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FAIR TRADE SUPPORTING GROUP: WHAT THEY KNOW, FEEL AND PREFER

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Abstract

Against free trade, another type of trade, namely Fair Trade, offers to small producers in the underdeveloped countries of the Third World a guaranteed minimum price for each product. Fair Trade increased rapidly during the last decade in Europe and North America, while in Greece it has been recently introduced by the Altromercato shops in Athens and Thessaloniki. The Fair Trade Hellas also developed a group of supporters.

This paper presents the results of a preliminary on-line research study that examined supporters' intentional purchasing behaviour towards all available fair trade products; also their preferences about a new fair trade marmalade. The investigation included a set of variables that may influence future behaviour, such as consumers' level of awareness, their prior buying experiences, their attitudes towards fair principles and objectives, as well as selected demographic and psychographic characteristics of the sample.

It was found that supporters would like to buy mostly fair snacks, coffee, pasta, rice, sugar and souvenirs. With regard to a new fair marmalade, supporters prefer this to be offered at a reasonable price and to be organic by all means. Also, it might be produced in two types, one that might contain nuts and another that might contain honey. It was also found that these consumers hold very strong positive attitudes towards principles, objectives and effectiveness of the fair trade movement. They are very scrupulous people, who share strong universalistic and collectivistic values, while low levels of power and individualism.

Though limited due to the small response rate, the results of this study open significant paths for future research in order to understand better the insights of the ethical consumption that concerns the fair trade products in Greece.

Key Words: Fair Trade, Supporters' Group, Consumer Behaviour

1. Introduction

The capitalistic free trade regime keeps in poverty the majority of humanity, especially populations in Africa and Latin America. The aggressive liberalization of international trade has given tremendous power to the big monopolistic business. The relevant evolution has been aided by international institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as the World Trade Organization. Multinational organizations push prices under cost and make it impossible for small producers to compete on the market place.

For example, with reference to coffee, there are five big business (Philip Morris, Nestle, Sare Lee, Procter and Gamble and Tchibo), which control around the 70% of the global market (Schmelzer, 2006). In the meanwhile, the level of capital concentration constantly increases (Gibbon, 2005). In the coffee trade, exporters received US\$ 10-12 per year during the eighties, while only half of it, US\$ 5.5, in 2003 (Osorio, 2004). On the other hand, retail sales in developed countries increased from US\$30 billion in the 1990 to around US\$80 billion in 2003 (Osorio, 2004).

Against free trade, another type of trade, namely Fair Trade, offers to small producers in the underdeveloped countries a guaranteed minimum price, usually above the current world price for each product. According to the **International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT)** Fair Trade aims to offer fairer trade relations, protection of human and working rights and support to economic development to the less developed countries (IFAT, 2007).

Fair Trade increased rapidly during the last decade in Europe and North America, while in Greece it has been recently introduced by the Altrmercato shops in Athens and Thessaloniki. These shops deliver a plethora of fair products and they are expanding their product line frequently. The steering group (that established Fair Trade in Greece) also developed a group of supporters, who are usually the first to buy the fair products, join the Fair Trade events and happenings etc. The management of Altrmercato shops holds a number of ideas concerning new product development, among which there might be a traditional marmalade being produced by isolated small producers.

This paper aims to present the results of a research study that examined supporters' intentional purchasing behaviour towards all available Fair Trade products, as well as their preferences about a new fair marmalade. The investigation included a set of variables that may influence future behaviour, such as consumers' level of awareness, their prior buying experiences, their attitudes towards fair principles and objectives as well as selected demographic and psychographic characteristics of the sample.

2. Review of the literature

From a marketing point of view, the Fair Trade is considered to be included in the so-called ethical consumption, i.e. the consumption that takes into account the societal norms or, in other words, '*what is good for the society*' (Smith, 1990). Rather recently, in a number of field research papers qualitative or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology has been used to investigate consumers' fair behaviour in relevance to other ethical issues, such as slavery (McDonagh, 2002), environmental protection (Lureiro and Lotade, 2005; De Ferran and Grunert, 2007), labour standards and discrimination (Rode *et al.*, 2008).

