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Rediscovering consumer-producer involvement

A network perspective on fair trade marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to investigate the value of a network perspective in enhancing the understanding of the business to consumer marketing of high-involvement product categories. This is achieved through the analysis of the development of fair trade marketing in the UK.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper addresses the research question through an analysis of relevant literatures from both marketing and other disciplinary areas. The paper is thus multidisciplinary in nature. Findings from a series of in depth, semi-structured interviews with senior representatives of a fair trade wholesaler, of a specialist fair trade brand, of supermarket retailers involved with fair trade and of other fair trade labelling and support organisations are reported and discussed.

Findings – The relevance of an actor network theory (ANT) informed interpretation of the development of the fair trade marketing network is revealed. Its emphases on the processes of exchange and the role of human and non-human actants in enabling interactions within the network are shown to be important. fair trade marketing is shown as occurring within an unfolding network of information exchanges. Analysis of this emerging network highlights a shift of emphasis in fair trade marketing from the fair trade process to fair trade products and, latterly, fair trade places.

Originality/value – The paper highlights the requirement for further conceptualisation of the business to consumer marketing of high-involvement product categories, and reveals the potential of ANT as one approach to meet this need. The paper also provides a detailed insight into the development of fair trade marketing in the UK.

Keywords Fair trade, Ethics, Marketing, Networking

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Concern with gaining a better understanding of, and connection with, key target customers underpins much debate about the purpose and commercial effectiveness of marketing (for example, Bagozzi, 1995; Day, 1989; Gummesson, 1987, 2001; Keller, 1993; Park *et al.*, 1986; Shocker *et al.*, 1994). The strategic objectives of developing such connection and understanding have typically been directed at raising consumer involvement with products. Generating consumer involvement can lead to improved loyalty, better levels of awareness, and positive word-of-mouth communications. All of

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these can contribute towards the development of competitive advantage and, thus, towards maximising sustainable profitability (Storbacka *et al.*, 1994; Yeung *et al.*, 2002).

Consumers, in turn, appear to demonstrate an increasing interest in the goods and services they consume, typically looking for more information concerning their provenance and background. Such interest includes a more general move towards “ethical” consumption (see, for example, *The Guardian/ICM*, 2004; Mintel, 2001), but also involves a wider range of products that have more detailed information embedded within them. Supply chain information, such as country of origin, is becoming increasingly significant for certain product groups (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Davidson *et al.*, 2003; Thakor and Lavack, 2003) and the sourcing strategies of multi-national corporations are now subject to intense scrutiny (New, 2004). Part of this movement may be understood as a desire for authentic and reliable information in the consumption process, whether it be through more open marketing communications or more transparent supply chains and contingent operations (Grayson and Shulman, 1996).

For both marketers and consumers, then, an important issue going forward concerns connectivity and how to embed authentic information flows within marketing messaging. However, this paper argues that more consideration needs to be given to the conceptualisation of marketing practices surrounding such high-involvement products; those in which the importance of consumer-producer involvement is magnified. This is necessary to enable us to understand better the means by, and extent to which this involvement may be achieved. The paper contributes to this discussion, arguing that consumers’ search for connection and involvement can be more fully understood as part of an evolving business to consumer marketing network, in which the consumption value of goods itself is partly defined by the links they generate (Cova, 1997). Thus, successful marketing communications can be established through interpreting these networks to maximise consumer-producer connection. However, in order completely to recognise the potential of such (re-)connections existing attempts to apply network approaches to business to consumer marketing must be more fully developed.

To illustrate these arguments this paper develops a case related to fair trade marketing in the UK. “Ethical” products – of which fair trade and organic food represent the most successful categories – are high involvement goods that draw in strong levels of consumer engagement at the purchase decision-making stage (see Harrison *et al.*, 2005). As such, fair trade represents an appropriate focus for the discussion in this paper. Fair trade food constitutes an important element of the burgeoning alternative food networks (AFNs). However, until now the implications for marketing of their proliferation have remained rather opaque. This is surprising given the preceding discussion, and the very obvious way that consumers’ desire for greater connectivity with products, producers, and the sources of production informs much of the business to consumer marketing of AFNs.

The starting point for our analysis came from the strategic insight of a senior manager within a fair trade business who highlighted an awareness of the value of producer-consumer connectivity:

... we can't drop the connectivity idea, the producer aspect of it. ... it is understanding that you know where something you pick up in the supermarket comes from – it comes from another world and your purchasing decision affects other people's lives (interview with Diana Gayle, 2003).

