcraft Exchange (Traidcraft's charity) traces its origins to Tearfund and was a founding member of the Fairtrade Foundation.
[5] Twin Trading's innovative work led to the development of leading Fairtrade brands including: Cafédirect (1991), Divine Chocolate (1998), and Liberation Foods CIC (2007).
[6] For additional details of archive collections and access arrangements for research please see Database of Archives of Non-Governmental Organisations (DANGO) http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/

The paper develops a conceptual framework based on an assessment of Fair Trade's theory(ies) of change and the evolution of the role of the ethical consumer as an agent of change from the 1960s to the present. Four consumer narratives are identified based on an analysis of Fair Trade consumer messaging and the underlying vision, purpose and principles articulated in key policy and strategy documents during this period. The aim of this framework is to investigate how Fair Trade's theory(ies) of change have responded to the wider socio-economic environment and how these developments have informed the conceptualisation of the ethical consumer. The conceptual framework presents a dynamic model of Fair Trade's vision, purpose and principles that highlights significant shifts in ideas and practices, and maps how these changes informed Fair Trade interventions and outputs. Within this framework key tipping points or critical junctures can be identified (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). These shifts were in part a response to external factors such as changes to trade policy, charity law and aid budgets, but also internal changes to Fair Trade ownership models, certification and governance of the movement. It should also be noted that alternative narratives existed and reflected a dynamic process of conflict and challenge (Mouffe, 2013). The final section of the paper concludes by considering the application of the 'citizen-consumer' narrative in emerging markets and the potential for the (re)politicisation of the Fair Trade consumption.

The framework below (Figure 1) presents the four main consumer narratives promoted by Fair Trade networks in their consumer messaging and related calls to action: 1. Simpler living and moral action (1960s – mid 1970s); 2. Co-operation and solidarity (mid 1970s – late 1980s); 3. Consumer demand and choice (late 1980s – early 2000s); 4. Citizen-consumers (early 2000s onwards). The following sections of the paper explore each of these four narratives and draws on multiple case study analysis to illustrate the broader trends in policy and practice as pursued by Fair Trade organisations at the time. The objective of this study is to better understand the underlying motivations of Fair Trade organisations, with the goal of building theory that addresses questions of 'how' and 'why' (Eisenhardt, 1989). The model presented is exploratory and should enable further research by scholars to empirically test these findings in different contexts and settings.

[Insert Figure 1: Fair Trade Theory(ies) of Change: 1960s – 2015]

1. Simpler living and moral action

In recent years, Fair Trade campaigns have attempted to move beyond the boundaries traditionally associated with 'charity'. Bruce Crowther, Fairtrade Towns Co-ordinator at the Fairtrade Foundation, has argued that, 'people see it as charity, but it is not, it is justice. We have to get rid of the charity way of thinking' (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). This tension over the 'charitable aims' of Fair Trade has a longer history that can be traced back to the early involvement of international development NGOs (in particular Oxfam) and Christian agencies (including Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund) that shaped the emergence of Fair Trade practices in the 1960s and 1970s. During this early period of Fair Trade activities there was only a limited attempt to restructure the supply chains that linked the consumer in the UK and the producer in the 'Third World'. This meant that appeals to the consumer were mainly considered symbolic gestures - a signal of moral intent, whereas change would happen through support for aid and development projects.

From the mid-1960s, Oxfam's Helping by Selling (HbS) initiative imported products from the 'Third World' to be sold in Oxfam's shops – the income would then be directed towards Oxfam's international relief and development work. HbS favoured what it described as 'appropriate "labour-intensive" rather than "capital intensive" industries' (Oxfam, 1970). But beyond the immediate benefits of providing employment, there was only limited consideration of the wider impacts of the business. In 1970 Guy Stringer, the newly appointed Commercial Director, noted his concern that 'it is necessary to persuade our organisers and supporters to be less worried about the profit from this operation and to see it much more clearly as a form of aid' (Stringer, 1970). Shoppers were encouraged to buy Fair Trade handcrafts as a demonstration of their wider support for the charity and as a financial contribution towards Oxfam's aid and development programmes. In this way, Fair Trade consumption was primarily viewed as a form of charitable giving.

