

# THE FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS: A MARKETING INNOVATION OR A MANIFESTATION OF CONSIDERED CONSUMPTION

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**Abstract.** Responsible consumption trends have become increasingly pronounced in the foodstuffs market as reflected by the interest in healthy foods (organic and green products). This is consistent with the fair trade concept which, in the Polish market, is still considered to be a highly innovative project, and may be developed only after reaching a higher level of consumer awareness. As shown by the results, in the Polish market, the consumers are primarily guided by the price of the product when making their purchase decisions. However, as the market changes dynamically, there is an increase in the awareness level of buyers of food products. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and assess the consumers' behavior in respect to fair trade goods on the product market, and to identify the main motives for choosing them. This paper presents the results of the authors' own studies of a quantitative nature, performed as a part of a research project. A CATI survey was carried out in 2015 with a sample of 508 respondents from all over the country.

**Keywords:** fair trade, sustainable marketing, considered consumption

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, responsible consumption trends have become increasingly pronounced in the Polish foodstuffs market, as reflected by the interest in healthy foods (organic and green products). This is consistent with the fair trade concept which, in the Polish market, is still considered to be a highly innovative project, and may be

developed only after reaching a higher level of consumer awareness. Fair trade means an alternative approach to traditional trade and is based on cooperation between producers and consumers. With fair trade, farmers may sell their crops on better terms and are provided with the opportunity to improve their lives and plan a better future. For the consumers, fair trade means contributing to solving the world's poverty problem by giving them the ability to purchase labeled products (Fairtrade International, n.d.).

After many years of fascination with consumption, there is a clear shift away from such activities towards alternative trends. The economic development and knowledge society make it necessary to adopt a new approach to production and product distribution methods. As a consequence, the companies' marketing activities become aligned with the expectations of consumers with higher awareness. The consumer's awareness is reflected by his/her responsible purchasing. According to M. Wróbel (2015), responsible consumption is a process of addressing the needs of entities aware of the need to bear the consequences of their actions, aimed at ensuring a sustainable improvement in the quality of life of today's and future generations. The enterprises realize that in order to be successful on the market, they need to establish a collaborative network which, in addition to customers, also covers their employees, suppliers and intermediaries (all stakeholders). What also needs to be taken into consideration is the customer's welfare as well as the welfare of the entire society (Brzustewicz,

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2014). This philosophy is reflected by the concept which promotes fair trade products, taking into account the benefits throughout the product value chain, from the producer up to the consumer. A question arises whether fair trade was developed as a part of marketing activities to differentiate some products from their competitors, or does it rather address the consumers' needs in this field.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and assess the consumers' behavior in respect to fair trade goods on the product market, and to identify the main motives for choosing them.

This paper presents the results of the authors' own studies<sup>1</sup> of a quantitative nature, performed as a part of a research project. A CATI survey was carried out in 2015 with a sample of 508 respondents from all over the country.

## CONSIDERED CONSUMPTION AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

Along with the economic growth and social development, an increase of customer awareness may be observed in the market. A brand new type of consumers emerges, characterized by high market awareness, autonomy, competency, selectivity and high requirements (Fryzel, 2014, p. 88–98). Awareness means not only adequate levels of knowledge but also taking specific actions and changing one's habits, lifestyle and market behavior (Czubała, 2011, p. 61). According to Zaremba-Warnke (2012, p. 73), one of the symptoms of the new approach is the development of social initiatives for the protection of consumers and the emergence of a new consumer type, referred to as a socially responsible consumer. Therefore, informed consumers are responsible and well-balanced; they make wise and ethical shopping decisions which, while addressing their economic needs, support responsible businesses guided not only by economic principles but also by environmental, social or ethical measures (Dobre Zakupy, 2006, p. 3).

Considered consumption is reflected in multiple ways, for instance by an increased interest in healthy diets. According to S. Żakowska-Biemans (2011, p. 216–220),

<sup>1</sup> This study is a part of the "Strength of the fair trade mark for the managers" research project carried out by the authors, funded with an internal grant from the Wrocław WSB University. This is a quantitative study which starts a series of planned research activities.

while the Polish organic food market is still in a start-up period, it attracts a growing interest which is manifested by a boost in demand and by the increasing number of enterprises active in the manufacturing and distribution of organic food.