The next section of this paper considers the limited discussion to date on the place of the network in business to consumer marketing and, more particularly, the potential marketing implications of a series of broader studies from the social sciences concerned with the movement of information, knowledge, and goods within networks. It suggests that a more detailed conceptualisation of marketing networks is of value in understanding the marketing of products and services in which the consumer-producer relationship matters. We then present the methodology underpinning our study, followed by an overview of the characteristics and growth of fair trade. The main section of the paper comprises two parts. In part one, we illustrate the development of fair trade marketing through three phases. The first emphasises the processes of fair trade marketing, the second the products of fair trade, and the third fair trade places. In part two we reveal the potential of a network conceptualisation to our understanding of these emerging phases of fair trade marketing. In doing so, we draw in particular on work in the literatures of the sociology of scientific knowledge and geography concerned with actor network theory (hereafter ANT). Finally some conclusions are drawn and general management insights are made.

Business to consumer marketing relationships as networks

Our starting point is that there is value in conceptualising the business to consumer marketing of high involvement products as a network. Two largely discrete literatures provide some support to this notion. The first emanates from the marketing discipline. The second comes from a body of work in the social sciences concerned with the flow of goods and meanings within networks, particularly those connected with the agro-food industries. These reveal some encouraging discussion, but suggest that the interpretive potential of a network informed business to consumer marketing theorisation has, to date, been only partially realised.

The fact that many areas of marketing theory research are inherently concerned with the relationships between actors in networks has been clearly articulated (for example Iacobucci and Hopkins, 1992) and the possibilities of network analysis in marketing revealed (Easton and Håkansson, 1996; Iacobucci and Hopkins, 1992; Iacobucci, 1996). Some studies seek to present the network as a conceptual device, whilst others provide empirical analyses of aspects of network structure, such as centrality and cohesion. Unsurprisingly given its status as a “buzz word” of the 1990s, the notion of the network has been widely employed and with varying degrees of sophistication.

Despite this, the utilisation of “networks” in the areas of business to consumer marketing and consumer behaviour has been relatively limited (Easton and Håkansson, 1996). Examples of such research include explorations of brand effects that used consumer associative networks to understand behaviours (see for example Henderson *et al.*, 1998, 2002) and recent research into internet marketing (see for example Hanson, 2000, p. 64). From our perspective, the treatment of the network in the latter has been rather more mechanistic and its full potential remains untapped.

It is in the industrial marketing literature, of course, that the notion of Markets as Networks has been most developed (see for example Syson and Perks, 2004). This research was pioneered by the IMP group, with particular reference to a reconceptualisation of business-to-business (B2B) relationships (for example Håkansson and Ostberg, 1975; Håkansson *et al.*, 1976 (for an overview, see McLoughlin and Horan, 2002; also Healy *et al.*, 2001)). This theorisation rejected the established, uni-directional, marketing paradigm based on a behavioural psychology model in favour of an approach, built around social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cook, 1977; Cook and Emerson, 1984), that conceptualised B2B interactions in a network, multi-directional, structure determined by a central analytical device described as actors-resources-activities (Håkansson and Johanson, 1992).

Research from the IMP school has provided an important influence on “Customer Relationship Marketing” (Grönroos, 1994; Paravatiyar and Sheth, 2000) in which marketing has been portrayed as an approach based on “relationships, interactions and networks” (Gummesson, 1995, cited in Grönroos, 1996). Indeed, Mattsson (1997) put forward a case for greater interaction between the research traditions of markets as networks and customer relationship marketing, where the concern of the latter is extended beyond solely a strategy aimed to increase customer loyalty. In the alternative, extended view “R[elationship] M[arketing] means true interaction between the parties over time, a relatively high mutual dependency between seller and buyer and a major concern for how individual relationships are connected in nets and networks” (Mattsson, 1997, p. 458).

However, Mattsson reveals a tendency within customer relationship marketing to portray the seller as taking the initiative and to have only a weak concern for the interdependency between parties and for the emergent nature of the network (Mattsson, 1997; see also Easton and Håkansson, 1996; Varey, 2002). Indeed, there seem few instances in which the detail of the business to consumer marketing network is explicated in this literature and the real interpretative potential of the network revealed. This point is at least implicit in Healy *et al.*'s (2001) review of the literature of marketing relationships, in which consideration of “network theory” is once again confined to studies of industrial networks.

The potential of the network for our understanding of business to consumer marketing of high involvement products is, arguably, at least equally well illustrated in studies emanating from geography and sociology; particularly those concerned with the development of AFNs (for example: Hughes, 2000; Reynolds, 2002; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). In these, the connections between actors that shape commodity circulation are often seen as “complex ‘webs of interdependence’ rather than the fixed, vertical and uni-directional relationships” (Hughes, 2000, p. 178; see also Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994). The contrast is significant, because when information and knowledge flows are considered in a trade network that includes producer, retailer and consumer this destabilises notions of supply-chain information as being solely retailer-generated, unidirectional and upstream (Hughes, 2000, p. 188).

