

## Panel Session: Consumer Perspective

Panel Chair: Amelie Bernzen

Participants: Eszter Toth, Andrea Reyes, Ida Fartsi & Ivan Dufeu, Rebecca Anns

Abstracts:

1. **Toth, E.** *The consumers' perception of fair trade in Hungary*

Fair trade is one of the best-known ethical trademarks in Europe, yet it is still in its infancy in Hungary. There were attempts to promote this concept in the early 2000s, but these attempts were largely unsuccessful, as the fair trade trademark is still little known among the Hungarians. Not only is the phenomenon a gray area among the population, but the national academic literature on the subject is also limited. In my presentation, I would like to discuss Hungarian consumers' perceptions of the fair trade, describing their purchasing habits with regard to fair trade products and the factors that most influence these habits. Market research involving 500 people shows that although Hungarians feel sympathy for the movement's goals in principle, when asked about additional spending, their willingness to pay is extremely low. Their price sensitivity is also evident from their answers to several questions.

Nevertheless, purchases of certified products have increased a hundredfold (!) in Hungary over the past 10 years, which shows that spending is not the result of conscious purchasing decisions. Among the factors influencing the purchase of fair trade products, the availability (or lack thereof) of information is considered the most critical. At the same time, it turned out that the place of purchase was not a strong determining factor. The strongest element of the path analysis established during the research is the concern for fair trade as a movement and the positive perception of fair trade products, which naturally has a supportive effect on purchasing.

2. **Reyes, A.** *From Aesthetic Authority to Ethical Legitimacy: The Role of Creative Directors in Shaping Sustainable and Fair Trade Fashion Brands*

This paper examines the role of creative directors as ethical and symbolic leaders within sustainability-oriented and fair trade-aligned fashion companies. While fair trade scholarship has extensively analyzed institutional standards, certification systems, and supply-chain governance, less attention has been paid to how ethical commitments are translated into market-facing narratives that shape consumer trust and brand legitimacy. In fashion, creative directors occupy a uniquely influential position at the intersection of aesthetics, culture, and commerce, making them pivotal actors in how sustainability and fair trade principles are interpreted, communicated, and sustained across organizational life stages.

Drawing on Upper Echelons Theory and symbolic leadership perspectives, this study conceptualizes creative directors as meaning-makers who frame ethical values through design choices, storytelling, and public identity. Building on research in creative industries, the paper argues that creative directors play a critical role in aligning sustainability commitments with brand identity, thereby influencing consumer perceptions, market legitimacy, and long-term brand loyalty. This influence is particularly salient in start-up and scaling organizations, where formal governance structures are still emerging and ethical narratives often substitute for institutionalized controls.

Using illustrative examples from the global fashion industry and insights from a broader leadership and sustainability research program, the paper highlights how creative directors' sustainability orientation shapes whether fair trade commitments are perceived as authentic or symbolic. The analysis also considers how leadership transitions in creative roles may disrupt or reinforce ethical narratives, with implications for trust among consumers and fair trade stakeholders. By foregrounding the cultural and symbolic dimensions of leadership, this paper contributes to fair trade scholarship by shifting attention from compliance mechanisms to meaning-making processes in ethical markets. Practically, it offers insights for fair trade organizations, fashion brands, and policymakers seeking to strengthen the credibility and durability of sustainability commitments through leadership and communication strategies.

3. **Fartsi, I.; Dufeu, I.** *The determinants of the decision to purchase fair trade tea: consideration of cognitive factors*

The value proposition of fair trade is intangible and ethical in nature. A fair-trade product is assumed, *ceteris paribus*, to be more conducive to sustainable development and fairness in international trade. This quality attribute is based on a set of criteria defined in the specifications of fair-trade certification labels. The fact that the value proposition is explicitly detailed in a controlled and freely accessible specification, and that it relates to quality attributes that cannot be verified through consumption, is a distinctive feature that should be considered in marketing. Actually, the "fairness" quality of a food product cannot be properly assessed unless the consumer possesses a certain level of knowledge related to these criteria. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study specifically examines the role of consumers' knowledge on their purchase intentions for a fair-trade product, namely tea : subjective knowledge, that is, what they believe they know, but also some dimensions of objective knowledge. A theoretical model was developed and tested using a sample of 819 French consumers through an online survey. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling. The results show that subjective knowledge significantly and positively influences purchase intention, as do some dimensions of objective knowledge. Subjective norms and perceived behavioural control also exert a positive effect on this intention. This study highlights the importance of integrating perceived knowledge into the analysis of ethical consumption behaviour and provides concrete recommendations for fair trade awareness campaigns. Furthermore, it contributes to extending the TPB model by incorporating a cognitive dimension that has been relatively underexplored in the context of responsible food consumption.

4. **Anns, R.** *Market preparedness for policy interventions towards domestic sustainable markets: A study on Thai rice supply chain*

Climate change is a critical global issue affecting environments, economies, and societies. Sustainable development, which meets current needs without compromising future generation emerged in the 1987 Brundtland Report, requiring transformation across sectors, including business, where sustainability must be central. Integrating sustainability into market strategies allows businesses to attract environmentally conscious consumers, differentiate in a competitive market, and contribute to a sustainable future. This paper examines the Thai rice supply chain using Fairtrade as a voluntary sustainability standard, exploring consumer awareness, factors influencing sustainable market practices, and market readiness for sustainable products in the Global South. Based on the research

project conducted in Thailand by engaging university students by Fairtrade International, it uses desk and field methods to assess the Thai rice supply chain, Thai rice market, and Thai customers. The study is indicative of the market readiness for sustainable products and recommends that state policies are synonymous with established private sustainable standards to strengthen domestic sustainable market ecosystem.