The early discourse about sustainable consumption in the 1970s was often framed in terms of 'simpler living' – a concept that owed much to the Christian teachings of frugality and simplicity (Newholm & Shaw, 2017). While newly formed campaign groups, such as Friends of the Earth, advocated simpler living on environmental grounds; for Christians, it represented a moral challenge to the 'false ideologies' of materialism. In the United Kingdom, the idea of simpler living was used by a coalition of Christian development agencies, (including Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund), to integrate a consumer campaign into a wider critique of European trade policy. In petitioning the European Community Commissioners on reforms of its trade relations with the 'Third World' they called for 'an international environment where the basic needs of the majority of human mankind get the highest priority' (Christian Aid, 1973). This geo-political critique was also communicated as a call for simpler living. The Christian development agencies argued that little progress would be made in reducing the gap between rich and poor, 'unless the EC [European Community] are prepared to sacrifice the unrestricted advance in their living standards and increased consumption of resources' (Christian Aid, 1973).

Building on this critique of overconsumption, a Christian Aid leaflet from 1977 titled '*A Look at Lifestyle from a Christian Viewpoint*' asked the question, 'What can simple living achieve?' In reply, two main points were made: first, that savings could be donated to Christian Aid and 'would bring benefit to a few of those most in need' (Christian Aid, 1977). In addition, a simpler lifestyle was meant as 'a sign of the sort of change we wish to see in the economic structures of the world – change designed to help the poorest' (Christian Aid, 1977). It was hoped that this example would contribute towards changing public opinion and Government policies on fairer trade and aid. On a personal and household level Christians were challenged to look at their own circumstances and consider the wider implications of their consumer lifestyle choices. Handbooks and leaflets produced by Christian agencies during this period sought to challenge any sense of entitlement felt by consumers living in the Global North. Changes of lifestyle and shopping habits were viewed primarily as charitable moral action and a symbolic statement of Christian concern rather than an economic response to market inequalities and trade justice.

2. Co-operation and solidarity

From the mid-1970s there were new efforts to organise trading practices so that they (re)connected consumers and producers through alternative trade models. For Fair Trade organisations this meant connecting consumers and producers through co-operative trade ventures and working to support policies that would develop closer links with 'progressive' governments in the Global South. Fair Trade interventions also assumed a more 'political' character and this was reflected in a consumer narrative that emphasised the importance of solidarity and co-operation. Moving beyond the ethics of individual consumers, Fair Trade organisations also experimented with ideas of collective consumption and public procurement.

In 1972, Roy Scott, a manager at Oxfam Trading, began work on creating a new type of trading venture. Scott believed that Helping by Selling (HbS) was only, 'a very limited "fair-trade" importing programme' (Scott, 1973). He argued that HbS was too close to the trading values of commercial importers and in a drive to make profit they were ignoring the development potential of international trade. Scott believed that Oxfam's trading operations should act as a practical demonstration of 'the kind of socially "ideal" trade system most supporters of the Third World believe is necessary' (Scott, 1973). Scott's solution was to remove the middleman and form an international co-operative, 'a "bridge" linking worker-producers of very poor countries with the ordinary shopper here in Europe' (Oxfam, 1973). Scott proposed an organisational structure that would eventually lead to Bridge being run jointly by the consumers and producers independent of Oxfam. This venture was presented as, 'a brave independent movement liberating producers entirely from continuing charity support' (Scott, 1975).

Launched as a new subsidiary company of Oxfam, Bridge's mission statement from November 1975 stated that it was, 'dedicated towards providing the best possible employment, earnings, working and social

environments for producers; and fair prices, quality and service for customers' (Oxfam, 1975). This was not the 'socially ideal' model outlined in Scott's original plan, but Bridge did represent a genuine attempt to prioritise a more equal relationship between the producer and consumer. Oxfam was now committed to an international trade programme that went beyond the considerations of commercial buyers in order to ensure that those producers making goods, imported and sold by Oxfam, would receive a 'fair' return for their work.