Most of the studies conclude that there are beliefs and values, which might influence purchasing choices for the Fair Trade products, such as environmental concern, respect for human rights (De Ferran and Grunert, 2007), concern for working conditions (Strong, 1996), idealism (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2003), ethical obligation

and self-identity (Shaw *et al.*, 1999, 2000, 2003). There are also product attributes such as brand, flavour and label, which were found able to influence the consumers' purchasing behaviour (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2003). Implications have been made that the specialized stores should emphasize social responsibility and social-oriented values in their communication, whereas the super markets should offer quality products and constant availability of the Fair Trade products (De Ferran and Grunert, 2007).

Mintel research (2004) suggested that in 2003 only the 28.3% of consumers actually bought Fair Trade products and the majority of these were one-off purchases (Nicholls and Lee, 2006). Cowe and Williams (2000) argued that although most surveys reveal that around 30% of the population is particularly motivated to buy ethical products, these products make up only fewer than 3% of their individual markets. This phenomenon has been named the "30:3 syndrome". Nicholls and Lee (2006), who investigated children, argued that there is an urgent need to develop meaningful Fair Trade brands that combine strong brand knowledge and positive brand images to bridge the gap between ethical attitudes and ethical purchase behaviour. Lastly, there is a recent exploratory consumers' survey of ours (Delistavrou and Tilikidou, 2009), implemented in Thessaloniki, Greece focusing on consumers' intentional purchasing behaviour.

3. Theory and Method

It was assumed that what supporters' knew and feel about Fair Trade, as well as their prior experience in fair buying might influence their future purchasing behaviour. Also, that demographic and psychographic characteristics might add to what we know about fair trade supporters. Specifically, with regard to the new marmalade, it was assumed that conjoint measurement might help in determining the mostly desired new product attributes. Five attributes were selected to be investigated: price (€2.30, €2.70, €3.00 per380gr), organic or not, calories (regular or light, 25% less sugar) or not, sweetener (honey or sugar) and with nuts or not. The orthogonal design provided ten combinations.

4. Questionnaire Content

An **Awareness of Fair Trade** four items Guttman's scale: 1 = I have seen Fair Trade products, 2 = I have seen a Fair Trade shop, 3 = I have visited the Fair Trade shop and 4= I have bought a/some Fair Trade product/s.

A **Past Purchasing Behaviour** scale including 15 items (one for each Fair Trade product category) being measured on a five-point satisfaction scale from 0 = Not at all satisfied to 4 = Absolutely satisfied.

A **Place of Purchase** five items scale: 1= From abroad, 2 = From an S/M, 3 = From the Altromercato in Athens, 4 = From the Altromercato in Thessaloniki.

An **Intentional Purchasing Behaviour** scale, including the same items with those of the **Past Behaviour** scale, served as the main dependent variable of the investigation. It was measured on a five-point possibility scale from 0 = Totally Unlikely to 4 = Very Likely.

A **Fair Trade Attitudes** scale, which was purposively developed for the requirements of this research during a long, antecedent procedure. Details that concern the measure development procedure have been described elsewhere (see Tilikidou and Delistavrou, ---). The final scale that was used in this survey included 24 items, measured on a five-point Likert scale. The Fair Trade Attitudes scale had been tested in an exploratory consumers' survey (Delistavrou and Tilikidou, ---) and provided a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.8792. As it indicated an accepted level of reliability

according to Robinson *et al.* (1991), it was judged suitable to be used in the supporters' group as well. In this study the scale provided a 0.7780 Cronbach's alpha.

Five demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, income and occupation) were added in the investigation, being measured on the N.S.S.G. scales. The following four psychographic scales were also employed: **Universalism** (six items) and **Power** (three items) - adopted from the Schwartz's (1992) *List of Values* - as well as **Collectivism** (four items) and **Individualism** (three items) - adopted from Shrum and McCarty (2001). They provided the following Cronbach's values: Universalism ($\alpha=0.7206$), Power ($\alpha=0.7942$), Collectivism ($\alpha=0.8582$) and Individualism ($\alpha=0.6533$). With the exception of the Individualism scale, all other reliability coefficients fell well within the acceptable limits according to Robinson *et al.* (1991).

