

Consumer Behavior in Moral Markets. On the Relevance of Identity, Justice Beliefs, Social Norms, Status, and Trust in Ethical Consumption

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Abstract: This article addresses ethical consumer behavior and uses the purchase of Fair Trade (FT) coffee to gain insights into determinants of 'moral behavior' in the marketplace. Our primary concern is to clarify which theoretical concepts and determinants are more useful than others in explaining FT consumption. We compare the explanatory power of consumer budget restrictions, consumer identity, social and personal norms, social status, justice beliefs, and trust. Our second aim is methodological; we contrast data on self-reported consumption of FT coffee with experimental data on hypothetical choices of different coffee products. To gain insights into the robustness of our measurement and findings, we test our propositions using two samples of undergraduate students from Germany and the United States. Our data show that consumer identity and personal norms are the major determinants of FT consumption in both samples, the results from survey-based data and from our experimental data are similar in this regard. Further, we demonstrate that studies based on a limited number of determinants might overestimate effects; the effect of justice beliefs for instance vanishes if other determinants are taken into account.

Introduction

More and more consumers consider the moral features of products in their everyday shopping decisions: they buy organic food, use renewable energy, or boycott clothes manufactured under dubious working conditions. Generally, ethical consumption is defined as purchase decisions by consumers who are not only concerned with the price of a product but also with its political, social, and environmental consequences (Harrison *et al.*, 2005: 2f.). Buying Fair Trade (FT) commodities is a prominent example of morally oriented consumer behavior, as exchanges of such commodities in the marketplace involve an altruistic component (Beckert, 2006).

Generally, FT aims at the long-term improvement of the living and working conditions of small-scale producer cooperatives and workers in developing countries. Basic objectives may include bans on illegal child labor

and forced labor, promotion of safe and healthy working conditions, and securing workers' rights (Nicholls and Opal, 2005). A widely accepted definition of FT is missing so far.¹ Moreover, the product line-up is heterogeneous with both unlabeled and certified labeled commodities available in supermarkets and one world specialty shops. Nevertheless, food and handicrafts are often understood to be fairly traded if producer cooperatives, workers, or small-scale farmers are guaranteed fair prices, which cover their production costs. FT products such as tea, coffee, or bananas may include a social premium, which producer cooperatives can invest in sustainable production modes and community projects to alleviate poverty (Nicholls and Opal, 2005).

Recent data from a global online survey commissioned by Fairtrade International (FLO, 2011) suggest that European respondents are familiar with FT labels; in 11 of 16 European countries, 60% or more report to have often or occasionally seen the FT mark. This holds true

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for 34% of US respondents. However, market shares of FT coffee—a widely available FT product—vary considerably between countries (e.g. 20% in the United Kingdom, 7% in France, 3% in the United States, 1% in Germany; FAO, 2009).

Consumers' awareness of FT products is matched by an increasing interest of scholars in the social sciences in this topic. Economic explanations of consumer choice within consumers' budget restrictions and social psychological explanations of consumer attitudes dominate the field of research (see Andorfer and Liebe, 2012). Scholars of sociology (of consumption) often refer to the framework of identity and analyze the construction of consumers as moral persons (e.g. Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Varul, 2010). Focusing on individualized collective action, civic engagement, and social movements, scholars of sociology, human geography, and political science emphasize the need to account for the multiple ways in which organizational forms of policies, campaigns, and practices shape ethical consumption beyond individual consumer choice (e.g. Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Clarke *et al.*, 2007; Lewis and Potter, 2011). Acknowledging the manifold theoretical perspectives in the interdisciplinary research on FT consumption, the need to empirically compare different theoretical explanations arises.