The considered consumption and social sensitivity aspects are also reflected by purchasing fair trade products. Fair trade certification labels issued by independent organizations help customers distinguish between fair trade goods and other ones, making it easier for them to make their shopping decisions. In order for a product to be fair-trade certified, the manufacturer must establish a democratically managed organization (e.g. a manufacturing cooperative) which respects equal rights of women and of ethnic minorities, ensures at least the statutory minimum wage, provides decent and safe working conditions, and does not use child or bonded labor. Environmental standards are also set out, and therefore many fair trade products also feature environmental certificates. According to a study by the Polish Consumer Association, as many as 77 percent of Polish respondents admitted not to have any knowledge of "fair" products. This was the worst result among six European countries covered by the survey. In turn, only 10 percent of Polish consumers declared to have good or very knowledge of fair trade. By comparison, in France and Denmark, the corresponding ratio of informed consumers was 47% and 54%, respectively (Ćwik, 2012, p. 95). This illustrates that fair trade is a relatively innovative concept for the Polish market. Having in mind the European patterns, a growing interest in this topic and the development of the fair trade product market may be expected. This is confirmed by S. Waluś (2014, p. 93) who claims that an important aspect for Poland will be the gradual implementation of sustainable development programs and the environmental and regional policy.

## RESPONSIBLE MARKETING

Just as other mature markets, the Polish market shifts away from traditionally defined marketing activities to new marketing concepts. P. Brzustewicz (2014, p. 2) believes that marketing evolves towards a model where the key role is played by responsibility, partnership and collaborative creation of the economical and social success together with the stakeholders. The socially responsible market concept is consistent with that trend, and focuses on the buyers' wealth while preserving

social welfare (Dejnaka et al., 2013, p. 68). Sustainable marketing is a similar concept which, according to Zajakowska (2015), is still little known in the Polish socio-economic reality. This approach marks the emergence of the sustainable consumer who addresses his/her needs while contributing to environmental and social objectives (Pabian, 2013, p. 12).

When implementing their marketing policies, businesses endeavor to address their customers' needs while attaining their own goals. They often outperform each other by developing new ideas to attract the attention of consumers and have them select a specific product or service. As the market develops, consumer awareness grows. Ultimately, consumers become resistant to marketing activities taken by the businesses. In that context, a question arises whether product (usually food) labeling may be perceived by the consumers as a planned marketing activity aimed at distinguishing the product from its competitors. One of the product labeling methods is the fair trade certificate which, in addition to the product origin information, may include a promotional message.

Another objective of a company's marketing activities is to influence the customers' attitudes and have them follow specific purchasing patterns. According to A. Piotrowska (2014), consumer behavior is conditioned by external and internal factors. External factors include consumer income, prices, product features and promotional activities. In turn, internal factors mean consumer needs, motives, personalities and attitudes towards products.

The consumers and their selection motives also do evolve. Today's consumers are believed to create their own identity and to be increasingly willing to actively participate not only in the consumption but also in the creation of products, thus becoming trendsetters (Penn and Kinney Zalesne, 2009, p. 13–15). In the Polish market, fair trade products still represent a niche, and therefore fair trade buyers are trendsetters in this field. They are innovators not afraid of novelty who willingly take the risk of purchasing innovative products. According to T. Zalega (2015), in the era of new technologies, innovative consumers are the very ones who drive the market for new brands and products. Such creative and demanding consumers are the pillars of the innovative economy whose efficiency depends on the high quality of human capital.

There is an emerging demand for fair trade products which, while addressing the consumer's nutritional

needs, provide them with greater overall satisfaction and fulfill their higher needs. The new consumer approach is leveraged by companies who, as a part of their marketing activities, promote their products as socially responsible ones. However, because some of these actions (referred to as greenwashing) are unethical, this laudable concept becomes a tool for unfair competition.