The ten combinations of the marmalade attributes were presented to the respondents by the ten following cards:

Marmalade 1: Organic, With Honey, No Squarely, €2.30/380gr

Marmalade 2: No Squarely, €2.70/380gr

Marmalade 3: With Honey, Light (25% less sugar), No Squarely, €3.00/380 gr

Marmalade 4: Organic, Light (25% less sugar), No Squarely, €2.70/380gr

Marmalade 5: With Honey, With Nuts, No Squarely, €2.70/380gr

Marmalade 6: Organic, With Nuts, No Squarely, €3.00/380gr

Marmalade 7: Light (25% less sugar), With Nuts, No Squarely €2.30/380gr

Marmalade 8: Organic, Light (25% less sugar), With Honey, With Nuts €2.70/380gr

Marmalade 9: Organic, Light (25% less sugar), With Honey, No Squarely €3.00/380gr

Marmalade10: Organic, With Honey, With Nuts, No squarely, €2.30/380gr

The respondents were asked to rate each one of the marmalade combinations on a rating scale from 0 to 10 and then tick whether they were going to buy (or not) each marmalade. The questionnaires were delivered through internet to the Fair Trade Hellas supporters' data base but the response rate (20%) was not very satisfactory.

5. Results

The **Awareness** scale indicated that 93.9% of the supporters have previously bought a fair product. The **Place of Purchase** indicated that most of the supporters (83.6%) had made their prior purchases from the Altromercato in Thessaloniki. The **Past Purchasing Behaviour** takes theoretical values from 0 to 60 and provided a Mean of 29.4286, which indicates an average overall satisfaction of their prior experiences. The higher satisfaction Means (above 3 in a 0 to 4 scale) were found with reference to sugar, snacks, souvenirs and coffee. The lower Means were found with reference to cosmetics and clothes.

The **Intentional Purchasing Behaviour** scale takes theoretical values from 0 to 60 and provided a Mean of 43.6047, which indicates that supporters are rather likely to make a future purchase of fair products. With reference to product categories, the higher Means were obtained by snacks, coffee, pasta, rice, sugar and souvenirs.

With regard to the personality variables it is observed that the **Universalism** scale takes theoretical values from 0 to 24 and provided a Mean of 21.9394, which is a very high level of universalistic values; on the opposite, the **Power** scale takes theoretical values from 0 to 12 and provided a Mean of 2.7273, which indicates an overall absolute disagreement to the power values. The **Collectivism** scale takes theoretical values from 0 to 16 and provided a Mean of 11.7846, which indicates a general agreement to the collectivistic values, while on the opposite the **Individualism** scale takes theoretical values from 2 to 12 and provided a rather low Mean of 4.7077.

The **Fair Trade Attitudes** scale takes theoretical values from 0 to 96 and provided a Mean of 77.7500, which indicates a generally rather high level of positive attitudes towards fair trade principles.

According to the item means (Table 1) supporters mostly believe in the ability of Fair Trade to assist the Third World producers to earn a fair income, decent living standards, human and working rights; this is because Fair Trade can secure a minimum price for each product. They also believe that buying fair products simultaneously informs and educates consumers in a socially responsible behaviour. On the other hand, supporters strongly disagree that Fair Trade claims are nothing more than advertising tricks, that it is not their own responsibility to help the less developed countries, that it is aimless to buy fair products since not many other people do so or that they harm the Greek products by preferring the Fair Trade products. Also, they do not think that they should be exclusively interested in the financial problems of their own country.