Our contribution to research on ethical consumption is twofold. The primary concern of our study is to clarify which determinants are more useful than others in explaining FT consumption. While such an approach of comparing different theoretical concepts is fruitful for identifying crucial determinants, it has rarely been applied in research on ethical consumption (see Andorfer and Liebe, 2012; Sunderer and Rössel, 2012). We compare the explanatory power of seven determinants from the disciplines of economics, social psychology, and sociology. Focusing on standard determinants of consumer budget restrictions, social and personal norms, and consumer identity, we also include complementary determinants of social status, justice beliefs, and trust, which have only marginally been accounted for so far.²

Our second aim is methodological. The moral component inherent in FT consumption might lead to measurement problems and subsequently flawed results. It seems therefore advisable to apply different methodological approaches to study FT consumption. So far, researchers have used a diverse set ranging from qualitative approaches of in-depth interviews (e.g. Varul, 2010) and content analysis (e.g. Wright, 2004; Adams and Raisborough, 2010) to standard population surveys (e.g. De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2007; Sunderer and Rössel, 2012) and (field) experiments (e.g. Hainmueller, Hiscox and Sequira, 2011; Rotaris and

Danielis, 2011). Conventional survey designs, which are widely used in sociological and social psychological studies and in marketing research, are in need of more incentive compatible measures of FT consumption to diminish problems of social desirability. The drawback of simple item measures in surveys on ethical consumption is that respondents might answer in a socially desirable manner leading to an overestimation of FT consumption. To shed some light on this issue of potential social desirability bias, we will contrast survey data on self-reported consumption of FT coffee with experimental data on hypothetical choices of different coffee products.

We test our propositions using two samples of undergraduate students. The replication gives us the opportunity to gather insights into the robustness of our findings in two different country settings using similar kinds of respondents.³ In 2011, we asked 556 German and 547 US undergraduate students to complete a questionnaire including self-reported coffee consumption and stated preferences for FT coffee.

The article is organized as follows. We introduce the relevant theoretical concepts in the next section. Details on the background of our study and methods are given in section 'Study Background and Methods'. In section 'Results', we present our major findings; we start out by testing the influence of theoretical determinants in a competitive manner and then contrast these survey-based findings with our experimental data. We conclude the article with a summary of our results and discuss limitations.

Theoretical Considerations

Various theoretical approaches to consumer behavior in the social sciences offer insights into what determines (ethical) consumption (for overviews see e.g. Zukin and Maguire, 2004; Lewis and Potter, 2011). Theoretical concepts on the effect of consumer budget restrictions, social and personal norms, and consumer identity feature as a standard set of determinants in many explanations of FT consumption. Attending to additional determinants of social status, justice beliefs, and trust offers insights into the explanatory power of standard theoretical approaches and broaden the theoretical basis of research on ethical consumption. In addition, some of these determinants have only marginally been accounted for so far in research on FT consumption.

Budget Restrictions

Standard economic approaches to (ethical) consumption focus on *preferences* and *budget restrictions* when explaining consumer behavior. Based on the assumption that

individuals make choices between alternative products or services that will maximize their expected utility, consumers choose, within their budget restrictions, the good that gives them the highest expected utility per cost unit. Preferences are understood to be subjective dispositions that can only be analyzed indirectly when observing an individual's action (Random Utility Theory, McFadden, 1974). Consumers reveal their ethical preferences when buying FT products. Given the same ethical preferences for a certain set of goods, persons in higher income groups are able to spend more on FT products than persons in lower income groups. Thus, persons with higher incomes are expected to consume more of these goods and exhibit a higher willingness to pay. These considerations lead us to conclude: *Income positively influences the consumption of Fair Trade products.* Empirical evidence on the link between income and FT consumption is mixed with some studies finding no effect (e.g. De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2006; Sunderer and Rössel, 2012) and others suggesting a positive effect (Tallontire *et al.*, 2001; Hertel, Scruggs and Heidkamp, 2009; Cailleba and Casteran, 2010). In addition, some studies find evidence that consumers' subjectively perceived financial situation influences FT consumption (e.g. Ozcaglar-Toulouse *et al.*, 2006; Sunderer and Rössel, 2012).