The thesis advanced in the title of this paper does not have to result in excluding one of these conclusions. It seems possible for a fair trade product to be the outcome of marketing activities taken in response to the growing awareness of the consumers. This is confirmed by Niedzielska (2014) who states that instead of being focused only on profit maximization, marketing should be a supporting tool for the solution of social and environmental problems.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors performed a quantitative study. A CATI survey was carried out in 2015 with a sample of 508 respondents from all over the country. The main purpose was to hear the opinions on purchasing habits, fair trade and habits related to fair-trade labeled products. The research tool was a structured questionnaire mostly composed of closed and semi-closed questions, together with an extended personal information section. The results were analyzed with such statistical methods as the chi-square test used to evaluate the relationships between qualitative variables.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In the Polish market, fair trade products are mostly associated with foods, even though many other fair-trade labeled goods (e.g. clothes, furniture) are sold. As this study was not solely focused on foodstuffs, it covered all goods consistent with the fair trade philosophy. However, according to the authors' own observations and experience, the Polish fair trade market is mainly focused on foodstuffs.

The maturity of the consumer market is related to the determinants of purchasing choices. A relationship can be observed between consumer awareness and the increased importance of these factors. Quality may be defined from the perspective of the product's brand and environmental and health impact etc. Immature markets are characterized by a prevailing role of price over other

**Table 1.** The primary determinants of decision in the product purchase process

Characteristics	Total	Sex		Kids in household	
		female	male	no	yes
Price	77.8%	82%	74%	78%	77%
Brand	40.2%	38%	42%	41%	39%
Distance from home	13.0%	14%	12%	12%	14%
Impact on health	8.9%	10%	7%	8%	11%
Environmental performance	8.7%	10%	8%	8%	11%

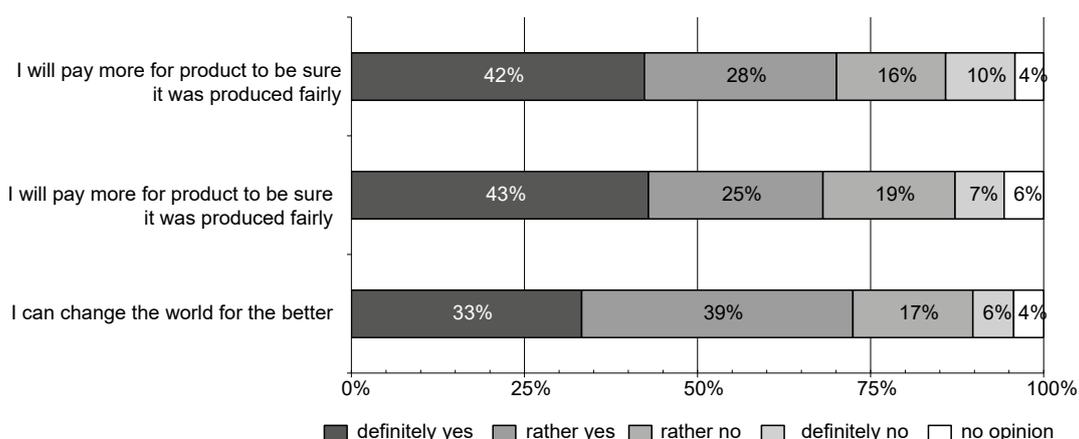
N = 508, F = 250, M = 258  
 Source: own elaboration based on research.

choice criteria. This study verified the main determinants of purchasing choices (Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, over ¾ of all respondents indicated the price to be their main choice criterion. Ranked second, the brand was indicated by only 40 percent. The primary reason for this distribution of answers are the relatively low incomes of Polish consumers. However, what is interesting is the breakdown of results by gender. Accordingly, the percentage of women who indicated the price as their main choice criterion is higher (by 8 percentage points) than that of men. It is the opposite for the brand as the determinant of purchasing choices: the percentage of men exceeds that of women. The generally low share of “environmental and health impact” may suggest

the low awareness of Polish consumers. However, when taking the number of children into consideration, that share turns out to be higher in the households with children. This could mean that the concern for the health of the youngest determines the purchasing behavior.

