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Antecedents of Intention and Behavior Towards Fair Trade Products: A Study on Values and Attitudes in Italy

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the significance and power of direct and indirect effects of values and attitudes on intention to buy fair trade products and on self-reported behaviors. Drawing on previous research, we selected three attitudinal measures – Consciousness for Fair Consumption, Environmental Concern, Moral Reasoning – and two categories of human values, Power and Universalism. Through a web-based survey conducted in Italy we collected data analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. Results showed that Universalism exerted a positive indirect effect on buying fair traded products while Power exerted a negative effect. Therefore, according to Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the intention was the only direct antecedent of behavior.

Keywords: consumer; fair trade; attitudes; values; mediation; structural equation model

1 Introduction

Scholars' interest for ethical or sustainable consumerism has progressively increased in recent years. According to Crane and Matten (2004), ethical consumerism can be defined as "*the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices due to personal and moral beliefs''*. In the context of food consumption, a number of environmental and/or social issues have been discussed in relation to a large array of attributes and products and there is an evidence of growing consumers' concern about ethical issues. About this, Balderjahn et al. (2013), distinguish three different categories of social consumption: philanthropic consumption, political consumption, and Fair Trade (FT) consumption. In this paper we focus on the last one, that is, on the consumption of products manufactured and traded according to fair working conditions. Within food consumption research, FT has been one of the most explored categories during the last 20 years. Andorfer and Liebe (2012) in their overview on the current state of research on individual consumption of FT products, analyzed 51 papers on this topic: several articles deal with consumers' preferences and WTP, yet the main part analyzes FT consumption in terms of consumer attitudes and motivations, extending or modifying Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. Recently, Balderjahn et al. (2013) conceptualized a new construct, namely the Consciousness for Fair Consumption (CFC), defined as "*a consumer's disposition to prefer products that have been manufactured and traded in compliance with fair labor conditions*" (Balderjahn et al., 2013, p.2). In three independent studies the authors tested the validity of CFC showing the unidimensionality of the six-item scale that they developed for measuring CFC and the discriminant validity as well, with respect to other two concurrent constructs identified in the literature review – the *Environmental Concern (EC)* and the

Moral and other orientated Reasoning (MR). In addition, the nomological validity of the scale was supported by the study findings, which confirmed the pattern of relationships hypothesized by authors, namely the significant effect of CFC on the intention to buy FT products and on the self-reported purchase of FT products. In addition, Balderjahn and colleagues (2013) found a significant role of EC on FT-related intention and self-reported behavior, whereas MR did not exert a significant effect. These results seem quite surprising. By definition, FT consumption belongs to the category of socially concerned consumption rather than environmental concerned, hence one should expect moral reasoning to exert a larger influence – compared to environmental concern – on intention to buy FT products and buying behavior. Therefore, this point seems to deserve further investigation, and we tried to address it in this paper. Furthermore, in our best knowledge, there is a lack of research on CFC and, as suggested by Balderjahn and colleagues (2013), we also aimed to explore the relevance of universal human values as antecedents of the CFC, using Schwartz's theoretical and methodological approach (Schwartz, 1992).

Then, the main aim of the current study was to further test the model and the measures used by Balderjahn et al. (2013) in order to contribute to the understanding of the psychological drivers of intention to buy FT products, and related behavior as well. We were particularly interested with FT products consumption in Italy where, like in other Mediterranean countries, the consumption of these products is growing but still quite low (with regard to level of per capita spending) compared to other European countries like Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, UK and Germany (Coppola et al., 2015; Panico et al., 2015; Verneau et al., 2016; Cicia et al., 2010.). The article is organized as follows: the second paragraph is dedicated to a literature review about the current state of ethical consumption research and to the aims and hypotheses of our study; the third paragraph, instead, is about the materials and methods of the statistical analysis; finally, in the fourth and the fifth paragraphs are, respectively, shown the results and the discussion with some conclusions.

2 Ethical consumerism: the research and a literature review

2.1 Ethical issues and human values as determinants of consumption behavior

In recent years consumers, worldwide, have shown a growing concern about environmental and social issues. From this, a growing interest in ethical or sustainable consumption patterns was generated. Considering the nature of the different principles underlying these consumption behaviors, two distinct consumption models emerge: environmentally friendly and socially conscious. As we pointed out above, within the context of food consumption, several ethical issues were discussed in relation to a wide range of attributes and products. Animal welfare, fair prices for farmers, social aspects of production, preservation of cultural features, are some of the attributes addressed by scholars (Zander and Hamm, 2012). Trusting relations between consumers and vendors in farmers' markets were also studied showing that consumers, in the alternative agri-food network, share ethical and moral values that include supporting the locality (Moore, 2006).