In a broadly similar vein attempts have been made to engage commodity chain circuits with consumption to elucidate the informational and knowledge movements that accompany the physical displacement of products (Leslie and Reimer, 1999). As commodity circuits, unlike chains, have no beginning or end and do not privilege one site, such as production, over another, “rather than assuming that consumers have

little knowledge of commodities, their quality and geographical origins, commodity circuits *both* construct and are reconstructed by consumer knowledge” (Leslie and Reimer, 1999, p. 406; see also Appadurai, 1986).

The geographers Whatmore and Thorne (1997) used ANT to present a detailed analysis of fair trade that is of particular interest here. In their study they conceptualise the broad spatial, economic, and power relationships in the international coffee supply chain as sustained by networks of interactions (see also Coe and Yeung, 2001). The fair trade and “normal” commercial coffee networks sometimes elide and are sometimes discrete. Following the spirit of ANT (Latour, 1993; Law, 1986, 1994), these networks are considered to be sustained and reinforced over distance by the weaving together of network mediators, both human and non-human actants, such as money, telephones etc., in a process known as network lengthening (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997, p. 291; see also, Easton and Håkansson, 1996; Law, 1986, p. 235). Critically, the networks in ANT are considered to be durable over time through the notion of modes of ordering. Quoting Law (1994, p. 20), Whatmore and Thorne (1997, p. 294) explained “Modes of ordering are both narrative, ways of telling about the world. . . what used to be, or what ought to happen and material, acted out and embodied in a concrete, non-verbal manner in a network.”

In the fair trade coffee network the mode of ordering of “connectivity” is of fundamental importance, with the establishment of a connection between those who grow and those who buy fair trade coffee essential to the successful development of fair trade companies engaged in this product sector. This mediates and re-articulates conventions of enterprise and distinguishes the fair trade coffee network from the commercial coffee network (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997).

While none of the aforementioned studies focus explicitly on the marketing process their conceptualisation of the movement of information attached to goods is pertinent to the study of marketing communications surrounding fair trade and other high-involvement products, as there would seem a natural link to be made between the information and “meaning” knowledge flows between producer and consumer nodes commonly mapped in social-scientific network studies and conceptualisations of strategic marketing communications. One of the key contributions of this paper is to illustrate the contribution of a more theoretically informed conceptualisation of the role of the network to business to consumer marketing communications.

Methodology

This paper is primarily exploratory and is conceptual in scope. A qualitative research methodology was designed to reveal a range of perspectives on fair trade marketing communications from key actors and stakeholders in the field. The approach used here takes the form of a series of individual case studies, with data being drawn from both desk research and a series of in depth, semi-structured, interviews. A series of 11 interviews were undertaken in total, with details of the seven interviews directly cited here provided at the end of the paper in the Appendix.

The interviews were undertaken with the senior representatives of a leading fair trade wholesaler, of the largest, specialist, fair trade brand, of two leading grocery retailers involved with fair trade, and of other fair trade labelling and support organisations. Consumers were excluded since the purpose of the work was to establish the strategic direction of fair trade marketing communications from an

organisational perspective. The dynamic nature of fair trade market development is acknowledged in the longitudinal nature of the research interviews that span three years.

Interviews were tape recorded, with the interviewees' consent, for subsequent analysis. The research design was interpretive (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Questions addressed broad issues of marketing communications strategy and development and organisational planning for commercial growth. Interviews were analyzed in the four-step interactive process (Miles and Huberman, 1994) that revealed common patterns and themes that were coded and compared to allow the development of propositions. These were then taken back into the field for testing. Accuracy and truthfulness were supported by the use of data collected from multiple sources (Vass and Wells, 1994).

Of particular importance was the emergence in the data collection of the theme of connectivity. This led to a network approach being employed to theorise and extend the empirical data via the analysis and discussion below. The analytic value of ANT only became apparent after a reading of the wider literature on networks, particularly that from the disciplines of geography and the sociology of scientific knowledge.

Fair trade: principles and progress

Fair trade represents an approach to the buyer-supplier transaction that aims at equality of exchange, recognising the power discrepancy between the developed and developing worlds (Nicholls, 2002). Attempts have been made to define fair trade based on a series of factors that distinguish it from other trade practices (see, for instance, Nicholls and Opal, 2005, pp. 6-8). Central to this fair trade model is a partnership approach emphasising joint business aims and objectives (Tallontire, 2000).