Later in this study, more in-depth questions were asked about purchasing fair trade products. One of the purposes of this study was to determine the respondents’ fair trade awareness. The respondents could identify with specific statements on their consumption awareness and behavior. Figure 1 shows the selected attitude statements. 72 percent of the respondents declared (“definitely yes” or “rather yes”) that their attitude could make the world a better place.



**Fig. 1.** Declarative consumer awareness  
 N = 508.  
 Source: own elaboration based on research.

Over 2/3 of the respondents declared to be willing to pay more for a product, if confident that it is a branded product manufactured in line with fair trade principles. It should be realized, however, that such a high rate of declarations is not necessarily reflected by actual behaviors. When it comes to declarations, it is easier to demonstrate awareness than when making the final choice and paying for it.

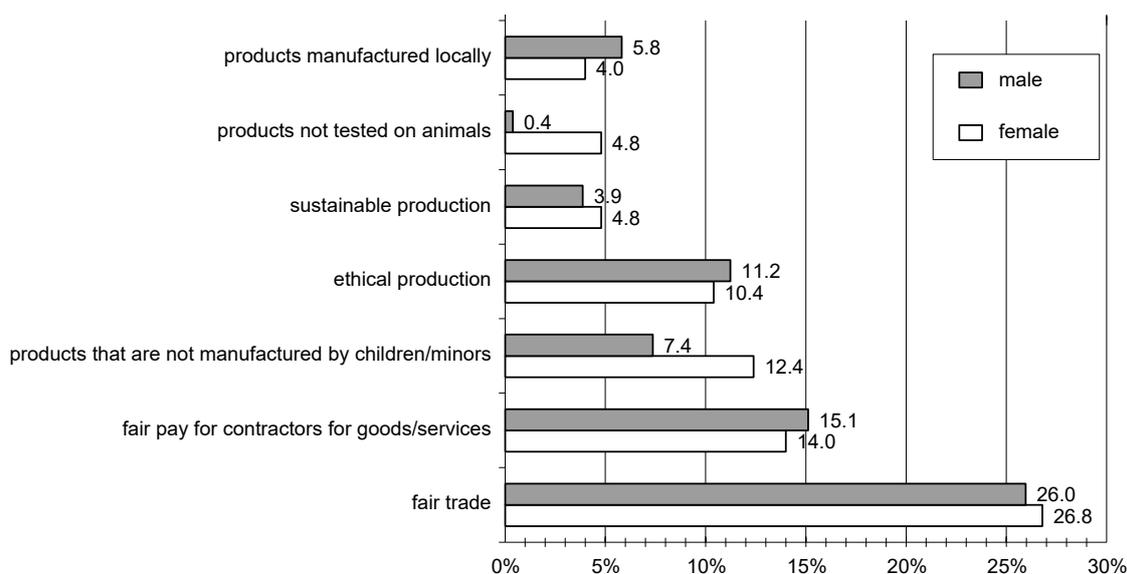
Only 1/4 of the respondents admitted to be familiar with fair trade while only half of that group have ever purchased a fair trade product. That question was quite general in order to discover the scale of a relatively new process on the Polish market, and to show the market potential (if any) rather than restricting the study to users of fair trade products. The above is also confirmed by other research which found that the greatest likelihood of purchasing a product in support of a social cause was observed for consumers involved in other social activities (Mirońska and Zaborek, 2013, p. 122).

As follow-up for this research problem, an open question was asked about spontaneous associations with fair trade. Over 2/3 and 12% of respondents associated fair trade with honesty and decent remuneration, respectively. Only 11% of respondents understood the very meaning of this term, which may be surprising

because “fair trade” and the Polish equivalent expression are used alternately. Note that ecology was associated with fair trade by 7% of respondents who were familiar with this term. This is interesting when compared with Table 1 data where 8.7% of respondents indicated ecology as one of the determinants of their purchasing decisions. The above may reflect the position of ecology in the minds of Polish consumers, and could suggest that ecology is assimilated to social aspects, including fair trade. Therefore, it may be concluded that the respondents’ declarations are not consistent with their actual behavior.

