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Fashion victim: the impact of fair trade concerns on clothing choice

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Fair trade is concerned with ensuring a fair price and fair working conditions for producers and suppliers, promoting equitable trading agreements. Throughout recent years fair trade has experienced considerable growth in the food sector. This growth has been significantly aided by labelling certification through the Fairtrade Foundation mark and availability in the mainstream. Consumer concern in other product sectors, notably fashion and clothing where child labour and worker's rights are pertinent issues, is exerting pressure for similar action. However, this market remains under-developed, restricting choice in this area. Despite recent media attention and increased levels of consumer concern, fair trade concerns in the clothing market have been neglected in marketing research. In order to address this, this paper considers fair trade concerns in the context of sweatshop clothing. The article examines consumers' ethical intentions to avoid purchasing sweatshop-produced clothing and their actual purchase behaviour, as well as the constraints impacting consumer behaviour in this context.

KEYWORDS: Fair trade; fashion; sweatshop; decision–making

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INTRODUCTION

The growing awareness among consumers of the environmental and social impact of their own consumption has led to the increased demand for more 'ethical' product alternatives (e.g. Doane, 2001). Ethical concerns are very broad and in some way are applicable to every product and service, and include environmental, animal, societal and people issues (e.g. Shaw and Clarke, 1999; Strong, 1997). This study addresses the latter: concerns about fair labour practices in clothing production that impact upon consumer choice (Weadick, 2002). Despite recent media attention and increased levels of consumer concern, fair trade concerns in this context have been neglected in marketing research. Pertinent to marketing strategy are the decisions surrounding how organisations respond to such consumer concerns, and the resultant impact on the management of both short- and long-term organisational objectives. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine consumers' intention to avoid sweatshop-manufactured clothing and their corresponding behaviour. The challenges and opportunities of a fair trade framework in clothing production will be discussed and implications for organisational strategic decision-making outlined.

Fair trade is concerned with ensuring a fair price and fair working conditions for producers and suppliers, promoting equitable trading agreements. Consumer concern surrounding sweatshop clothing production has resulted in a demand for fairer practices in the clothing sector. Fair trade has experienced significant growth in the food sector. In the UK, for example, sales of fair trade products doubled between 2001 and 2003 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2003). In food choice the development of fair trade has been significantly aided by labelling certification through the Fairtrade Foundation mark and availability in the mainstream. Consumer concern in other product sectors, notably fashion and clothing where child labour and worker's rights are pertinent issues, is exerting pressure for similar action. Campaigns across Western countries have highlighted poor labour practices and resulted in high profile boycott calls against organisations including Nike and Gap (Klein, 2001). Although many organisations have responded with codes of conduct on production practices, many campaigners and consumers are demanding that these are improved to further ensure fairer trade practices. Given the accusations that many codes of conduct are mere public relations exercises, they remain unreliable as a guide to ethical decision-making (Shaw and Duff, 2002). As yet, therefore, consumer decision-making cues such as labelling are not readily available in this sector. In this context, therefore, ethically concerned consumers find themselves confronted by uncertainty in terms of both information available to aid decision-making and the consequences of their actions (Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004). Using the example of a t-shirt, consumer choice criteria may include the 'people' issue of whether the t-shirt is fairly traded or made under sweatshop conditions. The consumer may, therefore, consider country of origin and working conditions important factors in choice and wish to purchase a garment produced in their home country to alleviate these concerns. Conflict can arise, for example, between a concern to trade fairly with poorer countries, to promote their economies and a desire to support home-country production. In such a situation the purchase of a traditionally low involvement product such as a t-shirt can require substantially more effort on the part of the consumer in decision-making. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a 'words/deeds inconsistency' has been reported in terms of a weak relationship between what consumers say, and what they do (e.g. Gill et al., 1986). Thus, while an individual may state that they intend to avoid sweatshop labour when purchasing clothing, difficulties at the point of choice may result in 'apparent' behavioural inconsistency.

How consumers do in fact respond to such fair trade concerns is critical to organisational strategy and decisions surrounding how to or whether to respond to such consumer concerns.