Furthermore, fair trade represents a new model of supplier-consumer relations, centred not on economic capital alone, but also embracing human and social capital (see Putnam, 2000). As Reynolds (2002, pp. 409-10) has commented:

The Fair Trade movement destabilizes neo-liberal knowledge claims regarding the normalcy of commercial conventions through reconsideration of "fairness" in commodity prices, market exchanges, and North-South relations.

Fair trade aims to be "in and against" the market (Barratt-Brown, 1993; Nicholls and Opal, 2005) and thus correct market failures in the free market system, such as information asymmetry in the supply chain, to ensure that all stakeholders benefit equally and in proper measure from exchange relationships. The fair trade mission encompasses a challenge to the commercial status quo (see also FTF, 2004a).

The global market for fair trade goods amounted to £500 million in 2003 (European Free Trade Association, 2004 quoted in *The Guardian*, 2004) and now spans more than 300 producer organisations (Reynolds, 2000). There are over 100 fair trade import organisations working with more than 800 suppliers, globally providing goods to consumers via over 45,000 sales outlets (PWC, 2002; Reynolds, 2002). In the UK, the market generated about £100 million of sales in 2003 (FTF, 2004b): this figure represents an approximately 400 per cent growth since 1998 (Mintel, 2001). However, fair trade products generally account for less than 1 per cent of their individual markets; notable exceptions being fair trade bananas in Switzerland and roast and ground coffee in the UK (*The Independent*, 2004). Consequently, the sternest challenge

facing fair trade groups today is how to market their products to a wider audience beyond the sympathetic segment of ethically aware consumers and to bring sales more closely in-line with consumer research suggesting that more than two thirds of consumers are willing to pay more for fairly traded products (*Retail Week*, 2002). Thus, fair trade marketing has increasingly sought marketing strategies that will underpin a movement from niche targeting to mass appeal (Moore, 2004; Nicholls, 2004; Wright, 2004; also Nicholls and Lee, forthcoming).

One such strategy employed during the last ten years has been to widen the marketing communications of fair trade from a focus purely on process, to incorporate a focus on the product and then, much more recently, a focus on place. This, we suggest, reflects a gradual recognition in marketing terms of the potential of the emerging fair trade network centred on better defining linkages between an increasing number of elements in the network such as products, producers, spaces, audits, certification and new target consumer segments.

The 3 Ps of fair trade marketing

Process focus

The establishment of Cafédirect in the early 1990s heralded a change in the marketing of “fairly traded” products in the UK. Cafédirect launched its first product – roasted and ground coffee – on the UK market in 1991. Unlike other alternative trading organisations (ATOs), Cafédirect aimed to compete directly with mainstream coffee suppliers and was run as a “for-profit” company. In keeping with this more conventional business approach, Cafédirect was the first fair trade company to engage in national marketing campaigns. It focussed its efforts on highlighting the key differences in the fair trade process when compared with the existing coffee supply chain, with a particular emphasis on individual supplier stories. The aim was to link the end consumer with the producer and thus combine both an emotional - the supply chain is more “fair” – and rational – fair trade actually helps real people – impetus for purchase behaviour.

In the first instance, the central marketing objective was raising issue-awareness with the most naturally sympathetic segment. Consequently, the initial target market was “strongly ethical” consumers (Mintel, 1999); the “global watchdogs” defined by Cowe and Williams (2000, p. 32) as “ethical hardliners . . . they are, and feel, powerful, but want more information on which to base their decisions”. Providing clear and credible process information to the consumer was central to the initial success of fair trade marketing.

However, in tandem with creating issue awareness, the first phase of fair trade marketing was about building trust in the authenticity of the fair trade process. In 1994, the Fairtrade Foundation launched the fair trade audit mark in the UK. The mark provided a clearly defined social audit of any accredited fair trade products that guaranteed to the consumer that what they were buying was genuinely fairly traded. The mark was applied to all of Cafédirect’s products as well as to a range of others and today there are over 100 fair trade marked goods on the UK market. The fair trade mark underpins the emerging fair trade “brand” encompassing the range of ethical meanings incorporated in the fair trade supply chain process, reducing the risk for the consumer and promoting top-of-mind awareness across category groups. The mark serves the need for the provision of credible and clear information and confirmation of

organisational claims and practice that was central to the early success of fair trade (McDonagh, 2002).

Terry Hudgton, Corporate Marketing manager for the Co-operative Group, has noted, "the more consumer awareness is heightened the greater propensity there is to buy fair trade" (interview with Terry Hudgton, 2001). As a result, all the main fair trade retail groups are actively engaged in education and information programs via leaflets, the internet, product labelling, and conventional advertising. This approach is proving to be successful and consumer awareness of fair trade is growing rapidly from 12 per cent of people claiming to recognise the mark in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2003 (MORI, 2003).

