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Evaluating italian attitude and behaviour toward Fair Trade products

In the context of food consumption, several issues have been widely discussed in reference to a large array of attributes and product types used as evidence of growing consumer feeling toward ethical issues linked to moral and social consciousness. Animal welfare, fair prices for farmers, social aspects of production, and preservation of cultural features, are some of the product attributes for which consumer behaviour has been analyzed in the context of ethical consumerism. This paper aims at providing insights into consumer motivational systems and their relations with fair trade product purchasing behaviour. In order to pursue this goal, the effectiveness of two alternative approaches, proposed in the literature and tested in Belgium and Germany, were formally assessed in Italy. The two sets of scales were tested for predicting purchasing behaviour by using a sample of Italian consumers.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, academic interest in ethical consumerism has progressively increased. From a general point of view ethical consumerism can be defined as "the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices due to personal and moral beliefs" (Crane and Matten, 2004). According to Cherrier (2007) and Newholm and Shaw (2007), the two most important activities which define ethical consumption are positive choice behaviors on the one hand, and boycotting certain goods or companies on the other. Moreover, ethical consumerism covers two distinct aspects: ecologically friendly and socially conscious consumption patterns.

In this study we specifically focus on the second aspect. Within the sphere of ethical consumerism and socially conscious consumption, fair trade products (FT) represent an important segment.

The main goal of the present paper is to add new empirical evidence so as to shed light on motivational systems and their relations with buying behavior of FT products in the Italian case. To pursue this goal two sets of attitudinal scales (De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Balderjahn et al.; 2013) were formally assessed and used to predict stated buying behavior of FT products on a sample of Italian consumers.

2. Consumers and ethical issues

In the context of food consumption, several issues have been widely discussed in reference to a large array of attributes and product types used as evidence of growing consumer feeling toward ethical issues linked to moral and social consciousness. Animal welfare, fair prices for farmers, social aspects of production, and preservation of cultural features, are some of the product attributes for which consumer behavior has been analyzed in the context of ethical consumerism. Several authors have focused on farm animal welfare concerns (see Lagerkvist and Hess, 2009, for a meta-analysis of the literature on consumers' WTP for farm animal welfare). Moore (2006) examined trusting relations between consumers and vendors in farmers' markets, underlining that consumers in the alternative agri-food network share ethical and moral values that include supporting the local area. Willingness to pay more for food products that guarantee a living wage and safe working conditions for farmworkers were also researched in the context of ethical consumption (Howard, 2006). Moreover, Zander and Hamm (2012) analyzed ethical attributes of organic food using among the different ethical attributes, fair prices for farmers, protection of biodiversity and preservation of cultural features.

Within the sphere of ethical consumerism and socially conscious consumption, fair trade (FT) products have been extensively analyzed by the literature in the last 20 years. Andorfer and Liebe (2012) in their overview on the current state of research on individual consumption of FT products analyze 51 papers and, even if some articles deal with consumer preferences and WTP, most examine FT product consumption in terms of consumer attitudes and motivations, extending or modifying Ajzen's (1991) basic model on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al., 2006; Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Nicholls and Lee, 2006; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007).

Other studies focus on general aspects of consumer attitudes toward FT: Nijssen and Douglas (2008) analyzed the impact of world-mindedness and social-mindedness on FT store image; Goig (2007) focused on the effect of consumers' global cognitive orientation on FT product consumption. Finally, Hertel et al. (2009) highlighted the influence of attitudes toward human rights on FT purchasing intentions.

De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) proposed and tested a complex 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. The factors used to collect information on general attitude were skepticism and level of concern, while specific attitude was measured by product interest, product likeability, price acceptability and convenience. The estimated behavioral model for buying fair trade products highlights the di-

rect effects of specific attitude indicators, the direct and indirect effect of general attitudes, and the indirect effects on behavior of knowledge and information.

More recently, Balderjahn et al. (2013) conceptualized and tested a model in which intention and buying behavior are determined by a synthetic indicator of action tendency, called Consciousness for Fair Consumption (CFC), resulting from personal experiences, norms, values and attitudes. The same authors define CFC as "a consumer's disposition to prefer products that have been manufactured and traded in compliance with fair labor conditions" (Balderjahn et al. 2013)