Previous research indicates that consumers prioritise their ethical concerns to a limited number they consider they can 'cope' with when making consumption choices (e.g. Newholm, 2000; Shaw and Clarke, 1999). Indeed, Shaw and Duff (2002) and Tomolillo and Shaw (2004) found ethical concerns surrounding sweatshop labour to be most pertinent to ethical consumers in clothing choice. It is critical that an improved understanding of the impact of these concerns on actual behaviour is gained before key strategic business responses can be considered.

The aim of the present study, therefore, is to examine consumers' ethical intentions to avoid purchasing sweatshop-produced clothing and their actual purchase behaviour. This research does not seek to assess the actual practices of manufacturers or retailers regarding the use or abuse of sweatshop labour; rather we are concerned with the behaviour of consumers in the UK with regard to their purchase of clothing that they *perceive* to be either fairly or unfairly produced. As such, the paper will begin by discussing fair trade clothing in the context of fashion and consumer decision-making and will then explore business responses and implications for strategic marketing.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fair trade and fashion

Increasingly, consumers and businesses are being alerted to fair trade concerns related to the clothing and fashion sector. Many of these concerns relate to sweatshop production; thus, the call for fair trade practices in the clothing sector is being illustrated through sweatshop concerns. Although there are a number of definitions of 'sweatshop', it mostly refers to factory production in which employees are exploited by means of low wages, excessive working hours, under-age employees, or other exploitative practices, frequently but not exclusively in developing economies where labour laws and workers rights can be less rigorous (see for example, Weadick, 2002).

Research exploring decision-making among ethical consumer groups has revealed that while consumers place ethical concerns highly on their purchase criteria this is often not at the expense of other more traditional factors important in choice (e.g. Shaw and Clarke, 1999). The UK fair trade coffee brand Cafedirect provides an illustration of this. In order to be successful the organisations involved in Cafedirect were aware that it was not enough to be an ethical brand, they also had to ensure they supplied a good quality product which was readily available in mainstream markets; these factors were critical to the success of this product. Similarly, in clothing choice research has revealed that factors including fashion and availability are pertinent to actual purchase behaviour among concerned consumers (Shaw and Duff, 2002; Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004). Thus, although research in the UK (e.g. Shaw and Duff, 2002; Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004) and the United States (e.g. Dickson, 1999, 2001) has revealed that consumers wish to purchase more fairly traded clothing items, this is not always to the neglect of the style of the items purchased. This was evident from complaints about the 'unfashionability' of many fair trade alternatives available on the market (Shaw and Duff, 2002; Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004). Thus, although consumers were disparaging of 'fashion' this was due to the dominance and irresponsible behaviour of many large organisations in well-documented cases of the use of sweatshop labour.

For many individuals in Western society the role of clothing is not confined to functional needs; rather, it is suggested that needs for belongingness and self-esteem motivate individuals to seek fashionable clothing as a means of gaining acceptance from peers and as a demonstration of social standing (Easey, 2002; Gabriel and Lang, 1995). The importance attached to the

'sign–value' of successful brands provides a clear illustration of this. In terms of ethics consumers must manage their need for personal identity through clothing and their concerns surrounding sweatshop labour. The fashion industry is characterised by rapid changes in styles, novelty and mass consumption which run contrary to the notions of ethical consumption. Critics further argue that fashion fosters shallow, materialistic perspectives which result in a constant state of lifestyle and physical dissatisfaction (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Jameson, 1992). Lee (2003) refers to this as 'speed chic' and the 'McFashion' of an industry which feeds our relentless appetite for new clothes, while noting the environmental damage and economic divisions caused by this industry.