Table 1

Fair Trade Attitudes

		Mean	Std. Dev.
D01	I stand for a Fair Trade network, which can ensure a fair price for each product of the less developed countries	3.3692	0.8762
D02	Fair Trade may contribute to the balancing of inequality, which rules the free world trade	3.2687	0.8087
D03	Fair Trade is able to assist the Third World producers to sell their production and earn a fair income	4.0597	4.9875
D04	Fair Trade may contribute to the abolition of poverty in the economically weak countries	3.2090	0.8264
D05	The problem of the economically weak countries can not be faced by such movements as Fair Trade	1.5224	0.9105
D06	Every man is entitled to decent standards of living as well as health care, education, security and democracy	3.9403	0.2955
D07	Human and working rights of people in the Third World should be protected	3.9254	0.3169
D08	Fair Trade is able to contribute to the protection of the human and working rights of people in the Third World	3.1940	0.7228
D09	Eventually Fair Trade is going to assist to the development of infrastructure for security, education, health care and social welfare in the economically weak countries	3.0448	0.7474
D10	Fair Trade may contribute to the abolition of child labour	2.9701	0.8343
D11	Fair Trade may contribute to the parity of women in their work. family and local society	3.0448	0.7674
D12	It seems fair to me to pay a premium for a fair product in order to contribute to the welfare of people in the Third World	3.1791	0.8151
D13	Buying fair products simultaneously informs and educates consumers in a socially responsible behaviour	3.3433	0.8081
D14	The Fair Trade products are not as good as the regular products in terms of quality	0.9848	1.0596
D15	Fair Trade claims are nothing more than advertising tricks	0.6866	0.7428
D16	I believe that the Fair Trade advertisements would be distinguished by honesty	2.7692	0.8798
D17	I would like to have the chance to find the Fair Trade products in many other places than the specialized stores	3.1515	0.8813
D18	The Fair Trade shall acquire better prospect if the fair products enter the big S/Ms	2.4697	1.2676
D19	The Fair Trade contributes to the protection of the environment and to the sustainable development as well	3.1231	0.7808
D20	It is not my own responsibility to help the less developed countries	0.5303	0.8453
D21	It seems aimless for me to buy fair products since not many other people do so	0.4394	0.8063
D22	I don't think that poverty in the Third World might be challenged if I bought fair products	1.0758	1.0423
D23	I harm the Greek products by preferring the Fair Trade products	0.7879	0.7129

D24	I am exclusively interested in the financial problems of my own country and not in the problems of the less developed countries	0.4848	0.6138
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With regard to the attributes of the new marmalade conjoint analysis was conducted through SPSS. Pearson's r and Kendall's tau were found significant ($p < 0.001$). The part – worth scores (utilities) indicate the influence of each factor level on respondents' preference for a particular combination. It is observed (Table 2) that price was the most important factor (31.37% average importance) followed by organic (27.48%) and sweetener (20.03%). The rating (from 1 to 10) also indicated that the higher Mean (7.3220) was obtained by Marmalade 10 (see Table 3), which means that this combination is considered to be the better of all. On the other hand, more consumers declared their intention to buy Marmalade 1 (86.2%), while Marmalade 10 and Marmalade 6 captured the second place (70.8%) in the consumers' intentions to buy them.

Table 2

Conjoint analysis results

Averaged Importance	Utility	Factor
+-----+ I27.48 I	-0.3882	ORGANIC ---I no
+-----+ +-----+ I20.03I	0.3882	I--- yes
+-----+ +-----+ I18.48I	-0.2829	SUGAR --I honey
+-----+ +-----+ I18.48I	0.2829	I-- sugar
+-----+ +-----+ I18.48I	-0.2610	CALORIES --I regular
+-----+ +-----+ I18.48I	0.2610	I-- light
++ 2.64 II	0.0373	NUTS I no
++ 2.64 II	-0.0373	I yes
+-----+ I31.37 I	-0.2076	PRICE --I 2.70
+-----+ +-----+ I	-0.3392	--I 3.00
+-----+ +-----+ I	0.5468	I---- 2.30
6.1813	CONSTANT	
Pearson's R = 0.996		Significance = 0.0000
Kendall's tau = 1.000		Significance = 0.0003
Kendall's tau = -1.00 for 2 holdouts		Significance = 0.0000