In the closed question, the respondents could indicate 3 associations with fair trade. The answers are consistent with those to the open question. The results were broken down by gender (Fig. 2).

Interestingly, in the assisted survey of fair trade awareness, the top-ranked association was fair trade (irrespective of the respondent’s gender). This may be because “fair trade” and the Polish equivalent term are used alternately in the media; as a consequence, the respondents have heard of it (or have consumed it). What could be surprising in the answers is that women stated nearly twice as frequently as men that fair trade includes child labor-free products. Also, ten times more women than



**Fig. 2.** Supported associations with fair trade among women and men  
N = 508.

Source: own elaboration based on research.

men associated the free trade philosophy with products not tested on animals. This could suggest that, according to studies, women are more socially sensitive and empathic. In total, 58% of respondents (irrespective of gender) did not specify any associations with fair trade, despite the suggested answers. This could mean that fair trade is a quite new concept to the Polish market, and is familiar to socially sensitive consumers.

Suggested answers included one which stated that fair trade products are associated with marketing activities. However, it was picked by less than 1% of respondents (and due to low selection rate was not presented in Fig. 2). This allows to conclude that the consumers do not associate fair trade with marketing; and that the choice of fair trade products is determined by the consumers' awareness and attitude rather than by the certificates. However, in order for the consumer to behave that way, the product packaging must be appropriately labeled. Thus, the fair trade mark has a marketing function. This means that in order to develop the Polish fair trade market, the providers should first shape customer attitudes in accordance with the fair trade philosophy, and then should inform them of product specifications. As shown by research, women could become the first

target group for fair trade products as they demonstrate higher social sensitivity.

As mentioned earlier, only 13% of respondents declared to have purchased a fair trade product. Ranked first were the foods (indicated by 52% of respondents). The products purchased were mostly coffee and chocolate which means these are the most popular goods available in Polish stores.

Figure 3 shows the limitations related to purchasing fair trade products. Fourteen percent of respondents declared the narrow range of fair trade products to be a barrier. This may suggest that the diversification of products available on the market (extending the product range) could contribute to increasing the number of consumers. In addition to a small number of products, every tenth consumer indicated the small number of shops to be another barrier. Only 7% of respondents believe that the barrier is the higher price level compared to traditional products. This could suggest the price is not the main sales inhibitor for fair trade products.

According to 54% of respondents, the purchase of such products is not subject to any restrictions. As regards previous declarations of low purchasing volumes of fair trade products, it can be presumed that these



**Fig. 3.** Barriers to purchase fair trade products  
N = 508.  
Source: own elaboration based on research.

answers were given by respondents who do not purchase such goods.

Afterwards, it was decided to check whether the barriers to purchasing fair trade products depend on the respondents' gender. For that purpose, the chi-square test was performed to verify the relationships between qualitative variables (Churchill, 2002, p. 774). The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was defined as the absence of relationships between the respondent's gender and the barriers to purchasing fair trade products. In turn, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) means the existence of a relationship between the above characteristics.

The calculated empirical  $\chi^2_e$  statistic for the data covered by this analysis is 6.6631 while the theoretical  $\chi^2_\alpha$

statistic is equal to 9.4877<sup>2</sup>. The empirical statistic value is lower than that of the theoretical statistic which means the independence hypothesis should be accepted. This suggests that the respondents' gender has no effect on the declared barriers to purchasing fair trade products.

Also, it was decided to check whether the declared barriers to purchasing fair trade products depend on the presence of children in the household. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was defined as the absence of relationships between the presence of children in the household and the

<sup>2</sup> Value from the chi-square distribution with k degrees of freedom; k was calculated as follows:  $(2 - 1) * (5 - 1) = 1 * 4 = 4$ ; the standard level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$  was set.

**Table 2.** Summary table to examine the relationships between respondents' gender and barriers to the purchase of fair trade products – numbers obtained

Variant of answer	Female	Male	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i>
There are few places to buy them	37	21	58	0.1142
There are few fair trade products	32	37	69	0.1358
They are more expensive than traditional products	21	17	38	0.0748
Other	33	36	69	0.1358
No limits	127	147	274	0.5394
<i>n</i>	250	258		
<i>p</i>	0.4921	0.5079		

N = 508.