Ethical consumers believe that by making ethical choices they have the power to encourage and support businesses which avoid exploiting or harming humans (Anon, 2002; Shaw and Clarke, 1999). In this sense it is understood that these consumers use their buying decisions to demonstrate their beliefs and opinions, therefore, likening their purchase to a 'vote' (e.g. Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Friedman, 1996; Smith, 1990). In food choice purchase votes have revealed growth markets for organic and fair-trade produce and the increased availability of these items in mainstream markets. The market for ethical clothing, however, is limited, therefore, an individual's desire to convey their personal values and beliefs through ethical choices may prove untenable. Although consumers may state that they intend to avoid sweatshop clothing, in reality words/deeds inconsistency may arise when they attempt to actually purchase such items. This is hardly surprising in a market with limited product information, availability and choice of fair-trade alternatives. Indeed, Shaw and Duff (2002) found that it was not information about fair trade issues which was lacking—most felt that this was well-documented through pressure groups and the media—but what was frustrating for these consumers was their inability to act upon this information at point of purchase due to information conflict and a lack of 'positive' purchase information. Faced with no label to ensure fair trade standards of production, consumers resorted to imperfect clues such as 'country of origin', in the knowledge that stigmatising particular countries could also prove harmful to the workers employed there. Shaw and Duff (2002) further found that although most consumers were involved in actions such as boycotts, most would prefer to have the opportunity to make positive ethical choices. Although a small number of ethical retailers exist, most of these are only available through the internet or mail order and many of these retailers have been criticised for the lack of consideration given to the fashion element of their products (Shaw and Duff, 2002).

As a result of imperfect market choices, therefore, the purchasing strategies adopted by concerned consumers prove difficult to define. It is clear that clothing is an important consumption context, however, a lack of readily available ethical alternatives and product information leaves consumers with an inability to articulate their ethical concerns effectively through 'purchase votes'.

Market responses

As noted above, fair trade clothing is significantly under-represented in the marketplace (Anon, 1997; Law, 2000; Weadick, 2002). In terms of organic alternatives, Watson (2001) argues that in the same way as organic food products have become popular it is inevitable that consumers will extend the scope of their organic purchases to organic textiles. Such an argument could also be applied to fairly traded non-sweatshop clothing, given the significant growth of fair trade products in the food sector. Although some fashion retailers, including UK company Marks and Spencer and Italian company Missoni, have introduced organic cotton ranges (e.g. Marks and Spencer,

2002; Watson, 2001), generally, as with fair trade concerns, consumers experience more restricted ethical choices due to a general lack of available options in mainstream outlets (Anon, 1997).

Carrigan and Attalla (2001) note that although consumers may think highly of the practices of ethical companies, they may not necessarily purchase their products or correspondingly boycott ethically questionable companies. The context of clothing is particularly highlighted due to the importance of brand image and fashion status in decision-making. Previous research exploring the impact of ethics on clothing choice is supportive of the importance of fashion in decision-making (Shaw and Duff, 2002; Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004). This research reveals, therefore, the difficulties faced by niche ethical retailers in this area in, for example, keeping up-to-date with fashion trends while supporting fair trade producers. Contrary to Carrigan and Attalla (2001), however, Shaw and Duff (2002) and Tomolillo and Shaw (2004) found that consumers were willing to boycott unethical brand leaders. Such findings are pertinent to decisions concerning strategic organisational responses to ethical issues.

Consumer boycotting is believed to be on the increase, indeed, an internet search for the term 'boycott' revealed 618,840 hits (www.google.com). Aided by the effectiveness of the internet as a communication tool, evidence suggests that companies do suffer commercial loss from boycotts (e.g. Klein, 2000). High-profile boycott calls against global brands including Gap and Nike result in these companies becoming known ethical offenders. Awareness and information surrounding these boycott calls is relatively prolific. Shaw and Duff (2002) and Tomolillo and Shaw (2004) found that although many consumers supported these boycotts, difficulties emerged in making decisions as to which companies are 'good' to support. Faced with a high level of 'negative' company information, often to the point of information overload (Shaw and Clarke, 1999), consumers wished to see campaign groups and the media supply information on 'positive' alternative choices (Shaw and Duff, 2002). This issue is raised by Carrigan and Attalla (2001) who note that consumers may be overwhelmed rather than disinterested in ethical purchasing due to the abundant levels of available information, and note that information gathering may actually be reduced in a society where individuals experience a high level of time pressure. Further dilemmas arise when consumers consider the impact of boycotting child labour, which could force children into more dangerous employment and the ethics surrounding boycotting without prior workforce permission, an issue raised by UK campaign organisation Labour behind the Label (www.labourbehindthelabel.org). In terms of company impact the existence and profile of these boycotts has a negative impact on company image as well as a potentially damaging impact on commercial success. This can be seen in the case of one campaigner who requested that Nike write 'sweatshop' on a pair of personalised training shoes, and the resultant dialogue after a refusal from the company which made its way around the world on e-mail, the internet and mainstream media (Anon, 2001).