From the early 1980s, support for Fair Trade formed part of the aid and development narrative promoted by the official aid agencies of the Churches in the UK. Although Traidcraft had historical links to Tearfund, its non-evangelical approach to Fair Trade allowed it to engage successfully with both Catholic and Anglican congregations. Following its early partnership with Christian Aid, in 1984 Traidcraft produced a mail order catalogue for CAFOD. One of the items featured in the first catalogue was Nicaraguan Coffee. Commenting on its support for Nicaragua, CAFOD stated that 'new Nicaragua', 'raises fundamental questions as to the role of the Church and Christians in the construction of a different kind of society outside the capitalist or communist moulds' (CAFOD, 1985). CAFOD saw its role in Nicaragua as consistent with its wider goals of presenting Third World countries with, 'a real alternative for development, independent of alignment with either of the power blocs' (CAFOD, 1985). While simpler living may have been an important precursor to sustainable and ethical consumption, it was apparent that for Fair Trade to represent perspectives of the Global South, it would need to address issues of poverty and inequality. This required a theory of change that saw fairness not only as an issue for individual morality, but one of justice and liberation (Gutierrez, 1971).

Established in 1985, Twin Trading represented a new approach to Fair Trade based on the ideals of international trade unionism and labour solidarity rather than charity or international development. Twin Trading's Statement of Principles declared that, 'Trade Unions in First and Third World countries should seek opportunities for meeting together to draw up a code of labour for manufacturing industries in order to universalise best practices, such as the ILO Code' (TWIN, 1985a). With backing from the Greater London Council (GLC), there was interest in developing new markets that would utilise the resources of public procurement and were less reliant on mainstream retail channels. Oliver Le Brun, Director of Twin Trading set out an ambitious plan for Fair Trade collective consumption: 'If we want to develop more direct and permanent trading links between the south and the north we have to open new opportunities for the distribution of Third World products. We have to explore the social market: the supply departments of local authorities, their purchasing associations and civic catering, universities, polytechnics, schools, social services, hospitals, trade unions, labour clubs etc.' (Le Brun, 1985, p. 7). The abolition of the GLC by Thatcher's Conservative government put an end to these initial experiments with the social market. However, funding was secured for Twin Trading and they would later establish pioneering Fair Trade companies such as Cafédirect (1991), Divine Chocolate (1998) and Liberation Foods CIC (2007).

3. Consumer demand and choice

By the late 1980s the idea of green, or ethical, consumerism was starting to gain greater mainstream recognition. Following the success of publications such as, *The Green Consumer's Supermarket Shopping Guide* (Elkington & Hailes, 1989), leaders within the Fair Trade movement saw an opportunity to adapt their approach to consumer politics. The new idea was that consumer choice would drive pro-social and environmental change in business behaviour. By voting with their wallets, consumer demand for 'green' and ethical products would send a clear signal to the markets that would lead to improvements in conditions for those at the end of the supply chain. Fair Trade began to be characterised as a 'unique solution to the market failures in the global trading system' and as a 'consumer choice movement' outside the scope of government regulation or trade policies (Nicholls & Opal, 2005).

Perhaps the most vocal proponent for 'ethical consumerism', among the Fairtrade Foundation's membership was a small research organisation called New Consumer. Established in February 1989 by Richard Adams, New Consumer advocated a new approach to consumer politics that would begin to define

the public profile of the Fairtrade Foundation. Adams believed that green, or ethical consumerism, heralded the way for a 'radical rethink about consumer power' (Bridge News, 1990). The opportunity that ethical consumerism represented was illustrated by a simple comparison between consumer spending and levels of charitable giving. In 1988, the British public gave about £1.5 billion to charity and in the same year spent £280 billion on consumer goods and services. This meant that for every six pence given to charity £10 was spent on consumer goods (Adams, 1989a). At one level this was an attempt to reconnect with earlier debates about 'trade not aid', but the context and questions of agency had shifted from government trade policy to individual shopping choices. In 1991, New Consumer published its own shopping guide – *Shopping for a Better World: A Quick and Easy Guide to Socially Responsible Shopping*. The message was that, 'the everyday shopper needn't be a "problem" but can be part of the solution' (Adams et al., 1991). Reaching this newly informed 'ethical consumer' would not rely solely on alternative outlets and world shops. Adams believed that the supermarket take-up of 'environmentally friendly' products could be extended without too much difficulty to 'people-friendly' products. Adams argued that, 'when it comes to much of mainstream business I believe that we don't need to start a fight with people who can be won over' (Adams, 1989a).