Consumer Identity

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) widen the scope of standard economic analysis and include *identity* as an additional motivation for behavior. Contrary to the economic approach presented above, individuals do not only gain utility from the consumption of a good but also from adhering to social norms and behavioral expectations associated with a social category (e.g. gender). From Akerlof and Kranton's explanations, we infer that the consumption of FT products includes an identity dimension as the social category of 'ethical consumer' is associated with an ideal social image of such consumers and denotes behavioral expectations corresponding with this image. Following the behavioral prescriptions for this social category (e.g. ethical consumers buy FT products) affirms an individual's identity as an ethical consumer and increases her utility. Non-compliance with these rules results in discomfort and cognitive dissonance.

As Davis (2007) points out, Akerlof and Kranton's approach to identity is ultimately bound to a 'social image of the self' (Ibid.: 352). The aspect of an individual's identity that exists independently from others is missing. Here, the sociological approach of identity comes into play. Especially in late modernity, consumption is seen as an important dimension in the

construction and expression of individual identity (Bauman, 1988; Giddens, 1991). From the perspective of the sociology of consumption, individuals try to answer for themselves and for others the question of 'who am I?' when consuming goods and services (Gabriel and Lang, 2006); identity is thus defined as '[...] a set of meanings attached to the self that serves as a standard or reference that guides behavior in situations.' (Stets and Biga, 2003: 401). Buying FT products is not only about helping small-scale producer cooperatives and workers in developing countries and consumers' altruistic concerns but also about expressing consumer identity as a moral person (Varul, 2009, 2010). The term 'ethical selving' denotes '[...] the ways in which FT consumers engage in the construction, affirmation and communication of ethical selves [...]' (Varul, 2009: 183) and makes clear that consumers of FT products are assumed to construct and re-enforce their consumer identity as the moral persons they aspire to be (Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Varul, 2010).

The two strands of arguments sketched out above show that consumer identity determines FT consumption in terms of social norms and behavioral expectations tied to the social category of ethical consumers and in terms of the individual construction and affirmation as moral persons. We therefore propose: *Fair Trade consumer identity positively influences the consumption of Fair Trade products.* Previous studies that analyze the effect of self-identity on FT consumption (Ozcaglar-Toulouse *et al.*, 2006; Shaw *et al.*, 2000) within the framework of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior find that self-identity as ethical consumer exerts a positive effect on the intention to buy FT grocery.

Social and Personal Norms

Scholars of sociology and social psychology pay particular attention to the concept of norms in their explanations of behavior (Schwartz, 1977; Hechter and Opp, 2001) or behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The concept of consumer identity has already pointed to the role of social norms in FT consumption: individuals buy FT products because of the perceived behavioral expectations that are bound to the image of ethical consumers. In more general terms, norms can be defined as '[...] cultural phenomena that prescribe and proscribe behavior in specific circumstances [...] (Hechter and Opp, 2001: xi). Individuals adhere to these rules because they expect negative or positive social sanctioning (*social norm*) or personal cognitive dissonance (*personal norm*) if they do not comply.

In the case of *social norms*, consumers buy FT products because they perceive social rewards from

members of their reference group such as family or friends to purchase these products. In the case of *personal norms*, internalization and activation of behavioral rules induce feelings of moral obligation to perform the behavior in question (Schwartz, 1977). In the case of ethical consumption, consumers avoid cognitive dissonance and maintain a coherent self-image when following the subjective obligation to purchase FT products. Based on the distinction between social and personal norm, we formulate two propositions. First, *perceived social rewards to buy FT products positively influence FT consumption*; and second, *a moral obligation to buy FT products positively influences FT consumption*. Several studies inform us about empirical results related to our arguments. With regard to personal norms Sunderer and Rössel (2012) find evidence that it exerts a positive effect on the self-reported frequency of purchasing FT products. With regard to social norms, the findings from Özcaglar-Toulouse *et al.* (2006) suggest that for those consumers who rarely buy FT products the social norm does have a positive effect. Shaw *et al.* (2000) find that the positive effect of the social norm becomes non-significant once self-identity as an ethical consumer is controlled for.