Table 3

Rating and purchasing intentions

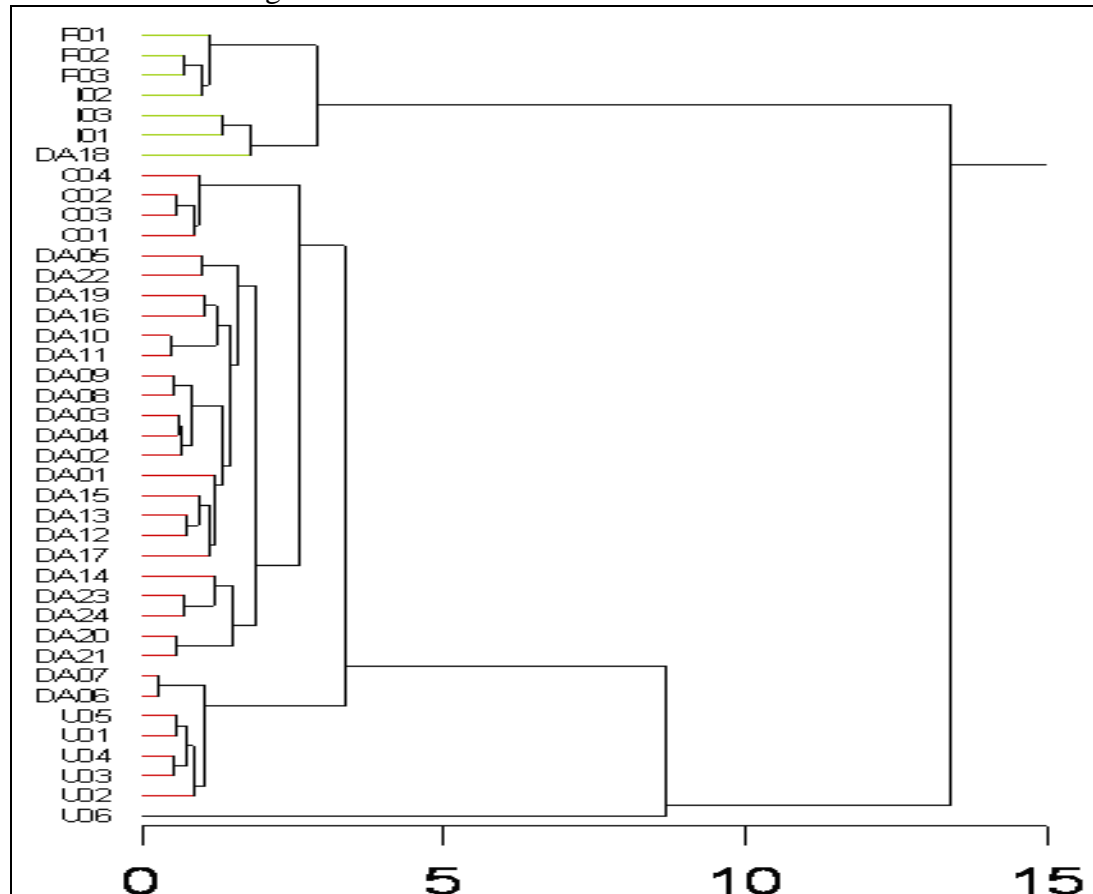
	Rating Mean	Purchase (% YES)		Rating Mean	Purchase (% YES)
<i>Marmalade 1</i>	7.1846	86.2%	<i>Marmalade 6</i>	6.9153	70.8%
<i>Marmalade 2</i>	5.6230	52.3%	<i>Marmalade 7</i>	5.4912	32.3%
<i>Marmalade 3</i>	5.0484	27.7%	<i>Marmalade 8</i>	6.1186	52.3%
<i>Marmalade 4</i>	6.2581	55.4%	<i>Marmalade 9</i>	5.6102	36.9%
<i>Marmalade 5</i>	6.3051	58.5%	<i>Marmalade 10</i>	7.3220	70.8%

The One-Way ANOVA was employed to examine the mean differences in **Intentional Purchasing Behaviour** across each one of the demographic characteristic, but no statistically significant results were found.

As the other parametrical statistical techniques failed to provide statistically significant relationships, we employed the non-parametric technique of Hierarchical Analysis (Figure 1) to explore the associations among the items of the attitudes and psychographics. The most interpretable solution resulted in two clusters. In cluster A, Universalism items appear at the bottom of the almost whole set of the attitudinal items, while the Collectivism items appear at the top of it. In cluster B there is only one item (DA18) of the attitudinal items, which is joined together with the Individualism and Power items.

Figure 1

Hierarchical dendrogram



It seems that the attitudes towards Fair Trade principles and objectives are encompassed by the universalistic values from one side and by the collectivistic values from the other side. This means that people's values about equality, democracy, care to the nature, protection of the weak, harmony and peace, from one hand, and also values about team goals, from the other hand, are closely associated to principles about decent standards of living, human and working rights for people in the Third World and beliefs about the ability of Fair Trade to help the Third World producers to sell their production and earn a fair income. It is to be noted that the power and individualistic values are associated with just one attitude, which concerns the entry of the fair products into the S/Ms. Most probably this finding needs further discussion.

6. Discussion

It is to be firstly noted that the limited sample size minimized the statistical data analysis and thus this discussion should be taken as a preliminary step to understand more deeply supporters' feelings and intentions.