New Consumer was not alone in its advocacy of ethical consumerism as a driver of change. By the early 1990s there was a growing enthusiasm amongst British alternative trade organisations (ATOs) about the possibility of harnessing the power of the 'green consumer'. Oxfam Trading's Press Officer, Caroline Lucas, citing the success of the Body Shop highlighted that, 'at this time of unprecedented consumer power and awareness, alternative trading organisations must seize the opportunity to broaden the debate: we need to demonstrate that for a product to be environmentally friendly alone is still not enough. It must be people and development friendly too' (Bridge News, 1990). Oxfam Trading, as a founding member of the Fairtrade Foundation, was particularly important in reinforcing the idea that by purchasing Fair Trade products consumers could become agents of change. Oxfam's credibility as a principled and pragmatic 'thought leader' was significant in engaging the development agencies and building a broad consensus around the role of the 'ethical consumer'.

This move by key Fair Trade organisations towards a market-driven concept of ethical consumption did not go unchallenged. The Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA) was one of the most outspoken critics of this new direction for Fair Trade. Established in June 1987, as a worker co-operative, the ECRA's main publication *Ethical Consumer* positioned itself as 'a magazine dedicated to the promotion of the ideals behind "ethical consumption"' (Ethical Consumer, 1989). ECRA openly criticised many corporate ethical initiatives as simply 'tokenism' or 'niche-marketing' with little connection to, or impact on, their main operations. In an early critique of the Fairtrade Mark, they argued that a product-specific approach did not address key questions about ownership and therefore 'disempowers consumers because it perpetuates the idea that there is nothing to be gained from understanding the companies behind the brand names' (Ethical Consumer, 1991, p. 23). In an editorial from December 1991, the *Ethical Consumer* stated that, 'the support of a number of the same UK Third World charities and development groups for *The Global Consumer*, and a related "Fair Trade Mark" project, appears to be a very worrying shift on their part to the political right' (Ethical Consumer, 1991, p. 23).

The ECRA argued that product certification offered only limited incentive for companies to drive improvements throughout their supply chain - instead new ethical products could be launched to cater specifically for the demands of a niche market. This critique challenged the scalability of the Fairtrade Foundation's business model and questioned the broader narrative of social change that underpinned the idea of mainstream ethical consumption. For the most part, the ECRA's insistence that 'ownership mattered' seemed to be out of step with the political and economic thinking of the time. The idea that Fair Trade was a consumer choice model was gaining traction and questions of ownership appeared to represent a throwback to the Fair Trade campaigns of the 1970's (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). Strategically, by defining Fair Trade as a consumer choice movement the Fairtrade Foundation was able to actively engage commercial partners and licensees which otherwise may have been wary of the idea of 'alternative' or 'solidarity' trade.

4. Citizen-consumers

In the UK, the Fairtrade Foundation's Annual Report for 2007/08 was the first time that it had defined its mission in terms of, 'bringing together producers and consumers in a citizens' movement for change' (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008). Prior to this, discussions about the role of the consumer had mainly referred to 'consumer demand', 'consumer choice' and 'consumer guarantee'. In 2009 the idea of consumer citizenship was also introduced in the Charter of Fair Trade Principles agreed by the World Fair Trade Organization and Fairtrade International. The Charter states that Fair Trade 'enables citizens to make a difference to producers through their actions and choices as consumers' (WFTO & FLO, 2009, p. 6). For the Fair Trade movement the idea of citizen-consumers offered a new way of understanding the role of ethical consumption as a driver of change. It was not just about raising awareness of the negative effects of unfair trade, the bigger challenge was to demonstrate what an alternative would look like and how change happens. There was also a wider recognition that Fair Trade interventions were only a small part of a much bigger system.