As noted above, research has revealed that consumers would prefer to positively support more socially responsible companies. This is evident in the increased pertinence given to corporate social responsibility in strategic decision-making (e.g. Hollender, 2004). While positive consumer choice is now possible in the context of food choice where many ethical alternatives are now readily available in mainstream outlets, ethical alternatives in clothing remains a limited niche market. Research suggests that consumers may be unwilling to fully support this sector due to more traditional product choice criteria, including fashion and availability, which remain important and yet to be adequately satisfied in this consumption context. This debate highlights the existence of an ethical market on a continuum of focus. Crane (2005) outlines this continuum in terms of strategies for orienting towards the ethical market from narrow specialisation in the form of ethical niche which focuses solely or predominantly on the promotion of ethical credentials to attempts to address ethical concerns within a more mainstream market where ethical credentials are a secondary or

additional factor. Indeed, some organisations may not wish to respond to ethical concerns at all, favouring a low-cost orientation, which in the clothing sector is likely to favour the outsourcing of production, perhaps involving questionable labour practices. Crane (2005) suggests that the potency of the ethical consumer is such that failure to act ethically could result in 'dire' consequences for the organisation. Indeed, the need to understand the ethical beliefs and values of consumers is critical to both niche and mainstream strategies in ethical markets as consumer backlash against green products during the 1980s clearly revealed. While the benefits of ethical nicheing are apparent in terms of a more holistic approach to ethics, the many criticisms levied at ethical organisations such as the Body Shop (e.g. Tomlinson, 2004) demonstrate the pertinence of living up to an ethical reputation. Ethical mainstreaming enjoys the benefits of wider market access but may suffer from criticisms regarding market exploitation through responding to changing market preferences rather than genuine ethical concern. Ethical concerns, therefore, are not fixed and can be unpredictable. Responding to the ethical concerns of consumers is something all organisations need to consider and for some may be an essential element in strategic decision-making.

The aim of the current study, therefore, is to explore more fully the fair trade concerns and behaviours of ethical consumers in clothing choice and their implications for strategic marketing. Specifically this paper will:

- compare ethical consumers intended behaviour when purchasing clothing and their actual purchases; and
- identify the constraints that impact ethical consumer behaviour in this context.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research aim it was essential to access a sample of consumers with a strong ethical stance who were likely to take steps to avoid purchasing sweatshop-produced clothing. In stage one, therefore, a questionnaire was sent to a purposive sample of subscribers to the UK magazine *Ethical Consumer*. Measures of behavioural intention were obtained from 894 respondents as recommended by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). From this original sample a sub-group of 262 consumers were identified as having a behavioural intention to avoid the purchase of sweatshop clothing and had indicated they were prepared to take part in future research. In stage two, telephone interviews were then conducted with these consumers 6 weeks after the completion of the original questionnaire to identify their actual purchase behaviour in that period. The telephone interviews were semi-structured and covered clothing purchases in the preceding 6 weeks, obstacles to exercising choice and specific influencing factors. The present paper focuses on findings from the telephone interview stage of the research.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In what follows the research findings will be discussed in terms of respondents behavioural intentions and actual behaviour, as well as the constraints impacting behaviour in this context in terms of mainstream availability and access to ethical retailers, information and price.

Behaviour

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1=no intention at all and 7=very strong intention, 'how strong is your intention to avoid purchasing an item of sweatshop

clothing the next time you shop for clothing?' Of respondents, 81% had a high level of intention (i.e. 5–7) to avoid sweatshop clothing and only 9.2% of respondents held a low intention (i.e. 1–3). Responses represented a mean of 5.71. A representative sample was then selected for telephone interview and 262 interviews took place 6 weeks after the completion of the questionnaire. Of the 262 interview respondents, 75% (200) had made clothing purchases in the time period, with the majority purchasing between 1 and 4 items. However, when asked what proportion was sweatshop-free, only 32% of respondents believed that they had made sweatshop-free purchases and 6% (16) did not experience any difficulties in shopping for sweatshop-free clothing. Of the remainder, the majority either had purchased items knowing that they were unlikely to be sweatshop-free, or were unable to assess whether their purchases were sweatshop-free or not. The difficulty in assessing purchases is illustrated by two respondents:

> It's not that I see ethical clothing and choose not to buy it, but rather I just don't see it around, so I don't have any choice. (R322).
> I wouldn't buy an item under any circumstances if I knew it was definitely sweatshop clothing, but you just can't tell. (R69).