Social Status

One predictor that has only marginally been accounted for in research on FT consumption is social status (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008, for reflections on this topic). In one of the classical writings in sociology of consumption, Veblen (1899) put forward the idea of *conspicuous consumption*: Members of higher social classes consume expensive goods to prove and to retain their social standing. Likewise, in Bourdieu's (1984) class theory, consumption practices serve as means to indicate, maintain, and reinforce class structures and social distinction thereby preserving power structures in society.

The purchase of FT products is therefore not only the expression of ethical consumer identity but can also serve as means of distinction from other members in society. When buying FT coffee—a more expensive but functionally equivalent product to conventional coffee—consumers can signal a high social status to and distance themselves from other members of society.

From the perspective of social norms, the positive effect of social status on FT consumption might also be due to *noblesse oblige* (Homans, 1961; Liebe and Tutic, 2010). A more fortunate individual is expected to help underprivileged members of society because of her favorable social position. Consumers with a high social status perceive greater responsibility for the protection of

human rights and the fight against poverty in developing countries and buy FT products to meet these expectations. Overall, these considerations lead us to conclude: *Social status positively influences Fair Trade consumption*. To our knowledge, empirical studies on the effect of social status on FT consumption are missing so far. However, analyses of newspaper advertising for a FT company (Wright, 2004) have found evidence of appealing to consumers' need for social distinction.

Justice Beliefs

At the core of the contemporary FT project lays the conviction that the current neoliberal trading system discriminates against producers in developing countries and triggers poverty, child labor, and environmental degradation (e.g. Nicholls and Opal, 2005). For consumers in Western affluent societies, such claims raise questions of justice in market exchanges. Scholars in the social sciences have long investigated the subjective notion of justice and how it affects social behavior (e.g. Homans, 1961; Deutsch, 1975; Lerner, 1980). From approaches on justice evaluation (e.g. Jasso, 2001, 2005), it follows that individuals develop a notion of what kind of goods and bads others are entitled to and compare what others have to what they personally regard as just. Individuals who believe a situation to be unjust will try to restore their subjective notion of justice either by actually altering the situation or by cognitively re-interpreting it. With regard to FT consumption, this framework of *justice beliefs* implies that consumers who believe that the trading system between developing countries and affluent societies is unjust will try to restore their notion of justice by purchasing products that benefit small-scale producer cooperatives. We derive the following proposition: *Consumers perceiving injustice in market exchanges between affluent countries and developing countries are more prone to Fair Trade consumption*. The findings by Sunderer and Rössel (2012) on the positive effect of FT consciousness, an additive index, which also includes justice beliefs about international trade arrangements, support our argument.

Trust

FT consumption essentially relies on consumers' *trust* in FT organizations, and their claims as supermarket customers can rarely ascertain whether their purchase really does improve the livelihoods of small-scale producer cooperatives and workers in developing countries.⁴ Such phenomena are often analyzed within the framework of social capital. Understood as '[...] features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social

trust [...]’ (Putnam, 1995: 67) social capital can solve problems of mutual cooperation because it facilitates and fosters cooperation among individual members of society or between individuals and organizations. Thus, in the case of FT consumption *social trust* facilitates cooperation and market exchanges between consumers and FT institutions. Customers who believe their purchase does improve the livelihood of producer cooperatives and workers are more likely to buy FT commodities. However, if consumers doubt that small-scale producer cooperatives benefit from the FT premium, they are less likely to purchase these products. Our last proposition therefore yields: *Trust in Fair Trade institutions positively affects Fair Trade consumption.* In their study on the effect of information on FT consumption, De Pelsmacker and Janssens (2007) provide evidence that is closely linked to our argument: Skepticism with FT exerts a negative effect on self-reported annual amounts spent on FT products.