Moreover, within social consumption, FT products are still one of the categories that have more attracted the interest of scholars. In addition to the research reported above, other researchers focused their attention on general aspects of consumer attitudes: Nijssen and Douglas (2008) analyzed the effect of international awareness and social concern for others; Goig (2007) focused on the effect of consumers' global cognitive orientation on FT consumption; Hertel et al. (2009) highlighted the influence of attitudes towards human rights on FT purchasing intentions. De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) proposed and tested a theoretical model in which buying behavior is determined by the level of knowledge, quality and quantity of information, general attitude toward FT and specific attitude toward FT products. Balderjahn et al. (2013) investigated the role of CFC, MR and EC on the intention to buy and on the self-reported purchase of FT products suggesting to explore the role that human values could have on purchasing behavior towards these products**.** Indeed, theorists from different disciplines, including psychology, sociology and anthropology have, since the mid-20th century, championed the concept of values as central to all of the sciences concerned with human behavior (Rokeach, 1973). In recent years, there has been a growing attention in consumer behavior researches to Schwartz's (1992) values theory, which has been tested with consistent results on more than 200 samples in 60 countries (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). According to Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) values are ''concepts or beliefs, pertaining to desirable end states, which transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events". Values differ from attitudes in their generality and hierarchical ordering by importance. Schwartz proposed 57 values that have been shown to be an exhaustive list of all human values across cultures, whereas, 45 values out of 57 have been found to be universal across cultures (Schwartz, 1992).

According to Schwartz (1992), the 57 single values can be grouped into 10 higher order value types, which encompasses similar motivations. In the current study we considered Universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, caring about humanity and nature), and Power (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources), which is structurally conflicting with Universalism. Both Universalism and Power have been shown to be correlated to FT consumption (Doran, 2009).

Several authors addressed the issue of value-behavior relation. Among the empirical studies that consider the linkages between values and behaviors, most examine single behaviors (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Doran, 2009) or sets of behavior presumed to express one content domain of values, e.g. pro social behavior and religiosity. In their recent review on advances in theory and empirical research on the relations between personal values and behavior, Roccas and Sagiv (2010) argued that "one of the reasons for the interest in understanding personal values is their effects on behavior" (p. 30) and that "personal values have been found to be associated with a large variety of behaviors" (p. 33). Overall, many theoretical arguments and empirical findings suggest that values influence behavior both directly and indirectly (Rohan, 2000; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990).

The relationships between values, attitudes and behaviors have been also extensively investigated and the flow of causality that seems to emerge from different studies is from values to behavior through attitudes, that is, values have an impact on attitudes, which in turn influence behavior (Thøgersen and Ölander 2002). This is also in line with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (1991) according to which values are among the "background factors" that may influence intention and behavior through the mediation of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Values are increasingly important in applied fields such as business and values-behavior relationships. They were widely explored in marketing literature, stressing that the understanding of societal changes in values is an imperative for marketers (Lee et al. 2010). Doran (2009) conducted a study to determine which values are salient to American FT consumption analyzing the influence of different Schwartz's values in determining the consumer behavior of FT products. The results showed a significant, strong and positive correlation between universalism and FT consumption while security and power showed a significant negative correlation. Doran (2009) also highlighted the significant interactions between personal values and fair trade consumption in spite of demographic variables, a useful result in creating a profile of the American fair trade consumer. In general, values are argued to be more effective than demographics to profile consumers and to segment markets.

2.2 The research: aims and hypotheses

Drawing on the study by Balderjahn et al. (2013) we tested a structural equation model to analyze the role of three attitudinal constructs, CFC, EC, MR, and two human values, Universalism and Power, on intention to buy and on FT products buying behavior in Italy. As we pointed out above, Balderjahn et al. (2013) conceptualized and tested Consciousness for Fair Consumption as a new construct to assess the consumer's disposition to prefer products produced and traded in compliance with fair labor conditions. To operationalize CFC, they applied the adequacy-importance approach, which considers the interaction between the consumer beliefs about the adherence to a specific labor standard and the importance the consumer attaches to adhering to that standard. From the results of their studies CFC seems to be a construct with a high heuristic potential but, until today, there is a lack of research on CFC. Moreover, following on a suggestion given from the same authors (Balderjahn et al., 2013), we investigated the role of universal human motivations as antecedents of attitudes, maintaining, also in line with other authors (Ajzen, 1991; Thøgersen and Ölander, 2002), the hypothesis that values are antecedents of attitudes and could indirectly affect behavior through the mediation of attitudes and intention.