Therefore, the two main approaches to dealing with individual consumption of FT products lie in consumer preferences and WTP on the one hand, and consumption in terms of attitudes and motivations on the other (Andorfer and Liebe, 2012). In both cases fair trade labels have been widely researched in order to analyze their role in addressing consumer preferences and affecting WTP (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Didier and Seirux, 2008). Nevertheless, recent research (Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Bray et al., 2011; Dutra de Barcellos et al., 2011; Grunert, 2014) showed that labels on ethical attributes do not currently play a major role in consumer food choices, and suggested that the future use of such labels could depend on the extent to which consumers' general concern about ethical issues can be turned into actual purchase. This well-known gap between consumer attitudes and behavior is still considerable in countries where consumers are already quite aware and familiar with FT products, like France, and the gap is even greater in the countries of the Mediterranean basin, like Italy, where ethical attributes seem to be less important in affecting buying behavior (MORI, 2000). Indeed, most of the studies on FT have been conducted in the USA, UK and other Northern European countries where consumption of FT products is a well-consolidated practice. On the contrary, very few studies have been conducted in Mediterranean countries, like Italy, where FT is a growing phenomenon but still very restricted (MORI, 2000, Maietta, 2005; Becchetti and Rosati, 2007).

3. Material and methods

In order to shed light on consumer motivational systems and their relations with buying behavior of fair trade products, an ad-hoc analysis was conducted in Italy, where the most important fair trade organization is the General Assembly of Italian Fair Trade (AGICES). In 2013, this network included 87 member organizations, 30,496 individual members, and 257 so-called world shops, representing at least 80% of the whole fair trade and solidarity network in Italy. The most important member organizations, namely «Altra Qualità»,

«CTM-Altromercato», «Equo Mercato», and «Libero Mondo», are also importers, and include several world shops. FT organizations are not evenly distributed in Italy: many are located in the North where five regions (Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, Emilia Romagna and Piedmont) account for about 80% of the total revenue, followed by those of the Center (Umbria, Lazio and Tuscany) and the South. In the period 2007-11 the value of the production of AGICES members rose by 9%, reaching more than €88m in 2011. 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 (world shops). Moreover, in this context, 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, 2013). 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), in Italy there is great potential to expand this market segment supported by a growing willingness to pay more for fair trade products (Annunziata et al., 2011, Maietta, 2005; MORI, 2000).

De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) built a model for fair trade buying behavior to investigate the impact of fair trade knowledge and attitudes to the fair trade issue, the importance of attitudes to fair trade products and the overall perception of the information about fair trade. The approach of the model is the traditional Knowledge-Attitudes-Behaviour logic. Buying behaviour depends on the general attitude towards the fair trade issue (representing a positive and a negative component). Attitude is influenced and determined by the level of knowledge about this issue. They concluded that knowledge of fair trade, overall concern and skepticism toward fair trade, and perceived fair trade information influence buying behavior directly and indirectly through specific attitudes to FT products. The authors developed valid and reliable scales for each construct. Information about FT was investigated through two constructs: perception of the quantity and quality of FT information. Similarly, for general attitude toward FT they used two constructs: concern/interest and skepticism/lack of belief in FT. Finally, they used four constructs for specific attitudes toward FT products: product interest, product likeability, shopping convenience, and price acceptability.

By contrast, Balderjahn et al. (2013) emphasized the need to conceptualize sustainable consumption as a multidimensional construct according to which consumers differentiate between different aspects of sustainable consumption, such as environmentally and socially conscious consumption. They therefore studied a particularly important aspect of social consumption: the consumer's consciousness for fair consumption (CFC). Following the studies of other authors (Hustvedt and Bernard, 2010; Sunderer and Rössel, 2012), they investi-

gated CFC as a determinant of demand for FT products. Authors define consumers consciousness as a disposition, influenced by personal experiences, norms, values and attitudes, to prefer products that have been manufactured and traded in compliance with fair labor conditions.

To operationalize CFC, they applied the adequacy-importance approach (Cohen et al., 1972; Mazis et al., 1975) which combines a consumer's belief about the adherence to a specific labor standard with the importance the consumer attaches to adhering to this standard (Creyer and Ross, 1997; Auger and Devinney, 2007; Srivastava and Huddleston, 2007; Auger et al., 2010). They considered six items to measure CFC: 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. De Pelsmacker and Janssens tested their model on a sample of Belgian consumers while Balderjahn et al. used a sample of European university students and employees. While the former model is well documented in the literature (Carrington et al., 2010; Bartels and Onwezen, 2014) the latter, to the best of our knowledge, is still underexplored.

We tested both models through a web-based survey using a three-section questionnaire. The first section collected information about buying behavior, both considering annual average expenditure in FT products and purchasing frequency concerning four FT product types (fruit, textiles, beverages and candy). In the second section the most important demographic and socio-economic characteristics were collected (see tables 1 and 2). Finally, the third section contained the attitudinal scales. While all questionnaires shared the first and second sections, they differ in the third. In the questionnaire called Questionnaire A, the third section was devoted to the De Pelsmacker and Janssens scales. In Questionnaire B, the third section was devoted to the Balderjahn scale on CFC.