Although respondents intended to avoid sweatshop-free clothing, it was difficult to do so; indeed, the barriers to ethical behaviour in this context were perceived by the majority of respondents to be unassailable within the High Street.

Three main constraints can be identified when attempting to purchase sweatshop-free clothing: difficulties in accessing ethical clothing including issues such as lack of ethical retail outlets, the limited range offered by ethical retailers and the lack of fashionable clothing available; the lack of information regarding the brands or retailers that are sweatshop-free; and the price of ethically produced clothing (see Table 1).

Access to ethical clothing

The most widely identified constraint was accessing ethical retailers. Over half (55%) of the respondents reported difficulties in getting access to ethical retailers or that there are no ethical brands and retailers on the High Street. Many also stated that they had a strong desire to make ethically sound purchases and, therefore, if ethical labels were readily available on the High Street they would purchase an increased number of sweatshop-free garments.

Table 1. Difficulties encountered when trying to shop for sweatshop-free clothing

	Frequency	Percent
Access to ethical retailers/availability of ethical retailers on high street	144	55
Lack of information	115	44
Limited choice/range	85	32
Fashionability	40	15
Ethical clothing too expensive	35	13
No difficulties experiencd	16	6
Not concerned with the issue	12	5

N.B. Frequency does not add to 262, and percentages do not add to 100% due to multiple responses.

> If I was more aware of where to buy ethical clothing I would definitely buy them, but as it is there are few retail outlets where I live. (R306).

Of respondents, 32% reported the limited choice/range in ethically produced clothing as a problem. Most complained about a lack of formal and/or smart work clothes:

> There's a very limited choice. If I was buying something for a special occasion I would be less likely to buy ethically, for example, for a wedding or something like that. Just because of the very limited choice. (R84).

> For work I need to wear business suits, but I have real problems in getting something that smart from ethical shops. (R116).

Related to these limitations imposed by the range provided in ethically sound clothing, a further 15% (40 respondents) complained about the unfashionable nature of ethical clothing. One respondent felt that ethical clothes 'are very unstylish and old fashioned' (R164), while another explained:

> You can't find design lead clothes that are ethical because the clothes are all of a certain type, like in the People Tree catalogue. Although they are starting to do basics, like t-shirts, socks, etc. but it's very difficult, if not impossible to buy trendy or smart clothing. (R66).

This lack of fashionable clothing forces consumers into trade-off decisions between their ethical and fashion led desires. Consumers frequently felt they were unable to marry their ethical identity and their fashion identity due to the poor selection of ethically produced clothing. If they wanted to convey their ethical beliefs they could not also be fashionable, and vice versa.

> If there are two designs and the item is for a special occasion I would go with my favourite design regardless of ethics, I am only human. (R159).

Within the 15% who reported fashionability as a problem when buying sweatshop-free clothing, 7% (18 respondents) also reported the lack of larger sizes. Again, these respondents expressed a desire to purchase fair trade clothing, but they are not catered for by ethical manufactures.

> I do not buy clothes on the basis of them being sweatshop free due to availability and size issues. I am over a size 18 and catalogues like People Tree don't have anything that big. So even though I am concerned about the issues my size dictates any purchases. (R203).

Information

The lack of information relating to the origins of the product and the company's policy regarding sweatshop-produced clothing was the second most prevalent problem faced by consumers. Consequently, consumers 'have no way of knowing' if garments originated in a sweatshop. One respondent explained how this has resulted in a decline in intention to avoid potential sweatshop purchases.

> 'You can't find out any information from shops, and other sources. I used to buy as much sweatshop-free as possible, but the lack of information has made it so difficult I no longer worry about it. (R12).

When asked 'how do you know that products are sweatshop-free?' four main methods were described: conducting background research into retailers ethical practices; purchasing *only* from trusted ethical outlets; reading labels and making judgements based upon the country of origin; and by avoiding particular companies (see Table 2).