[Insert Figure 2: Fairtrade Theory of Change: Citizen-Consumers]

In December 2013, following a series of workshops and meetings with small producer and worker representatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Fairtrade International published the first version of its Fairtrade Theory of Change document. The rationale for developing a Theory of Change was primarily to improve the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems - however, it was also noted that it could be used to 'inform communication about Fairtrade, both internally and externally, and help ensure there is a common understanding about Fairtrade's goals and approach' (Fairtrade International, 2013, p.3). The Theory of Change framework was structured according to a 'results chain' depicting four steps in the change process: interventions, outputs, outcomes and impacts. However, following a stakeholder review of the first draft, it was agreed that the Theory of Change should include a more detailed articulation of how Fairtrade brings about changes through interventions in the supply chain with businesses and consumers, and through advocacy and campaigning (Fairtrade International, 2013, p.4).

The revised Theory of Change was published by Fairtrade International in September 2015. This second version included two notable additions: a focus on the role of 'citizen-consumers' and greater attention towards 'emerging markets'. Fairtrade interventions for making trade fair now referred to 'building and sustaining Fairtrade markets jointly with producer and worker organisations, business and citizen-consumers' (Fairtrade International, 2015, p. 28). Specifically, this meant 'providing opportunities for citizen-consumers to use their purchasing power' and 'establishing the Fairtrade concept and brand in emerging markets' (Fairtrade International, 2015, p. 28). This new consumer narrative was most clearly articulated in Fairtrade's outcomes (see Figure 2). The notion of citizen-consumers actively choosing verified products was combined with, and constrained by, a rejection of those products that did not meet the required standards. The Fairtrade narrative of consumer demand was now bound by the limits of a qualified notion of citizenship, and informed by ideas of simpler living (Kallhoff, 2016). Likewise, the narrative of co-operation and solidarity was reshaped to reflect a shift away from the geo-political concerns of 'progressive governments' and a greater focus on uniting producers, workers, consumers and activists in a global agenda for change.

An emphasis on supporting emerging markets was also developed in Fairtrade International's global strategy document published in January 2016. In a statement on global consumer power, Fairtrade International outlined how: 'From 2016-2020 we will establish a truly global support base for Fairtrade, putting products on ever more shelves across the world. We will prioritize growth in Brazil and India, building on already solid progress which demonstrates the enthusiasm of *shoppers* in producer countries to champion farmers and workers locally as well as fair trade globally' (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.14). Despite ambitions of building a global consumer movement there was a linguistic return to associating the identity of the consumer with that of the 'shopper'. In creating new markets for South-South Fairtrade there was also an opportunity to articulate a more holistic perspective of 'producers' in the Global South - one that recognised their participation as consumers and citizens. The reluctance to reframe the dominant

discourse about producer participation in Fairtrade was perhaps symptomatic of the wider challenges of building inclusive multi-stakeholder governance structures (Bennett, 2017).

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

Recent studies by Oxfam have argued that there is a need for broader thinking by business, government and civil society about how change happens in order to be more creative in devising strategies and more adept at facing the huge challenges that confront our societies and planet (Krznaric, 2007; Green, 2016). Despite some evidence of an 'historic turn' in organisation studies, there is still a need for scholars of business ethics and corporate social responsibility to pay more attention to historical dimensions of social change (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Rowlinson, 2013). This research adds to the existing knowledge of Fair Trade, and an understanding of how change happens, by moving from a 'universalist and presentist' focus on individual consumer practices to a historically contextualised investigation of the concept and narrative of ethical consumerism and its connection to the vision, purpose and principles of Fair Trade.

This study has been guided by three main research questions and a summary of the findings are presented below:

RQ1. How has the Fair Trade movement defined ethical consumption in relation to its theory(ies) of change?