Product focus

Marketing centred on the fair trade process and communicating issue awareness and trust proved to be successful in growing the fair trade market dramatically among the "(strongly) ethical" initial target segment. However, for fair trade to grow its market share beyond the 5 per cent of the population that are its natural consumers the marketing focus was gradually shifted from process to product. There were four interconnected marketing objectives driving this change of strategy: repositioning fair trade products on quality and differentiation; focussing fair trade new product development on consumer as well as producer demands; broadening the fair trade brand message to include lifestyle characteristics of new market segments; increasing the retail availability of fair trade products beyond ATOs and into national multiple retailers.

From 2000, Cafédirect, in particular, began to use marketing communications to stress the quality, range, and differentiation of its products. As Claudia Salazar Lewis of Cafédirect noted:

What was happening before was fair trade, fair trade, fair trade; the whole message was fair trade but they were forgetting about the product. Now we want to change . . . it is important . . . that the product is top quality, so that people can still buy things that are very good quality but continue supporting fair trade . . . We want people to buy because it is good quality (interview with Claudia Salazar Lewis, 2001).

In order to gain market share, Cafédirect aimed to attract a new segment of "self-actualisers" who "are demanding quality more than anything" (Cowe and Williams, 2000).

Sylvie Barr, Strategic Development manager of Cafédirect, also highlighted the need for good quality, but went on to explain how this also plays a part in establishing producer-consumer connectivity:

It was about saying how can we still work with those guys and nurture the relationship we have, but also start talking to a more mainstream consumer who is primarily interested in what's in it for me; it's got to be the quality and the price (interview with Sylvie Barr, 2003).

Now fair trade was aiming for the "conscientious consumer" segment as well as the "global watchdogs" (Cowe and Williams, 2000). Conscientious consumers account for about 18 per cent of the population and clearly offered a significant opportunity for market expansion.

In keeping with targeting to this new "self-actualising" group, the marketing of the immediate consumer experience of fair trade products was moved from a largely informational/objective to a more personal, "lifestyle", appeal. Producer information

was relocated in lush, romantic imagery of foreign scenery, far removed from the actual immediate experience of most producers, and given less dominance in the marketing message (Wright, 2004). Brand building became paramount as a method of increasing loyalty and encouraging repurchase behaviour. As Alistaire Menzies of TraidCraft remarked “It’s all about developing the brand as a fair trade brand and then putting products under that brand” (interview with Alistaire Menzies, 2001). However, the fair trade brand message was now more complex, being based around ethics combined with unique quality. The aim was to make fair trade less earnest and more glamorous: as Menzies put it, “In our experience market driven products do better than product driven products”.

The third strand of this new phase of fair trade marketing was new product development. From 1999-2003 the number of fair trade certificated products more than doubled and there was a conscious move away from commodity products towards more processed, value-added, goods. Typical of this shift was the development of Carmenere Chilean wine by the Co-operative Group and TraidCraft and a strategy to develop composite products (Nicholls, 2004). More recently there has also been a growing awareness of the need for fair trade clothing (*The Guardian*, 2003).

The final element of the new marketing strategy was to widen the retail availability of fair trade products, specifically by winning or consolidating – through multi-packs – listings in national, multiple retailers. The combination of new product development and brand repositioning that was also underway facilitated this strategy considerably and fair trade products became available in all of the big four British supermarkets by 2001. Furthermore, in the same year, the Co-operative Group was the first to develop own label fair trade products and, thus, shift fair trade further still into the retailing mainstream. Even more significantly, Tesco, the UK’s largest grocery retailer, launched a range of over 30 own-label fair trade products in March 2004. If plans for this range are successful, it will more than double the total sales of fair trade products in the UK in its first year (see Nicholls and Opal, 2005, pp. 183-5). Here too, the marketing value of connectivity is recognised. Hamish Renton from Tesco noted:

We’re launching fair trade cut flowers ... and the nice thing is there’s a gender slant to it, female buyers-female pickers, so it kind of arcs from the first to the third world (interview with Hamish Renton, 2003)

As a final part of this significant marketing shift for fair trade, the body responsible for the international certification of fair trade products – the fair trade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) – rebranded its European audit mark in October 2002 from an enlarged capital F (for “Fair”) to an image – in environmentally-friendly green and blue – of a stylised waving human figure. This change of logo again underlined fair trade’s movement from delivering an ethical message alone to engaging with consumers’ lifestyles and self-image. The marketing development from process to product attracted some criticism from within the ATO establishment, but in purely commercial terms has been a great success (Wright, 2004).