Sketching out our theoretical considerations on FT identity and social norms, it became clear that the selected determinants and the theoretical considerations related to them are intertwined at times. In everyday consumer practice, it is likely that not only identity and social norms but several other determinants will inform each other as FT consumption—and ethical consumption in general—is a contingent and multilayered phenomenon. In terms of advancing the theoretical work in research on FT consumption, we find it, nonetheless, fruitful to separately test the determinants and their related propositions to clarify, which are more useful than others in explaining FT consumption.

Study Background and Methods

Respondent Samples and Data Collection

We will test our propositions using two non-random samples of undergraduate students in Germany and the United States. We collected our data with a paper-and-pencil survey before or after lectures at a large university in Germany in May/June 2011 and at a large university in the United States in October/November 2011. Respondents were asked to fill in a survey-based discrete choice experiment (DCE) on FT coffee and then answer a short follow-up questionnaire on their coffee consumption habits and socio-demographics.⁵

In total, we surveyed 556 German and 547 US students. In the German sample, 58% of respondents are female, and the respondents’ mean age is 24 years; in the US sample, 49% of respondents are female, and the respondents’ mean age is 21 years. In both samples, about one-third of the respondents study business and

economics, and roughly 20% study social sciences. Both samples are convenience samples of privileged and homogeneous sub-groups in German and US society. As our article primarily aims to clarify which theoretical concepts and determinants are more useful than others in explaining FT consumption, and to contrast survey data and experimental data, we do not necessarily need a random population sample. Nevertheless, it is desirable to test our propositions with such samples in the future.

Survey-based Measurements and Descriptive Results

We provide an overview of the dependent and independent variables, their measurement, exact wording of the items, and descriptive statistics in Table 1.

Dependent variable

Our *dependent variable* is the self-reported frequency (1 = never; 4 = usually) of purchasing FT coffee obtained from small-scale farmers in developing countries who were paid enough to cover their living costs; respondents received a definition for FT coffee in the introductory section of the questionnaire.⁶

Independent variables

We opted for respondents’ *subjective financial situation* as a proxy to income due to the specific nature of our sample of undergraduate students in two countries with different organizations and institutions of university education. We developed a *consumer identity* scale adapted from research in social psychology on green consumer identity (Sparks and Shepard, 1992; Whitmarsh and O’Neill, 2010) and on FT identity within Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (Ozcalcar-Toulouse *et al.*, 2006; Shaw *et al.*, 2000). In both samples, each block of four items formed a reliable additive scale with Cronbach’s α at 0.77 (Germany) and 0.73 (United States; see Table 2).

To measure the *social norm*, we asked respondents to what extent they think the people that matter most to them (i.e. family or friends) would approve if they bought FT coffee. To assess the *personal norm*, respondents indicated to what extent they feel a moral obligation to buy FT. We also included a measure of *subjective social status*, which we adapted from the ‘MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES’ (Adler *et al.*, 2000). Because of the specific nature of our respondent sample, we operationalized social status as the perceived social standing of respondents’ parents in German/US society. The questionnaire also contains four items adapted from research on Lerner’s (1980) ‘Just World Belief’ (Dalbert,