Finally, beside supporting with new empirical evidences the significance of the CFC effect on FT-related intention and behavior, we retained absolutely important to analyze the process of influence which hasn't been investigated by Balderjahn and colleagues, whose approach to the analysis relies only on direct effects. Therefore, we aimed to conduct an analysis with respect to direct and indirect relationships between values, attitudes, intention, and behavior towards Fair Trade products. Then, through a structural equation model, we have analyzed: 1) the relationships between CFC, EC, MR, intention to buy, and FT products buying behavior; 2) the effects of two human values, Power and Universalism, as defined by Schwartz (1992), on the same intention to buy and buying behavior.

In line with Ajzen (1991), we have hypothesized intention to be the only significant direct predictor of behavior. We expected intention to be significantly affected by consciousness for fair consumption (Balderjahn et al., 2013). According to the theoretical reasons we have illustrated in the introduction section, we also expected MR to exert a significant effect on intention, larger than the effect exerted by EC. Finally, we expected Universalism and Power to exert an indirect influence on intention and behavior through two steps of mediation (for a discussion about double mediation processes and their analysis see

La Barbera et al., 2014): First step involves the attitudinal measures – CFC, EC, MR – whereas the second step regards the intention to buy. More precisely, we expected Universalism and Power to exert opposite effects (positive and negative, respectively) on purchasing FT products, through the mediation of attitudinal constructs (step 1) and intention (step 2).

3 Materials and methods

3.1 The survey and the sample

An on-line survey was conducted trough the web site of the most important Italian FT organization, the General Assembly of Italian Fair Trade (AGICES). This method was supposed to foster contacts with individuals more likely to be interested and/or involved into fair trade consumption, thus more likely to hold structured attitudes and intentions towards such products. We submitted a questionnaire to collect information about: 1) buying behavior of fair trade products, considering both annual average expenditure and frequency; 2) the most important demographic and socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, education, job, income level, region); 3) the importance assigned from respondents to the ten value types of the Schwartz's model and to the attitudinal scales (CFC, MR and EC). The importance of the different items was rated on a Likert scale between 1 (not at all important) and 7 (very important).

The sample consisted of 334 consumers (201 females; M_{age} = 40.05 SD_{age} = 12.92). Overall the self-reported monthly income is in line with that of the Italian population (14.5% less than 1.000 euro; 44.5% between 1.000 and 2.000 euro; 25.5% between 2.000 and 3.000 euro; 15.5% more than 3.000 euro). The share of graduated (49.7%) is higher than for the Italian population.

3.2 Statistical analysis.

All descriptive analyses were performed using SPSS 20. A structural equation model was used to test the hypothesized direct and indirect effects using MPLUS software. Adequacy of fit of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) models was estimated by using Chi-Square and recommended incremental goodness-of-fit indexes: Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean residual (SRMR). The following values indicate a good fit: CFI and TLI values above 0.90, RMSEA values below or equal to 0.06, and SRMR values equal to or below 0.09 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Finally, a formal test based on 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013) was performed to test indirect effects. There were no missing data.

3.3 Measures

We administered the scales described below.

Intention

Three items were used for measuring intention to buy FT products (Balderjhan et al., 2013): "When I can choose, I buy products with the Fair Trade mark"; "I am willing to pay more for Fair Trade products"; "I always advise my friends to buy products with the Fair Trade mark". Participants answered on a seven point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). Tested for internal coherence, the scale proved adequate (Cronbach's α = 0.87). Items were averaged in a single score.

Behavior

Participants were asked to indicate their purchase frequency of four categories of fair trade products (fruits, clothes, drinks and candy). These four items were averaged, and the resulting index has been considered, in line with Balderjahn et al., (2013), as a proxy of the actual buying behavior. The scale had a good internal coherence (Cronbach's α = 0.85).