The two questionnaires for the survey were web administered using the website of the General Assembly of Italian Fair Trade (AGICES) which promoted the questionnaire in the period September – November 2013. Therefore, the population is likely to be characterized by a good level of knowledge and information about the FT concept and FT products. Questionnaire A or Questionnaire B were randomly submitted to the respondents. During the period, 668 questionnaires were collected, 334 for each survey. Demographics and socio-economic characteristics of the two samples are shown in tables 1 and 2.

The relationship of the two sets of scales with actual behavior was originally assessed using annual expenditure on FT products as a behavioral response. In this paper we follow the same procedure since the measure in question could be considered a specific and real index for actual buying patterns.

The functional relationship between the two sets of scales and actual behavior is thus analyzed using ordered probit regressions based on random

Tab. 1. Demographic characteristics*

Demographics	Classification	Percentage	
		Sample A	Sample B
Gender	Male	46.0	38.6
	Female	54.0	61.4
Age	18 – 25	17.5	12.3
	26 – 35	16.1	26.6
	36 -45	24.4	30.7
	46 -55	17.1	16.4
	56 +	24.9	14.0
Household members	1	10.0	12.0
	2	21.2	19.5
	3	21.8	25.4
	4	36.2	31.7
	5+	10.8	11.4
Families with children	< 12 y.o.	23.3	25.4
Geographic area	Central and Northern Italy	55.3	54.9
	Southern Italy	44.7	45.1

*Sample A refers to Questionnaire A; sample B refers to Questionnaire B

utility theory (McFadden, 2001). Ordered probit regression represents a generalization of probit regression and is specifically applied to analyze ordinal data, as in this case, since annual expenditure on FT products consists of a set (three in our analysis) of cases which can be ordinally measured (Winkelmann and Boes, 2009; Hinote et al., 2009).

The ordered probit model assumes a latent unobserved continuous process (1):

$$y_i^* = \mathbf{X}'_i \beta + e_i, \qquad E[e_i|\mathbf{X}_i] = 0, \qquad e_i \text{ i.i.d. N(0,1) with } i = 1,\ldots,n. \tag{1}$$

It underlies the ordinal observed outcome y_i (2):

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & (annual\,exp.\,in\,FT\,products\,less\,than\,10€) & if\,k_0 < y_i^* \le k_1 \\ 2 & (annual\,exp.\,in\,FT\,products\,between\,10€\,and\,100€) & if\,k_1 < y_i^* \le k_2 \\ 3 & (annual\,exp.\,in\,FT\,products\,more\,than\,100€) & if\,k_2 < y_i^* \le k_3 \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

Tab. 2. Socio-economic characteristics*

Demographics	Classification	Percentage	
		Sample A	Sample B
Occupation	Students	19.0	17.4
	Housekeepers	5.0	8.1
	Self-employed	19.0	16.2
	Employee	37.1	38.3
	Retired workers	7.0	6.3
	Temporary workers	13.0	13.8
Education	Low level	5.0	4.8
	Secondary school	49.0	49.1
	Degree	46.0	46.1
Monthly income	< €1,000	16.0	14.7
	€1,000 - 2,000	43.0	43.7
	€2,000 – 3,000	25.5	26.6
	> €3,000	15.6	15.0

*Sample A refers to Questionnaire A; sample B refers to Questionnaire B

where $k_0 = -\infty$ and $k_3 = \infty$; k_1 k_2 are unknown threshold parameters to be estimated in order to indicate the range of the normal distribution associated with specific values of the stated response variable y_i^*. $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a $1 \times m$ vector of explanatory variables and β is a $m \times 1$ vector of unknown parameters expressing the existing relationship between the behavioral response of consumers and the predictors.

Two different models were estimated using the two samples from the same population, and then compared to ascertain which fitted the observed data more accurately. The first model includes, among the factors influencing the behavioral response, traditional socio-demographic variables and the scales provided by De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007), to measure both specific and general attitudes toward FT products. The second model includes among the predictors, traditional socio-demographic variables and the measure of the consciousness for fair consumption – CFC, (Balderjahn et al., 2013).

Estimated coefficients (β) will show the direction and magnitude of the statistical associations between the explanatory variables ($\mathbf{x}$) and the probability of observing a higher classification of the consumption frequency, $P(y_i=j)$.

4. Results

The two samples used in the analysis show statistically equivalent values for ages, educational levels, and other socio-demographic variables. By means of Hotelling's T-squared test we cannot refute the hypothesis that the vectors of means are equal for the two samples (Table 3). Thus the two samples might be considered sampled by the same population.