According to our results the “30:3” syndrome - which is the rule in consumers’ surveys - is not at all apparent among the supporters’ group. Almost all of them have actually bought fair products, while they declared their intentions to keep doing so. However, future research might very well include further details in supporters’ buying behaviour, such as frequency of purchase, money spent, on-line shopping etc, beyond their preferences towards product categories.

Very strong beliefs (as expected) were stated with regard to the necessary aid for people in the less developed countries to gain a minimum price for their products, as well as towards the necessary protection of their human and working rights. It is to be noted though, that supporters also believe that Fair Trade movement is very well able to achieve these goals. Consumers too (see Delistavrou and Tilikidou, - - -) were found to believe in fair principles but they are not so sure that Fair Trade may indeed offer a significant contribution to the situation in the Third World. Further, supporters strongly disagree that they would harm Greek products and producers if they bought fair products, while consumers seem rather sceptic about that. On the other hand, even committed supporters keep some reservations with regard to the honesty of advertisements (see DA16 in Table 1), maybe because they would not like to misdoubt that fair claims are nothing more than advertisement tricks (DA15).

It has to be discussed too that supporters, although they would naturally like to find the fair products more easily (DA17), they do not tend to agree that the fair products should be delivered by the S/M chains (DA18). It is to be noted that the only attitudinal item, which was found closely to power and individualism in hierarchical clustering, is the one that concerns the financial prospects of fair products if entered in the S/Ms. In contrast, the majority of consumers were found to believe very strongly that the fair products shall acquire better prospect if they are entered in the big S/Ms (see Delistavrou and Tilikidou, - - -).

It is an issue of further discussion to discover what lies behind these opinions of supporters. Is it that they are scrupulous consumers, who do not mind the inconvenience to visit a specialized store in the centre of the city in order to buy just a packet of coffee and do their duty to the poor? Or is it that they believe that the fair products do not belong to the S/Ms due to principle reasons. As a matter of fact, the S/Ms are most probably the most profit-oriented part of the retail sector. On the other hand, the fair trade network by principle develops non-governmental, non-profit organizations. This point of view might be connected to a theoretical debate that has already started inside the academic community. The subject of this debate concerns the content and scope of Fair Trade itself. It is questioned whether Fair Trade is in or against the market (Schmelzer, 2006). Further, whether Fair Trade is just another neoliberal solution aiming to profit out of market opportunity, or it is a movement which challenges the free market function and aims to social changes. It is a duty of future research to clarify as much as possible the relevant Fair Trade supporters’ beliefs.

7. Conclusions

Those supporters, which joined the investigation, were found to hold very strong beliefs towards principles, objectives and effectiveness of the fair trade movement. They are very scrupulous people, who hold strong universalistic and collectivistic values, while low levels of power and individualism. They declared their intentions to buy mostly fair snacks, coffee, pasta, rice, sugar and souvenirs.

With regard to the new fair trade marmalade supporters seem rather happy to welcome it. According to their statements, price is the most important factor.

Marmalade 10 is considered to be the better of all; marmalade 1 is their first purchasing choice, while marmalade 10 and marmalade 6 are their second purchasing choice. If these results taken together, they lead to the conclusion that this new marmalade should be offered at a reasonable price and be organic by all means. Also, it might be produced in two types, one that might contain nuts and another that might contain honey.

The low response rate indicated that the Altromercato shops should communicate more often with their supporting group and make better use of their data base. Fair Trade Hellas to take serious consideration of their true feelings. Though limited due to the small response rate, the results of this study open significant paths for future research to follow in order to understand better fair purchasing behaviour and add to the demographical and psychographical profiles of supporters and consumers too. Future research might need to plow to qualitative methods - such as discussion groups - to reveal much more about future fair consumer behaviour.

It is well understood that it is little what we have come to reveal with regard to ethical consumers' actual feelings and preferences. Furthermore, it is also well understood that ethical consumption is not in the mainstream of the marketing academic community and thus it is always neglected by the academic research. It is also acknowledged that, no matter how scrupulous consumers are, the economic crisis in evolution and the constant decrement in the incomes of the working classes restrain their best of intentions. However, as Hopkins (1991) wrote "*while too many people live in total poverty or in regions where consumers' choice is a luxury, there are still several billion who can make a difference through their purchases*".

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