Values

We administered the three items used in the Schwartz Values Survey (1992) for measuring Universalism (Cronbach's α = .69), and the two item of Power (Spearman-Brown Rho = 0.54). Participants answered by a seven point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

Consciousness for Fair Consumption (CFC)

Following the procedure by Balderjahn et al., (2013), six items were used to measure CFC in relation to: compliance with workers' rights; freedom from forced labor; abolition of illegal child labor; non-discrimination in the workplace; compliance with international statutory labor standards; fair wages for workers. Participants indicated their agreement with each item by a seven points scale from 1 (totally

disagree) to 7 (totally agree). Participants also indicated the importance of the same six topics, with a response scale from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important). The two scores of each item were multiplied (belief * importance) and then averaged in a single score. Tested for reliability, the scale proved adequate (Cronbach's α = .93).

Environmental Concern and Moral Reasoning

Following Balderjahn and colleagues (2013), we measured participants' environmental concern using seven items, selected by a scale of nine items by Diekmann and Preisendörfer (2003). Moral Reasoning was measured by the 6-items subscale derived from the Prosocial Personality Battery by Penner (2002). For both measures, participants answered through a seven point scale from 1 to 7, and the items were eventually averaged in a single score. Both scales had good internal coherence (Cronbach's α_{EC} = 0.71; Cronbach's α_{MR} = 0.86).

4 Results

Means and standard deviations of the measured variables, as well as bivariate correlations between them, are provided in Table 1.

Table 1.
Summary of Intercorrelations, Means and Standard Deviations for Scores on Universalism, Power, CFC, MR, EC, Intention, and Behavior.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Universalism	6.44 (0.81)						
2. Power	-.136*	3.23 (1.29)					
3. CFC	.516**	-.044	41.49 (10.08)				
4. MR	.479**	-.063	.529**	5.55 (0.98)			
5. EC	.444**	.101	.471**	.566**	5.56 (0.78)		
6. Intention	.239**	-.165**	.278**	.322**	.240**	4.52 (1.74)	
7. Behavior	.516**	-.088	.064	.151**	.072	.520**	2.18 (1.06)

Note. The table shows Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients. Diagonal cells report the means (standard deviations in parentheses). * significant at $p < .05$ level; ** significant at $p < .01$ level

In line with our hypothesis, Universalism and Power are significantly correlated with intention, which is significantly correlated with behavior. The attitudinal measures are significantly inter-correlated, and also correlated with intention. Interestingly, Universalism is significantly correlated with the three attitudinal measures, whereas power is correlated with none of them.

A structural equation model was tested. Referring to measures, the item loading on each construct were overall satisfactory. So, each construct had items pertinent to its scale. Standardized values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Structural Equation Model: Standard Coefficients of all Items (p<.001)

Item	Standard Coefficient
Power 1	.79
Power 2	.45
Universalism 1	.56
Universalism 2	.52
Universalism 3	.77
Consciousness for fair consumption 1	.85
Consciousness for fair consumption 2	.87
Consciousness for fair consumption 3	.87
Consciousness for fair consumption 4	.92
Consciousness for fair consumption 5	.84
Consciousness for fair consumption 6	.93
Ecological Concern 1	.80
Ecological Concern 2	.81
Ecological Concern 3	.74
Ecological Concern 4	.61
Ecological Concern 7	.30
Ecological Concern 8	.51
Ecological Concern 9	.28
Moral Reasoning 1	.55
Moral Reasoning 2	.67
Moral Reasoning 3	.78
Moral Reasoning 4	.83
Moral Reasoning 5	.79
Moral Reasoning 6	.70

The model fit to the data was adequate: Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.92, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = RMSEA = 0.050, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.053. Results are summarized in Figure 1.