Tab. 3. Hotelling's T-squared on equality of means across the two samples

Variable	Description	Sample A		Sample B	
		Mean	Std.Dev	Mean	Std.Dev
HH members	HH members	3.132	1.240	3.174	1.353
Children	Number of children	0.386	0.738	0.368	0.755
Education	Education level (classes)	3.401	0.625	3.404	0.601
Income	Income (classes)	2.419	0.916	2.398	0.949
Expenditure	Expenditure in FT (classes)	2.320	1.515	2.108	1.581
Age	Age	40.099	12.863	39.713	13.160
Sex	1= female; 0 = male	0.614	0.488	0.536	0.499

H0: Vectors of means are equal for the two groups; Prob > F(7660) = 0.37

4.1 Predictive power

The objective of the research was to compare the predictive validity of the scales proposed in the two studies in question. We therefore assessed the effectiveness of attitudinal scales, demographic and socio-economic characteristics in predicting Italian consumer behavior.

In line with De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) and Balderjahn et al. (2013), annual expenditure on FT product was chosen as the dependent variable. We split annual expenditure in three classes (Table 4). Because all respondents buy fair trade products, we don't introduce an expenditure class equal to 0 euro. The functional relationship between the independent variables and self-reported behavior is analyzed using ordered probit regressions based on random utility theory (McFadden, 2001).

Table 5 shows the maximum likelihood estimates of the two ordered probit models. Socio-demographic variables not significant at the $p < .05$ were eliminated from the models, starting with the least significant variable. The first

Tab. 4. Fair trade consumer spending

Consumption in €	Sample A		Sample B	
	#	%	#	%
1- less than 10	114	34.13	93	27.84
2- from 10 to 100	152	45.51	156	46.71
3- more than 100	68	20.36	85	25.45

Tab. 5. Ordered probit estimates

Sample A	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>z	Sample B	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>z
Concern	0.136	0.073	0.064	CFC	0.050	0.007	0
Product interest	0.263	0.061	0				
Product likeability	0.231	0.059	0				
Price acceptability	0.118	0.047	0.012				
Southern Italy	-0.335	0.149	0.025	Southern Italy	-0.246	0.148	0.095
HH members	-0.094	0.051	0.067	HH members	-0.075	0.055	0.175
Income	0.121	0.071	0.087	Income	0.144	0.070	0.040
$/k_1$	0.016	0.53			$/k_1$	1.342	0.368
$/k_2$	1.59	0.536			$/k_2$	2.763	0.384
Log likelihood = -283.95				Log likelihood = -319.22			
Pseudo R^2=0.1897				Pseudo R^2 = 0.0982			

model aims at measuring the relations between FT consumption and both specific and general attitudes toward FT products, as provided by De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007), while the second model aims at assessing the significance of the information provided by Consciousness for Fair Consumption – CFC (Balderjahn et al., 2013).

As regards the socio-demographic variables, among a large set of predictor variables tested in the empirical analysis, including gender, age and educational level of respondents, our results provide statistical evidence that FT consumption depends only on the income of the respondents (*positive relation*), the number of household members (*negative relation*) and the area of residence (respondents from southern Italy show a lower propensity to consume FT products).

With regard to the two sets of scales employed in the analysis, regardless of the magnitude of the coefficients, the estimated signs are consistent with the hypotheses formulated in table 5. Specifically, model 1 results show that four out five constructs provided by De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) are able to predict the consumption pattern of FT products: only "Skepticism" does not significantly affect consumption behavior. A Higher level of Concern and Product likeability vis-à-vis fair trade influence the consumption of FT products positively, while "Product interest" and "Price acceptability" affect consumption positively.

Results from model 2 provide statistical evidence of the value of CFC (Balderjahn et al., 2013) in understanding FT product consumption. Specifically, the higher the consciousness for fair consumption, the higher the probability of observing FT product consumption.

Having estimated both the models, the predictive contribution and statistical significance of the information provided by the two sets of scales were assessed by comparing McFadden's pseudo R^2 across the two estimates: the scales provided by De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) (pseudo $R^2 = 0.19$) are assessed to explain the variance much better than the CFC construct does alone (pseudo $R^2 = 0.10$). This result seems to provide further evidence of the multidimensional nature of the attitude to FT: the five scales from De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) are able to depict behavior better than the CFC as a single predictor, as formulated by Balderjahn et al. (2013).