Table 2. Methods used by respondents to determine sweatshop-free products

			Frequency	Percent
1	Doing background research		172	66
	1.1	Media sources	119	45
		1.1.1 Reading ethical magazines/publications	102	39
		1.1.2 General media sources, e.g. newspapers, news, etc.	17	7
	1.12	Reading manufacturer/store information or Code of Conduct	18	7
	1.3	Web research	17	7
	1.4	Ask in tore for information	11	4
	1.5	Background research (no specifics given)	7	3
2	Using ONLY trusted/ethical outlets		111	42
3	Reading the label		88	34
	3.1	Generally reading the labels	24	9
	3.2	Checking the country of origin	16	6
	3.3	Assuming made in UK/EU is O.K.	25	10
	3.4	Avoid certain countries of origin	10	4
	3.5	Looking for Fair Trade logos/marks	13	5
4	Boycotting particular companies		19	7
	4.1	Avoiding stores/brands with bad reputation for ethics	14	5
	4.2	Avoid MNCs.	5	2
6	Don't know/can't tell		18	7
7	Word of mouth		10	4

N.B. Frequency does not add to 262, and percentages do not add to 100% due to multiple responses.

The majority of respondents (66%) reported seeking out factual information regarding a retailer's ethical practices. This was generally obtained from media, both ethical publications such as *Ethical Consumer Magazine* and *No Logo* and popular media sources such as newspapers and TV. A number of consumers claimed that they carried out more intensive background research into companies before they bought anything from them. Various sources were used in this research process including the internet, both the company in question's own website and other ethically informative sites, and the company Code of Conduct would be obtained and read along with the Corporate Policy. Therefore, the degree of external search effort required to establish the ethical credentials of fashion products was considerable and time-consuming, leaving little room to make impulse purchases. An organisation's staff was regarded as an unreliable source of data. Whilst a number of respondents stated that they asked in store about the company's policy regarding sweatshop manufacturing and the origins of certain garments, this was regarded as problematic as staff rarely know this information, 'I will ask the shop owners, however they tend not to know whether their products are ethical or not and claim they have to make a living regardless' (R83), and where they do give answers, respondents felt they were untrustworthy, 'the staff won't tell you the truth anyway' (R59). The act of asking questions in store may be futile in terms of the

customer gaining helpful information, but it can be a useful way for these consumers to register their concerns and desires with the retailers.

Of respondents, 42% felt they could only be certain of purchasing sweatshop-free products if they bought from ethically sound sources. A number of trusted ethical retailers such as Gossypium, Bishopston Trading, and Green Fibres which guarantee the origin of the products were mentioned. However, these sources were also reported as problematic as they are generally mail order, difficult to access on the High Street, stock limited ranges, were perceived to be aimed at the female market and were not perceived as being fashionable.

The most commonly used cue to distinguish between sweatshop and non-sweatshop clothing is the labelling of country of origin, 34% (88 respondents) mentioned this as a key indicator. For example, 10% (25 respondents) assumed that provided the label stated 'Made in the UK' or the 'EU' then it was sweatshop-free; however, if it was made outside these areas many assumed 'these clothes come from sweatshops' (R202).

A further 4% (10 respondents) used the premise that if the country of origin was a developing country the item must have been made in a sweatshop and was, therefore, avoided, but if it was a developed country it would be 'OK'. Within this 4%, a number of respondents specifically avoided garments made in 'notorious' or 'dubious' countries, the most common example given being China. Clearly, the use of these cues is problematic as it implies that any country wishing to improve labour conditions by encouraging ethical manufacturing, is in effect, hampered by a country of origin reputation, which may act against social change. It could also be interpreted as a form of cultural imperialism by assuming that sweatshop labour is not used in European countries, which makes them a superior supplier.

Respondents frequently espoused the need for Fair Trade logos in the clothing industry and many reported looking for Fair Trade logos on clothing labels as they equated these to mean that items had not been made under sweatshop conditions. The idea of Fair Trade logos was used synonymously with sweatshop free production.

> I think that the clothing industry needs more regulations and visible signs or logos on labels, like a Fair-trade mark. This would help consumers to know which products are ethically made instead of just looking at country of origin and avoiding countries that are known to have sweatshops when that particular product may not come from a sweatshop. (R262).