Place focus

The third phase of fair trade marketing moved the focus forward again. In this case the target consumer segment was nearly half the population (49 per cent) described by Cowe and Williams (2000) as the “do what I can” group. These consumers have weak

ethical concerns, but are still engaged with issues, particularly those that affect their local area.

The marketing approach to this large segment focussed on empowering them to act locally on their ethical concerns. In the UK, the marketing vehicle for this strategy came in the form of developing criteria for activists gaining accreditation for their local area as a fair trade town. Currently five goals need to be met for this accreditation: the local council must pass a resolution supporting fair trade and serve fair trade coffee and tea; it must also attract popular support for the campaign; a range of fair trade products must be available in the area's shops and catering establishments; fair trade products must be used by a number of local workplaces; a local fair trade steering group must be convened (FTF, 2005).

The founder of this initiative, Bruce Crowther, was driven by his sense of the centrality of social connection within the fair trade model. He noted, "I firmly believe that fair trade and community linking are heavily connected" (interview with Bruce Crowther, 2003). By the end of 2003, 33 towns had gained accredited status and more than a hundred others were actively pursuing the goal. The model is also spreading across Europe, particularly in France and Germany. Subsequent to the success of the Fair Trade Towns campaign, a number of other community based accreditation initiatives have been set in motion, including fair trade villages, fair trade churches, and fair trade universities. The latter provides a marketing strategy to target the younger – often brand aware consumers – that can be most difficult to engage with ethical issues (see Nicholls and Lee, forthcoming).

Fair trade marketing: a network interpretation

In this penultimate section of the paper we illustrate the value of a network conceptualisation of the development of fair trade marketing. In particular we wish to draw on insights from ANT, which we consider to have characteristics relevant to this analysis. In the marketing of fair trade the challenge is to "shorten" the geographical distance between producer and market through marketing communications. "Lengthening" the communication network between consumers in the developed North and producers in the developing South and strengthening connectivity between the two achieve this. In the language of ANT, this "lengthening" is made possible by mediators, both human and non-human agents, that include fair trade certification, brand developments and marketing communications campaigns. The network is sustained by connectivity as a fundamental mode of ordering which serves to establish the performance of "fairness" for the consumer (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997, p. 295).

An ANT informed analysis provides insights to illustrate and explain the three current phases of the network of fair trade marketing to date. It should be noted that what we describe and present graphically as the marketing network is very much a simplification of a complex reality in which the network in all phases is sustained by numerous interwoven mediators. Our intention is merely to reveal what we consider key mediators at each network stage.

The process phase of fair trade marketing represents the network at its simplest, and is illustrated in Figure 1. The first segment of naturally sympathetic consumers is targeted via the mediator of the FLO's certification that adds durability to the information flows between producer and consumer. This mediator played, and continues to play, a key role in the network lengthening that originally brought fair

trade successfully to the markets of the developed world. Fair trade certification functions as a marketing communication that articulates the conditions of production to the consumer via information flows driven by producer narratives. Furthermore, certification also drives information back to the producer via the audit mechanism and operational frameworks defined by FLO (based, in turn, on consumer responses to ideas of “fairness” in North-South supply chains) thus confirming the multi-directionality of network flows.

In the second phase of fair trade marketing a new mediator is engaged to target a new customer segment. Product quality is drawn into the network to strengthen the relationship between producer and supplier already articulated by phase one and to attract a second customer grouping (see Figure 2). The information flows within the mode of ordering of connectivity are now more complex. In addition to the producer narrative/conditions of the production process construct, new communications embracing notions of quality emerge, driven towards consumers via brand building and towards producers via product specifications that conform to the quality positioning being developed. These flows are again multi-directional, as market research informs brand development and producer circumstances shape product specifications.