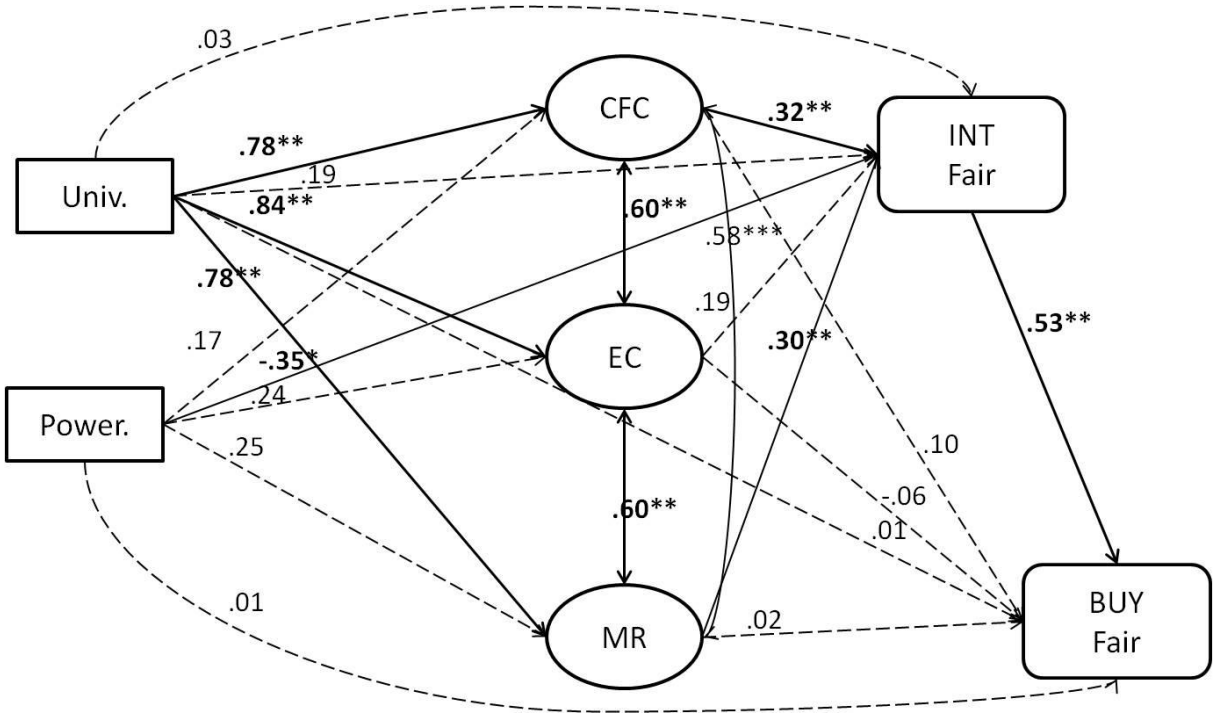

Figure 1. Structural equation model with standardized coefficients estimates

Universalism (Univ), Power (Pow) Consciousness for fair Consumption (CFC), ecological concern (EC) and moral reasoning (MR) as predictors for intention to buy fair-traded products (INT Fair) and self-reported buying behavior (Buy Fair). Dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

As hypothesized, the intention to buy FT products was the only significant direct predictor of buying behavior. CFC and MR affected the intention to consume fair trade products, but did not directly predict behavior. Instead, environmental concern had no significant direct effect both on intention to consume fair trade products and on buying behavior.

A formal test based on 5,000 bootstrap samples confirmed the significance of the indirect effect of Universalism on self-reported buying behavior *via* CFC (mediator 1) and intention (mediator 2), β=.06, bias corrected 95% CI (0.024, 0.110), as well as *via* MR (mediator 1) and intention (mediator 2), β=.07, bias corrected 95% CI (0.035, 0.116). As we noticed previously, EC was not a significant predictor of intention, which eliminated the possibility of a significant indirect effect of Universalism on behavior *via* EC and intention. In a similar fashion, Power did not exert a significant effect on the attitudinal variables (CFC, EC, MR), therefore the hypothesis of an indirect effect of Power on behavior through a double step of mediation (attitudes, step 1; intention, step 2) was not supported by the data. However, Power was a negative predictor of intention to buy. A formal test based on 5,000 bootstrap samples showed that the indirect effect of Power on behavior *via* intention was significant, β = -.09, bias corrected 95% CI (-0.142, -0.035)

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Organizations selling FT products face the same challenges as all other businesses within the market system and must deal with those challenges. They face competition not only from other fair trade retailers, but also from the retailers of the similar not FT products. Vital to their success is a deep understanding of their consumers (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). Consumer values are crucial to this knowledge, as these values define the product attributes that an individual will seek in a product.