Despite no regulated or independent Fair Trade mark currently existing for clothing, these respondents reported looking for fair trade symbols similar to those found on tea and coffee.

A commonly reported response by consumers who wished to purchase fairly traded clothing was the boycotting of certain companies based upon the reputation of the brand or retailer. A number of retailers were identified as having a 'reputation' for their ethical—or lack of ethical—practices. Gap and Nike were the most commonly cited examples of retailers who are associated with sweatshop labour and, therefore, should be avoided. In practice, however, a few respondents did shop at Gap and justified this in terms of either the availability and price of the items, or the lack of choice from ethical retailers. Conversely, respondents associated some retailers and brands with non sweatshop manufacturing. Two high street chains (BHS and Marks and Spencer's) were mentioned in particular as likely to be sweatshop-free and smaller, independent brands were assumed to be more ethical than large, luxury brands. This encouraged consumers to feel more confident about purchasing from these retailers. These respondents purchasing and avoidance behaviour can be considered as them 'registering their vote' by purchasing from retailers they believe to be ethical whilst boycotting retailers they believe are unethical. These judgements and

subsequent purchasing actions, however, are being made on little or no evidence about the practices of the organisations involved.

The impact of price

Price was reported as a significant barrier to purchasing sweatshop-free clothing. Ethical clothing is often sold at a higher price than mainstream clothing found on the High Street in order to pay a living wage to the producer. Some respondents, however, were living on a tight budget so, despite their strong desire, they simply could not afford to purchase ethically manufactured goods, whilst others described a trade off between price and ethics with many objecting to these higher prices when they could get cheaper alternatives quicker and easier from the High Street.

   The price of ethical clothing can be seen to be alienating potentially highly motivated consumers. Higher prices simply place ethical items beyond the means of some consumers, while others would appear to balance the extra cost against the purpose of the clothing. Clothing which the respondents considered unrelated to, or not worn to reflect their identity was viewed as not worth the extra money or hassle to ensure fair trade and ethical manufacturing practices had been adhered to. In contrast, it was considered important to ensure the ethical credentials of those items and/or outfits which the consumer perceived as being connected to the projection of their identity.

> The biggest problem I have is the cost of ethical clothing; in terms of work wear I'm not as bothered if they are ethically sound. I'm not willing to spend more on clothes for work so as to ensure their ethical credentials. (R66).

> I wouldn't dream of going to somewhere fancy and advertising my clothes had been made in a sweatshop, for example, going to a party where my clothes are going to be noticed, I would definitely make sure they were sweatshop free. (R683).

DISCUSSION

Respondents in this study were highly motivated ethical consumers many of whom equated Fair Trade to also mean sweatshop-free production. The results of this study illustrate the significant barriers to purchasing fairly traded sweatshop-free clothing and various methods employed by consumers in order to ensure the ethical and fairly traded sweatshop-free nature of garments before purchasing. Despite reporting a high intention to purchase sweatshop-free clothing, the lack of information forced many respondents to 'just take a gamble' (R402), 'it's guess work at times' (R200), and 'just hoping they were not made in a sweatshop' (R576). Given the high involvement nature of the sample with regard to ethical intentions, the perceived barriers to the purchase of ethical clothing illustrate the problems inherent in a market where information is limited in terms of its perceived availability and its usefulness in indicating fair trade manufacture. As a result consumers are clearly making judgements based on criteria that do not either accurately reflect any ethical policy on the part of the retailer or trading off ethical intention for fashion or price considerations.

   Just as fair trade food products must satisfy a desire for ethics alongside quality, taste and availability, respondents in this study reported fair trade clothing must fulfil consumer needs for fashion and availability. This suggests that ethical retailers must consider the fashion element of their products more fully while achieving ways in which to access the market more completely,

such as through concessions in mainstream outlets. In terms of existing high street retailers, inherently having the dimension of availability resolved, they must address the ethical concerns surrounding their products, particularly in terms of production and labelling. Codes of conduct as they currently stand are not sufficient to convince ethically concerned consumers of the merits of clothing products. Further, codes of conduct are not available at point of purchase, and, as such cannot be viewed as a substitute for clear informative labelling.