5. Discussion

Even though the use of De Pelsmacker and Janssens' model is well documented in the literature (Carrington et al., 2010; Bartels and Onwezen, 2014) their model has not been adopted to evaluate scale reliability and predictive power in other countries or cultural and socio-economic contexts. The same can also be said for the more recent model developed by Balderjahn et al. (2013). Moreover, as mentioned above, attitudes toward FT and FT products have been little researched in Italy. Becchetti and Costantino (2010) analyzed the effect of FT in Italy. Becchetti and Rosati (2007) conducted a survey to identify the determinants of expenditure in FT products and the relationship with traditional factors, like income and intrinsic motivation–related factors. Annunziata et al. (2011) performed market segmentation on a sample of 300 consumers in Campania using, amongst other variables, also general attitude toward fair trade. Cicia et al. (2010) analyzed consumer preferences for FT coffee in a district of Lombardy, while D'Alessio et al. (2007) discussed the role of social capital à la Putnam in order to explain different consumer behavior in three different regions of southern and northern Italy. They found that, in

regions with higher values of social capital indexes, ethical motivations tend to prevail.

Unlike the studies cited above, we adopted a sample that included consumers from all Italian regions. Our results confirm the different behavior of FT consumers in northern and southern Italy, with a lower consumption in southern Italy.

All the scales on general and product attitude tested in the De Pelsmacker and Janssens model confirmed their impact on consumer behavior, showing significant coefficients with the expected sign, with the only exception of the variable on skepticism which relates to attitude to FT in general. On this specific point, it could be argued that in the present study the sample was chosen among consumers already informed about the meaning of FT and FT products. Moreover, the survey was web-administered and promoted by the AGICES website. It is therefore very likely that respondents share a high degree of information and knowledge about fair trade, while in the De Pelsmacker and Janssens sample the respondents were not necessarily fair trade or ethical buyers. Since skepticism is highly correlated with information and knowledge (De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007) and our sample is highly homogeneous with reference to information and knowledge, the skepticism variable may not work.

Also CFC scale was confirmed through its impact on intentions to purchase of fair trade products.

Another aspect that differentiates our investigation is the use of sociodemographic variables that we included to capture the effects of income and family composition but also to highlight the differences in consumer behavior in northern and southern Italy: our findings confirm the higher propensity to participate in the FT market in northern Italy, besides highlighting the positive effect of income on FT product expenditure and the role of household size. Smaller families show higher expenditure in fair trade products, probably due to lower constraints when allocating family income.

Unlike the two original studies of De Pelsmacker and Janssens and Balderjahn et al., where the two sets of scales were mainly used for inferential purposes, in this paper the predictive power was formally investigated. For this purpose, we adopted the empirical framework proposed by Verneau *et al.* (2014). The authors used discrete choice models with different specifications in order to compare the predictive power of an attitudinal scale with classic socio-demographic variables. In our case, two different but statistically equivalent samples were used to compare the two attitudinal scales. Since the data generating process was the same for the two groups of samples, we assumed that the difference in predicting behavior between the two models depends on the predictive power of the two set of scales. The estimation outcome revealed the superiority of the De Pelsmacker and Janssens approach in predicting actual behavior in comparison with that of Balderjahn et al., at least in our experimental framework.

6. Conclusions

The main goal of the present paper was to add new empirical evidence in order to gain insights into consumer motivational systems and their relations with buying behavior in Italy.

To pursue this goal two different sets of attitudinal scales were assessed and used to predict stated buying behavior on a sample of Italian consumers.

The two questionnaires for the survey were web administered using the website of the General Assembly of Italian Fair Trade (AGICES) which promoted the questionnaire in the period September – November 2013.

Three main conclusions stem from the results. The first conclusion is related to the comparison of De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) and the CFC scales in predicting purchase behavior by means of an ordered probit model. The De Pelsmacker and Janssens scales seem to perform better in predicting behavior. Moreover, in both models, demographic and socio-economic variables play the same role, confirming the approximate equivalence of the two samples. Finally, the negative coefficient of Southern Italy highlights the need for more detailed analysis on the Italian case using regional macroeconomic and social capital indicators. The second conclusion refers to the possibility of using the results of our research to implement market segmentation strategies to target specific communication policies toward consumer segments most likely to purchase FT products. A final consideration regards the increasing importance of ethical consumption in developed countries, due to increased sensitivity towards sustainable aspects of the production processes, both environmental and social. In particular, the CFC scale is a tool that aims at focusing on a very specific dimension of socially consumerism because it reflects consumer's preferences for products obtained and traded according with fair labor conditions, 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 productions obtained in the developed Countries too. This implies the need to extend the analysis to a broader concept of fair trade, including typical products of developed countries which share with those from poor countries, ethical attributes increasingly important in driving consumer purchase behavior.

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