Our findings highlighted that Universalism, defined as understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the well-being of all people and for nature, has a significant effect on intention to buy FT products and on the self-reported buying behavior, mediated by consciousness for fair consumption and moral reasoning, but not by environmental concern. Power, defined as the attainment of social status and

prestige, and control or dominance over people and resources, exerted a negative effect on intention to buy and buying behavior, which was not mediated by our attitudinal measures. This finding seems to suggest that, even if Power has been proposed by Schwartz (1992) as a value type with a structural conflict with Universalism, it might not always be sufficient to consider one as the opposite of the other. The mechanism that lead to the influence of Universalism on FT related intention and behavior involves the moral domain, represented in our study by the measures of CFC and MR, yet this is not true for the negative effect of Power on the same dependent variables. Future research could fruitfully investigate alternative mediation paths, for clarifying the process of influence of Power on intentions and behaviors linked to FT products. This could be very important to find out what psychological factors hinter or impede the widening of positive intentions towards FT products and their actual purchasing, especially in countries like Italy. Although several studies have been conducted on the psychological drivers of FT products, there is a lack of research about the psychological barriers. Our study seems to suggest that the latter could not merely be the opposite of and/or the lack of the former. On the contrary, as highlighted by our process analysis, the intention to buy FT products and the buying behavior could be affected by opposite values, which exert their influence through different attitudinal constructs. As already noted, in the case of Universalism, the process of influence seems to lie in the moral domain. As for Power, the question of the psychological mechanism which underpins its negative effect on FT intention and behavior remains unanswered and needs future explorations.

Our findings support the criterion validity of the CFC scale, which is a tool that focuses on a very specific dimension of social consumerism: the consumers' preferences for products obtained and traded according with international statutory labor standards, namely the rights of workers. This issue, however, can no longer be considered as a unique feature of the products of the developing countries since it assumes increasing importance for the products obtained in the developed countries too. This implies the need to extend the analysis to a broader concept of FT, including typical products of developed countries which share with those from poor countries ethical attributes increasingly important in driving consumer purchase behavior.

Different from Balderjahn and colleagues (2013) findings, yet in line with our hypothesis, moral reasoning exerted a significant effect on intention to buy FT products, whereas environmental concern did not. The idea of a close link between the moral domain and the willingness to participate in the FT market is largely shared by scholars. Within the concept of food consumption sustainability, fair trade find its specificity in the valorization and improvement of morally and socially relevant attributes of food products (Goodman, 2004). The relationship between environmental concern and FT-related intention and behavior, although interesting, appears theoretically less direct and clear, and is not supported by our findings.

The findings need to be considered in light of several limitations. First, since we have implemented an online survey trough the website of the most important Italian FT organization, the sample was not a random sample and than representative of Italian population. However, considering the low level of Ft product consumption in Italy, this method of sampling was supposed to foster contacts with individuals more likely to be interested and/or involved into fair trade consumption, even if it is not possible to infer about the consumption behavior of FT products of Italian population. Second, due to the limitations of self-report data, the findings are biased by respondents' perceptions: it will be important to use behavioral observations as well as self-reports in order to minimize common method variance. Moreover, self-report instruments have the potential for social desirability bias. Although we need to consider this limitation, it is reasonable to think that our data are not highly influenced by this bias because anonymity was guaranteed in data collection. In addition, our data was collected through the website of the most important Italian FT organization, as we already noticed, in order to collect data from individuals more likely to be involved into fair trade consumption. Third, as pointed out by several authors (Bethlehem, J., 2010; Evans, J. R., & Mathur, A., 2005) web surveys, despite being an attractive tool, have some methodological problems. Some specific groups of the populations are under-represented, for example those who have less access to Internet. In addition, recruitment of those interviewed is often based on self-selection. Both under-coverage and self-selection may lead to biased estimates. Therefore, further studies involving wider and more heterogeneous samples would be useful for more complete understanding of what drivers and barriers affect FT consumption, also because the psychological factors which foster or hinder positive intention towards FT products could be different for individuals with high versus low involvement with a topic. Despite these limitations, our study could represent a step forward in defining a fair trade consumer profile in Italy. Unlike northern European countries, where FT products are marketed especially in modern retail channels, in Italy FT products are still primarily distributed by specialized stores and the per capita consumption of FT products is still low: 1.50€ compared to 11€ in the United Kingdom and up to 21€ in Switzerland (AGICES, 2015). Nonetheless, like elsewhere in Europe – where 47% of Europeans are willing to pay more for their daily shopping if they know that this would benefit developing countries (Eurobarometer, 2011) – also in Italy there is great potential to expand this

market segment supported by an increasing willingness to pay more for FT products (Verneau et al, 2016).

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