The narrative of ethical consumption has been central to defining Fair Trade's approach to making trade fair. From the first meeting of the Fairtrade Foundation, the steering committee identified consumer agency as the key driver of change, 'The Fair Trade Mark is an ambition to engage UK consumer power on a significant scale, to give a fairer deal to Third World producers of basic commodities' (Oxfam, 1990). However, a longer historical perspective reveals the dynamic nature of the concept of ethical consumption and the multiple consumer narratives that have been promoted by Fair Trade networks: 1. Simpler living and moral action, 2. Co-operation and solidarity, 3. Consumer demand and choice, 4. Citizen-consumers. These four narratives not only reflected different approaches to the consumer, but more broadly, different theories of change.

Ethical consumption has been seen as an effective strategic tool for civil society campaigns, however its use is not without challenges. Goodman et al. (2012) highlighted the potentially problematic nature of what they term 'spatial projections' in relation to how NGOs craft messages and articulate specific causes. NGOs may selectively choose messages and images from the Global South in order to filter what is then projected back to consumers. Findings of this study show that Fair Trade campaigns have also used 'ethical projections' that are reflected onto the consumer to provide an ethical narrative for activity that might otherwise be termed as 'passive consumption' (Doherty et al., 2013) or 'ordinary consumption' (Gregson and Ferdous, 2015). This 'ethical projection' by NGO campaigns raises questions about the identity, role and limits of the consumer as an agent of change.

RQ2. Which ethics and whose ethics are used to frame the politics of Fair Trade consumption?

Previous studies have highlighted the role of Christian organisations as an important stakeholder in shaping both individual ethical responses and collective campaigns such as Fair Trade towns (Barnett et al., 2010). This paper locates the historical role of Christian NGOs in promoting the Fair Trade narrative of simpler living and moral action; and explores the tensions in how Christian ethics were revealed, and sometimes hidden, based on a concern that 'Christian language' might alienate Fair Trade consumers (Adams, 1989b). This may have been a pragmatic response to a predominantly secular society, however it should not be assumed that the logic of the market, and the primacy of consumer choice, was an inevitable outcome of mainstreaming the ethics of Fair Trade.

In contrast, a counter-narrative of co-operation and solidarity was a significant, but short-lived, experiment in building an ethics of trade justice. Shared ideas and networks between Fair Trade organisations and diverse stakeholders, including international trade unionists, Nicaraguan solidarity campaigners and

liberation theologians - demonstrated the possibility of alternative theories of change. This represented a new political dimension and an ethics that was inspired, if not necessarily led, by the Global South. Some of these ideas re-emerged, or were reformulated, as part of Fair Trade's citizen-consumer narrative. Here we find a politics of civil society where active citizens and effective states are central to building a coherent theory of change (Green, 2012). Sustainable consumption is now primarily defined as collective not individual, and is seen as connected to public policy and public procurement. This perhaps represents a new attempt to move Fair Trade consumption from the ethical to the political (Clarke, 2008). Fair Trade organisations are not alone in their attempts to reshape the discourse on ethical consumption. Recent campaigns by the Food Ethics Council have also highlighted the need to shift from a consumer to a citizen mindset in order to reorientate the food system and reframe the basis on which policy decisions - both in government and organisations - are made (Food Ethics Council, 2017).

RQ3. What happens when Fair Trade campaigns begin to engage with consumers in emerging markets?

Commenting on the progress and challenges of mainstreaming ethical trade, Blowfield (1999) noted that: 'One of the successes of ethical trade is that it has opened the North's eyes to conditions in the South, but it will require belief in the South's capacity and ability to define its own ethical goals if Northern companies, civil society organisations and consumers are to relinquish the control over the ethical trade movement that they currently exert'. There is evidence that Fair Trade is responding to the critique of its paternalistic North/South decision-making processes (Fairtrade International, 2011). But it is yet to be seen whether this represents a genuine shift in the movement's centre of gravity towards the Global South. There may be lessons to learn from the experience of other civil society campaigns and the wider consumer movement, such as Consumers International (Hilton, 2009; Fazal, 2011). The concept of Fair Trade citizen-consumers could be extended in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of ethical consumption - one that better represents the complexities of the global market and provides new frames to challenge and explore meanings of consumer responsibility, living wage and trade justice.