The introduction of regulated Fair Trade labelling would help consumers to quickly and easily determine the ethical nature of items while reducing the time-consuming external search for information regarding the retailers manufacturing practices undertaken by many consumers. The introduction of these labels should prove effective and successful as many respondents reported already looking for such labelling on clothing to determine the sweatshop-free nature of garments. The need for labelling in this area has been highlighted by Dickson (2001), who explored consumer reaction to a 'no sweat label' designed for clothing. Indeed, in recognising this need the UK Fairtrade Foundation, who currently only certify food, are currently working to 'agree Fairtrade standards for cotton and textiles, and recent progress means that cotton producers and growers are now able to apply for Fairtrade certification through FLO. However, this is only one element of the cotton industry, and work is still ongoing to assess where Fairtrade certification could usefully be extended to aspects of textile and garment manufacturing' (Fairtrade Foundation correspondence, 2004). This will be pertinent to ensuring that ethical clothing does not become just another 'niche' market, enabling companies to work towards labelling certification for products. This appears to be central to the demands made by ethically concerned consumers both in this study and throughout previous research (Shaw and Duff, 2002; Tomolillo and Shaw, 2004), as through their demands for increased access on the high street and 'mainstream' ethical clothing they are seeking more widespread ethical organisational practice, beyond niche markets.

Successes in the ethical food market would suggest that consumers are not opposed to paying for ethics. This study, however, supports Tomolillo and Shaw's (2004) findings that price is a barrier to ethical purchasing in clothing even for highly motivated consumers, thereby providing support for the suggestion that companies should absorb added costs incurred by ethical practice so as not to repel consumers (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). This raises a further awareness issue, as a central ethos of fair trade is to pay a living wage to the producer, as such the consumer may expect to pay a higher, and subsequently fairer, product price.

CONCLUSION

As Crane (2004) argues, retailer ethics will be increasingly scrutinised in today's market; unethical behaviour or manufacture will be highlighted and they will be subject to bad press like Gap and Nike. There is evidence, however, of growing interest in responding to ethical consumers concerns, by incorporating ethical issues into organisational practices. Gap's new open report into their suppliers and producers highlight this point, all negative aspects of their previous policies are on show in this report, they have espoused complete openness to avoid bad press that they are trying to hide anything, and they are trying to address the problems (Dahle, 2004). This has impressed even the most vociferous of their harsh ethical critics.

It has been suggested that ethics will only matter to consumers when they are directly impacted by the issue (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). This can be seen to a degree in organic purchasing where some of the success of this market can be attributed to consumer health concerns. It must be noted, however, that for others organic purchasing centres around a concern for the

environment and, therefore, the 'greater good'. This is also witnessed among those who purchase fair trade products, as the purchase of this product directly benefits a producer the individual consumer is unlikely to ever even meet. Research by Shaw and Clarke (1999), Shaw *et al.* (2000) and Shaw and Shiu (2003) found that consumption in this context was driven by an ethical obligation to purchase ethically, even where there was no direct benefit to the individual consumer. The issue is similar in fair trade clothing, where again the impact upon the consumer, beyond feeling that it is the morally correct thing to do, is negligible.

Consumers are calling for ethical products to be available on the High Street so they are convenient and easy to access, while also demanding that they conform to fashion. This indicates a potential way forward for ethical manufacturers to avoid becoming a niche product and instead become more mainstream, Alliances such as the People Tree franchise in Selfridges gives ethical suppliers a High Street presence and overcomes the problems related to fast fashion turnaround, while not incurring the cost of widespread investment that is difficult for small labels to achieve. It also benefits the host store as they are seen to have an ethical interest. Similarly the entry of main stream fashion designers into the ethical arena such as the launch of Katherine Hammett's fashion line in spring 2005, marries fashion and ethical manufacture in the High Street.

This study concentrated on highly motivated ethical consumers and as a consequence the results cannot be taken as representative of the general population. As the consumers of Fair Trade products cover a range of demographics and not just those who class themselves as 'ethical' consumers, future research should be conducted with a more representative sample of the British general public. This would help to determine the true extent of both ethical concerns and the potential consumer base and subsequent success or failure for future fair trade markets across the UK.

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