Table 1 Summary of dependent and independent variables

Variables	Question wording	Min	Max	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	United States
Dependent variable										
Frequency of coffee purchase	When you go to a grocery store, café, cafeteria, restaurant, or some other place to buy coffee, how often do you specify that your coffee be FT coffee? (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually; 5 = don't know, recoded as missing values)	1	4	316	2.20	0.94	291	1.74	1.03	
Independent variables										
Subjective financial situation FT consumer identity ^a	How would you describe your financial situation at the moment? (1 = very bad, 2 = kind of bad, 3 = pretty good, 4 = very good)	1	4	525	2.85	0.69	524	2.82	0.73	
	To what extent do the following statements about buying FT products (like chocolate, coffee, clothing, etc.) apply to you? (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot)	1	4	526	2.31	0.65	522	2.35	0.67	
	I buy FT products as part of my socially responsible lifestyle.	1	4	539	2.29	0.93	529	2.03	0.94	
	I'm not the type of person to buy FT products.	1	4	534	2.76	0.95	524	3.21	0.91	
	I consider myself a consumer who takes social responsibility.	1	4	531	2.44	0.74	529	2.27	0.90	
Social norm FT	I show my sense of social responsibility to my family and friends by buying FT products.	1	4	535	1.74	0.73	528	1.89	0.90	
	Consider the people whose opinion matters most to you, e.g., family or friends. To what extent would they approve if you bought FT coffee? (1 = not approve at all, 5 = strongly approve)	1	5	545	3.78	0.76	521	3.65	0.99	
	I feel a moral obligation to buy FT products. (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot)	1	4	535	2.26	0.91	529	2.14	1.03	
	When you think of your family, where do your parents stand in German/US society? (1 = low income, low/no education, no job, 10 = high income, high education, respected job)	1	10	526	6.52	1.62	507	6.89	2.02	
	I doubt that the money spent on FT products actually reaches the small-scale producers and laborers. (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot)	1	4	537	2.62	0.88	526	3.07	0.90	
Gender	0 = male, 1 = female	0	1	537	0.58		531	0.49		
Justice beliefs ^c	How much do you personally disagree or agree with the following statements? (1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = completely agree)	1	4	506	3.19	0.54	517	3.01	0.58	
	In my opinion, there are justified differences in wealth between developing and industrialized countries.	1	4	528	2.94	0.95	529	2.30	0.97	
	Coffee companies in industrialized countries exploit coffee farmers in developing countries.	1	4	531	3.25	0.62	528	3.10	0.74	
	The price of coffee in Germany/in the United States is unfair because small-scale farmers in developing countries can hardly live off what they earn.	1	4	511	2.98	0.73	523	2.96	0.78	
	In my opinion, the coffee trade nowadays does not disadvantage small-scale farmers from developing countries.	1	4	516	3.37	0.69	525	2.98	0.78	

Notes: Response scales are printed in parentheses after each question. For dummy variables, the mean is equivalent to the proportion of the specification '1'.

^aNegatively keyed items are recoded. All items are combined into a scale using factor analysis.

^bReverse scored items are used for further analyses.

^cNegatively keyed items are recoded, and factor analysis is used to construct a scale from three of the four items (item excluded in both samples owing to low factor loading: 'In my opinion, there are justified differences in wealth between developing and industrialized countries.' see Table 2).

Table 2 Factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha for additive scales of FT identity and justice beliefs in Germany and the United States

Item	Germany Factor loading	United States Factor loading
FT identity	Alpha = 0.77	Alpha = 0.73
I buy FT products as part of my socially responsible lifestyle.	0.8509	0.8839
I'm not the type of person to buy FT products.	0.7207	0.3042
I consider myself a consumer who takes social responsibility.	0.7564	0.8146
I show my sense of social responsibility to my family and friends by buying FT products.	0.7529	0.8893
Justice beliefs	Alpha = 0.69	Alpha = 0.61
Coffee companies in industrialized countries exploit coffee farmers in developing countries.	0.8406	0.8145
The price of coffee in Germany/in the United States is unfair because small-scale farmers in developing countries can hardly live off what they earn.	0.8108	0.7978
In my opinion, the coffee trade nowadays does not disadvantage small-scale farmers from developing countries.	0.7039	0.6424

Notes: Rotated factor loadings (orthogonal varimax) of principal component analysis.