Source: own elaboration based on research.

**Table 3.** Ancillary calculations to determine empirical chi-square statistics for the data in Table 2

Variant of answer	Numbers obtained		Chi-square	
	female	male	female	male
There are few places to buy them	28.5433	29.4567	2.5055	2.4278
There are few fair trade products	33.9567	35.0433	0.1128	0.1093
They are more expensive than traditional products	18.7008	19.2992	0.2827	0.2739
Other	33.9567	35.0433	0.0270	0.0261
No limits	134.8425	139.1575	0.4561	0.4420

Source: own elaboration.

**Table 4.** Summary table to examine the relationships between the presence of children in the household and the barriers to purchasing fair trade products – numbers obtained

Variant of answer	No kids	Kids in household	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i>
There are few places to buy them	36	22	58	0.1142
There are few fair trade products	40	29	69	0.1358
They are more expensive than traditional products	24	14	38	0.0748
Other	34	35	69	0.1358
No limits	205	69	274	0.5394
<i>n</i>	339	169		
<i>p</i>	0.6673	0.3327		

Source: own elaboration.

**Table 5.** Ancillary calculations to determine empirical chi-square statistics for the data in Table 4

Variant of answer	Numbers obtained		Chi-square	
	no kids	kids in household	no kids	kids in household
There are few places to buy them	38.7047	19.2953	0.1890	0.3791
There are few fair trade products	46.0453	22.9547	0.7937	1.5921
They are more expensive than traditional products	25.3583	12.6417	0.0728	0.1459
Other	46.0453	22.9547	3.1510	6.3206
No limits	182.8465	91.1535	2.6841	5.3841

Source: own elaboration.

barriers to purchasing fair trade products. In turn, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) means the existence of a relationship between the above characteristics.

The calculated empirical  $\chi^2_e$  statistic for the data covered by this analysis is 20.7124 while the theoretical  $\chi^2_\alpha$  statistic is equal to 9.4877<sup>3</sup>. The empirical statistic value is higher than that of the theoretical statistic which means the independence hypothesis should be rejected. This suggests that the presence of children in the household has an effect on the declared barriers to purchasing fair trade products. The conclusion could

be that the presence of children in the household makes their parents look for other products (implicitly meaning healthier, greener products with nutritional values).

## CONCLUSIONS

The socio-economic development and access to knowledge make the Polish society increase their awareness of consumption issues and of the related choices. The increased awareness is reflected by the noticeable fair trade and ecology trends. The society starts to follow other determinants than just having and accessing food. They also take into consideration its quality, functionality, diversity and attractiveness (Dąbrowska and Babicz-Zielińska, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Value from the chi-square distribution with *k* degrees of freedom; *k* was calculated as follows:  $(2 - 1) * (5 - 1) = 1 * 4 = 4$ ; the standard level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$  was set.

Compared to more developed Western European countries, the trends in the Polish market are at an initial stage. The infiltration of lifestyles from various markets makes Poles discover other consumption patterns which provide a growth opportunity for fair trade. In order for this to happen, education on fair trade and its related values is essential. The next step is to build the market structure for these products and develop innovative promotional activities for informed customers.

The following conclusions may be drawn from the results of this study:

- the fair trade market is at an initial stage; its development depends both on the awareness and financial situation of the customers;
- women are more sensitive and therefore more willing to purchase fair trade products;
- while the barriers to purchasing fair trade products do not depend on the respondent's gender, they are related to the presence of children in the household;
- the Polish market is still characterized by a poor availability, narrow range and high price levels of fair trade products;
- informed customers do not assimilate product labeling with sales-boosting marketing activities; instead, they consider such labels to be the manufacturer's information on the values of the product itself.

While the above conclusions are not exhaustive, they show that fair trade is an innovative field of study which, in the future, may provide extensive, actionable knowledge for the development of business in Poland.

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