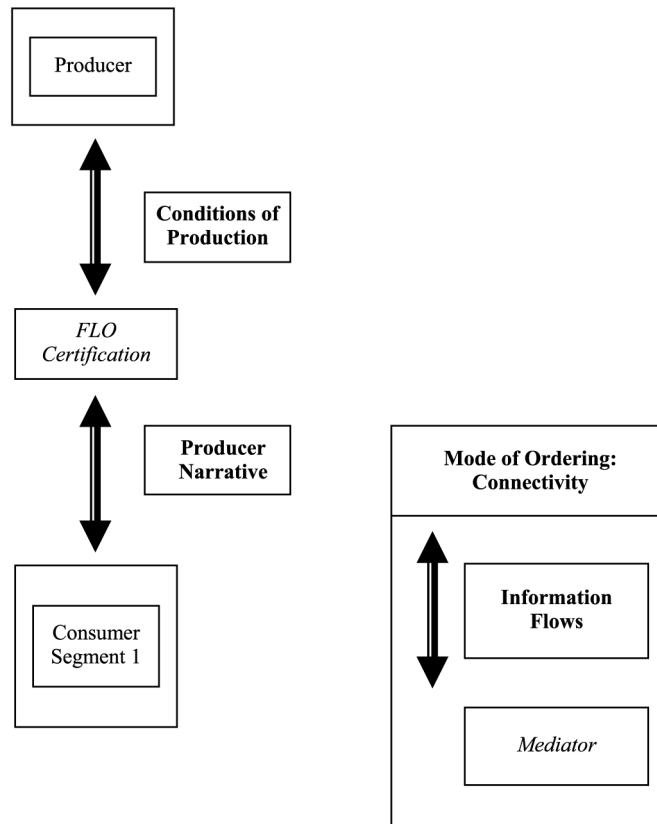


Figure 1.
Fair trade marketing
network: process

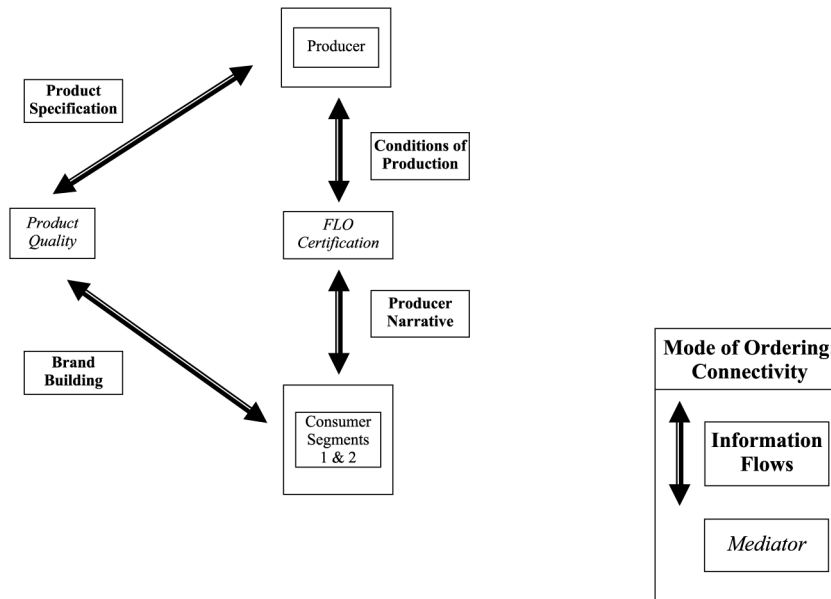


Figure 2.
Fair trade marketing
network: process and
product

Quality as a mediator formalises, and is defined by, information flows back to the producer that set out product specifications such as the need for organic growing conditions or switching to distinct varieties. Similarly, product quality drives the marketing communications information flow to the consumer via brand building and refocused campaigns centring on premium positioning.

Finally, we turn to the third, place-oriented phase of fair trade marketing. It is important to recognise that the inspiration for Fair Trade Towns came not from the Fair Trade Foundation or one of the large ATOs, but from a local group in the small market town of Garstang in Lancashire, England in 2000. The townspeople's initiative had its roots in a phase one marketing campaign to raise issue awareness of fair trade in their local area, seeking support from local political and business leaders. Only once the activities in Garstang became more widely noted did the Fair Trade Foundation launch a set of Fair Trade Town goals and an action guide to encourage others to follow in Garstang's footsteps. Fair Trade Towns thus represent a grass-roots movement.

In the third phase of fair trade marketing we reveal more of the emergent network that is exploited to gain access to a third market segment (see Figure 3). The Fair Trade Town initiative involves additional actants such as geographical spaces and identities becoming interwoven into the network of meanings that define fair trade marketing at a civic level. Civic engagement is the key mediator that connects the network to the third group of consumers, as well as strengthening the relationships between producer and end consumer for the other two segments. The information flows move between the fair trade branded community and the producer driven by concepts of social capital and solidarity (Putnam, 2000) and an attempt to concretise the act of bridging global/local divides; this is often further reinforced by cultural exchanges and meetings between producer and consumer communities. In the other direction, information flows