Montada and Schmitt, 1987) to assess respondent's *justice beliefs* on FT coffee; three of the four items were combined into an additive scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$ (Germany) and 0.61 (United States); see Table 2 for factor loadings).⁷ Respondents' *trust* in FT is measured with a negatively keyed item focusing on respondents' perception whether the FT premium actually reaches the addressee.

The drawback of simple item measures in surveys on ethical consumption is that respondents might answer in a socially desirable manner leading to an overestimation of FT consumption. Auger and Devinney (2007) argue that incentive-compatible methods such as DCEs yield more realistic and valid measures of ethical consumption behavior and behavioral intentions because respondents are forced to make trade-offs and reveal their 'true' preferences, attitudes, and intentions. To shed light on the problem of social desirability in research on FT consumption, we will contrast our survey-based results with experimental data gathered in a DCE.

Discrete Choice Experiment

The basic idea of DCEs is that respondents choose from a set of product alternatives the one they prefer most. Combining theoretical insights from Characteristics Theory of Value (Lancaster, 1966) and Random Utility Theory (McFadden, 1974), a systematic variation of product attributes and their respective levels makes it possible to determine their influence on respondents'

Table 3 Product attributes and their levels in the DCE

Attribute	Levels
Flavor	Mild, medium, dark
Organic	No, yes
FT	No, yes
Price	German version: EUR 3.79, EUR 4.49, EUR 5.29, EUR 6.99 US version: \$6.79, \$8.19, \$9.59, \$10.99

Note: In the German version, prices for 500 g of ground coffee are denoted in euros. US respondents received an identical DCE except that prices are denoted in US dollars and the amount of coffee is 1 lb.

stated choices (see Louviere, Hensher and Swait, 2000, for an introduction). The advantage of DCEs over simple item measures is that respondents are forced to make trade-offs between different product attributes because they can (repeatedly) choose only one product (see Rotaris and Danielis, 2011, for an application of DCE to the purchase of FT coffee and an overview on related studies).

In our empirical study, we presented 12 different choice sets with three generic product alternatives of ground coffee for drip brewing (Coffee 1, Coffee 2, Coffee 3) and a no-buy option ('None of these').⁸ Each alternative is described by four attributes (flavor, organic, FT, price). Table 3 summarizes the attributes and their respective levels; Table 4 depicts an example of a choice set as used in the US survey.^{9,10}

Table 4 Example of a choice set in the US survey

	Coffee 1 (1 lb.)	Coffee 2 (1 lb.)	Coffee 3 (1 lb.)	
Flavor	Dark	Mild	Medium	
Organic	Yes	Yes	No	
Fair trade	No	Yes	Yes	
Price	\$6.79	\$8.19	\$6.79	
Which coffee would you buy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> None of these

Results

Self-reported Behavior

To assess which of the seven determinants yields high explanatory power, we will compare basic models (Model 1), which only include gender with models that additionally include one of the predictor variables.¹¹ Models 2–8 allow us to test and to compare the influence of each predictor separately using adjusted R-squared as an indicator of model-fit and explanatory power. Model 9 includes the control variable gender and all predictor variables. Estimating this model, we can see whether the effects observed in Models 2–8 also hold when controlling for all other variables. The final model also tells us how much explanatory power all predictors exert together. All models are estimated separately for German and United States respondents using OLS regression.^{12,13} The size of both respondent samples is reduced for our multivariate analyses due to missing values. To ensure that our estimates do not lead to spurious results, we include bivariate regressions between our dependent variable and proposed determinants; estimates are presented in Supplementary Table A1. A comparison of the models in Table A1 with Models 1–9 in Table 5 shows only marginal differences, indicating that our results can be considered robust.

Model 1 – Basic model. The basic models including gender are not significant in both samples. When gender is combined with other predictor variables in Models 2–9, we find negative coefficients, which are mostly significantly different from zero. Contrary to theoretical considerations and empirical evidence from studies in environmental sociology (e.g. Dietz *et al.*, 1998; Zelezny, Chua and Aldrich, 2000) and FT consumption (e.g. Sunderer and Rössel, 2012) female respondents in our study tend to buy FT coffee less frequently than male respondents.