While the majority of consumer research on Fair Trade to date has focused on the Global North, recently Fair Trade products have been introduced into new markets such as India, Brazil, South Africa and Kenya (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.14). These emerging markets are still significantly under-represented within the extant academic literature (Biggs & Lewis, 2009; Andorfer & Liebe, 2012; Raynolds & Bennett, 2015, Gregson & Ferdous, 2015). Fair Trade's involvement and activity as a market creator and innovator in the Global South may also have wider relevance for business strategy and commercial operations in an increasingly global business environment (Doherty et al., 2015). Whether it is recognising opportunities at the bottom of the pyramid (Prahalad, 2005), or marketing products to the newly affluent middle class (Sheth, 2011), the geographies of production and consumption appear increasingly fluid and dynamic.

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Table 1:

Fair Trade Stakeholders and Consumer Narratives Promoted in UK Campaigns

			Consumer Narratives Promoted by Fair Trade Networks			
Organisation	Established / Active in Fair Trade Campaigns	Fairtrade Foundation Member	Simpler living and moral action	Co-operation and solidarity	Consumer demand and choice	Citizen-consumers
Oxfam	1942/ 1967	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christian Aid	1945/ 1973	✓	✓	✓		
CAFOD	1960/ 1973	✓	✓	✓		
Tearfund	1968/ 1974	✓	✓	✓		
Twin Trading	1985			✓	✓	
Ethical Consumer	1987				✓	✓
New Consumer	1989	✓			✓	
Fairtrade Foundation	1992	✓			✓	✓

Figure 1: Fair Trade Theory(ies) of Change: 1960s - 2015

Fair Trade Consumer Narratives and Call to Action

Consumer Narratives Promoted by Fair Trade Movement and Networks

| 1. **Simpler living and moral action** 1960s - mid 1970s | 2. **Co-operation and solidarity** Mid 1970s-1980s | 3. **Consumer demand and choice** Late 1980s - early 2000s | 4. **Citizen-consumers** Early 2000s - 2015 |

Decreasing influence as new consumer narratives are promoted

Campaign Call to Action: Articulated in Fair Trade Vision, Purpose and Principles

| 1. Reduce personal consumption and encourage charitable giving | 2. Support for co-operatives & progressive governments in developing countries | 3. Build scale and impact utilising mainstream free market mechanisms | 4. Campaign to change trade structures and support sustainable consumption |

| **Individual Consumption** | **Collective Consumption** | **Individual Consumption** | **Collective Consumption** |

Figure 2: Fairtrade Theory of Change - A detailed description of interventions, outputs and outcomes in relation to citizen-consumers

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<u>Outcomes in Fairtrade's Theory of Change for Making Trade Fair</u>

Growing proportion of citizen-consumers actively choose products which are verified as fairly traded and reject products which are not, and encourage others to do the same.

The Fair Trade movement unites citizens in their roles as producers, workers, consumers and activists around a global agenda for change in the way trade is structured by governments and practiced by business.

Growing public awareness and understanding of the negative consequences of unfair trade influences social and cultural norms around consumption.

Policy makers recognize and respond to the collective power of citizens and civil society in setting fairer terms for trade.

<u>Outputs in Fairtrade's Theory of Change for Making Trade Fair</u>

Businesses and sectors with unfair trading practices come under increasing pressure from citizen-consumers, civil society, governments, the media and investors to reform the way they trade.

Stronger partnerships and alliances between Fairtrade and other civil society organizations and institutions to promote fair and sustainable trade collectively.

Citizen-consumer support for Fairtrade and engagement in grassroots campaigning around unfair trade demonstrates level of public concern to policy makers.

<u>Fairtrade Interventions for Making Trade Fair</u>

Establishing the Fairtrade concept and brand in emerging markets and deepening public understanding of Fair Trade values and principles as markets mature.

Providing opportunities for citizen-consumers to use their purchasing power to demonstrate their support for small producers and workers and their opposition to unfair trade.

Extract adapted from Fairtrade International (2015) *Fairtrade Theory of Change.*