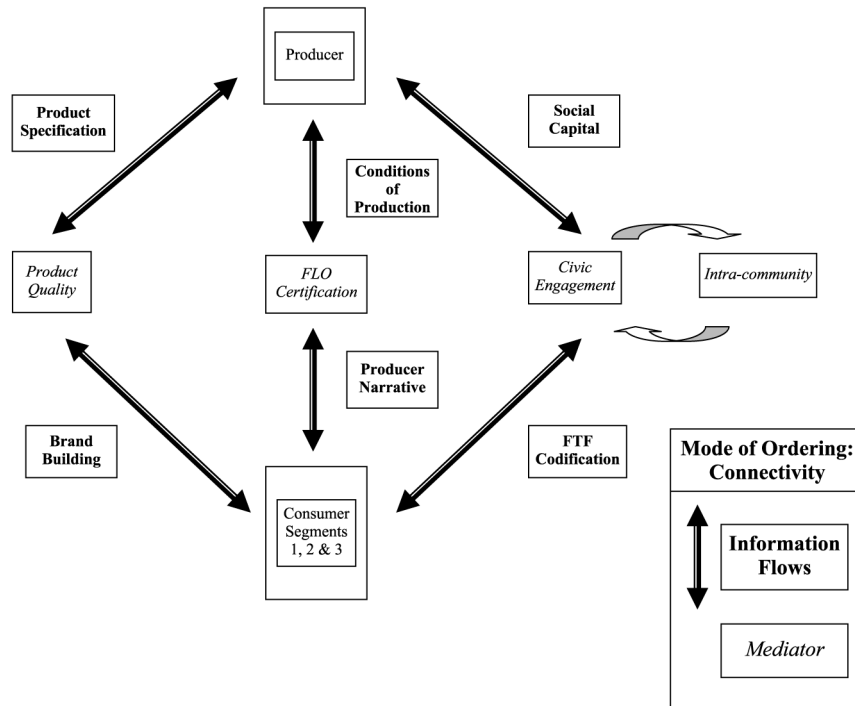


Figure 3.
Fair trade marketing
network: process, product
and place

between the Fair Trade Foundation and potential fair trade towns through codification and propagation, via marketing, of the Fair Trade Town initiative. Of course, as has already been noted, the initiative had its origins in local action and this underlines the multi-directionality of the communication flows. Finally, information also flows between communities as the notion of a fair trade town spreads geographically. Once again connectivity acts as the mode of ordering through which this part of the network is strengthened.

Conclusions

This research has highlighted how the marketing of fair trade has shifted from one solely focussing on the fair trade process to incorporate products and, more latterly, places. This shift can be explained by the development of target markets that have redefined the key information flows at each stage. Fair trade marketing has developed as the scope and potential of the fair trade commodity network has been understood.

Theoretically, we have sought to reveal the potential of an ANT informed interpretation. Two key aspects of this theory are highly relevant to our understanding of the development of fair trade. The first aspect centres on its focus on the process of exchange not the structure of exchange relationships. In a fair trade marketing context, the process of exchange can be seen as being constructed by the information flows within a communications strategy. The marketing relationships within the network serve to define fair trade for the end consumer by articulating the connection between consumer and supplier, and indeed include the consumer's own self-actualisation

process. Tied to this, an ANT informed conceptualisation sees the network constructed by the interaction of both human and non-human actants that serve as intermediaries defining its structure. Within the fair trade marketing network there are a range of important actants. The human actants include, for example, farmers, activists, roasters and consumers. The inanimate include the product itself, the certification process, supplier narratives, and civic values.

Since the strategic aim of fair trade marketing centres on establishing meaning via information flows between the producer and the consumer that create connectivity, an ANT approach is valuable in revealing mediators that enable the network. The development of fair trade marketing shows a conscious attempt to exploit an increasingly broad conceptualisation of the potential of the network in order to transmit the meanings of connectivity and fairness to a wider variety of market segments. This is not without difficulties and risks, but is full of potential.

The next stage of fair trade marketing is not yet clearly delineated, but several opportunities exist, including: to encourage market leading retailers to further develop own label fair trade products; to develop the role of fair trade as a part of corporate in-house catering; further to develop composite fair trade products that mix fair trade and non-fair trade ingredients to reduce the overall cost to the consumer of engaging with the fair trade process. A final opportunity is to expand the out-of-home market for fair trade in restaurants and coffee shops. In terms of the ANT analysis within this paper, these strategies would exploit new linkages within the fair trade marketing network, engaging new actants – for example the marketing executives of non-fair trade producers and new consumer segments – and developing new paths through which fair trade marketing communications can flow.

In conclusion, it can be proposed that an ANT analysis of marketing may have useful applications beyond fair trade. As has already been suggested, there is a growing interest on the part of both marketers and consumers in establishing firmer connections between producers, manufacturers, and the consumers of their goods. Clearly, this can be most immediately recognised in ethical products such as organic produce, but it is also the case that such analysis may add value to the formulation of marketing communications of not only a broader range of products that gain value from their embedded information and associations, such as provenance, but also of high-involvement goods in general. It is beyond the scope of this present work to elucidate such claims, and further testing of the ANT conceptualisation is required, but it is hoped that the application of an ANT approach to fair trade presented here may prompt a broader discussion in subsequent research.

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