Model 2 – Subjective financial situation. According to our proposition about the positive effect of respondents' subjective financial situation on the consumption of FT

products, we would expect an increase in the purchase frequency of FT coffee, the better the respondents' perception of their financial situation. For both samples, our data do not support this hypothesis, as the models are not significant. These findings suggest that a key determinant derived from standard economic theory does not suffice to explain FT consumption in our study. However, we have to bear in mind that we measured respondents' subjective financial situation rather than their income.

Model 3 – Identity. Our theoretical discussion about the positive influence of consumer identity on FT consumption leads us to expect an increase in the self-reported purchase frequency of FT coffee when ethical consumer identity is more pronounced. In both samples, our data support this line of argument. The statistically significant coefficients in Model 3 are positive and indicate that respondents scoring high on FT consumer identity purchase this kind of coffee more frequently. Model 3 yields high explanatory power in both samples with R-squared of 0.31 (Germany) and 0.28 (United States).

Model 4 – Social norm. With regard to social norms, we argued that consumers buy such kinds of coffee products because they perceive social rewards from family or friends. Our data confirm this argument in large part. In both samples, the social norm positively influences the self-reported purchase frequency. For both samples, the model fit is considerably lower than the fit of the models including consumer identity (adjusted R-squared 0.10 for the German sample and 0.07 for the US sample).

Model 5 – Personal norm. Our argument about the effect of personal norms predicts higher consumption of FT coffee for respondents who feel a subjective moral obligation to purchase these coffee products. As expected, the personal norm has a positive effect on FT consumption as the coefficients of 0.501 (Germany) and 0.426 (United States) indicate. In both samples, the model fit is good. The R-squared values of 0.22 (Germany) and 0.19 (United States) suggest that in our study, it is personal norms rather

Table 5 Multivariate results from survey-based self-reported data and experimental data

Country	Data of self-reported consumption of FT coffee (OLS Models)												Experimental Data (Mixed Logit Models)							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9		Model 10	
	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA	Germany	USA
Gender (ref. male)	-0.070 (0.60)	-0.087 (0.67)	-0.070 (0.60)	-0.089 (0.68)	-0.231** (2.36)	-0.229** (2.06)	-0.135 (1.21)	-0.131 (1.04)	-0.187* (1.80)	-0.217* (1.83)	-0.074 (0.64)	-0.092 (0.70)	-0.129 (1.12)	-0.205 (1.64)	-0.069 (0.61)	-0.103 (0.78)	-0.256*** (2.64)	-0.299*** (2.68)	-0.432*** (2.13)	-0.121 (0.56)
Subj. financial situation (scale 1-4)				-0.035 (0.13)													-0.029 (0.39)	-0.013 (0.16)	0.042 (0.27)	0.078 (0.48)
FT identity (index 1-4)					0.810*** (10.78)	0.780*** (9.99)											0.555*** (5.66)	0.599*** (5.58)	0.715*** (3.54)	0.373* (1.79)
FT social norm (scale 1-5)							0.411*** (5.46)	0.309*** (4.71)									0.061 (0.82)	0.021 (0.32)	0.026 (0.17)	0.280** (2.18)
FT pers. norm (scale 1-4)									0.501*** (8.56)	0.426*** (7.85)							0.203*** (2.91)	0.088 (1.18)	0.412*** (2.87)	0.391*** (2.69)
Subj. social status (scale 1-10)									0.019 (0.52)	-0.032 (1.01)							0.040 (1.28)	0.002 (0.06)	0.105* (1.65)	-0.053 (0.90)
Justice beliefs (index 1-4)													0.398*** (3.84)	0.612*** (5.62)			0.065 (0.69)	0.288*** (2.46)	0.103 (0.54)	-0.051 (0.22)
FT trust (scale 1-4)															0.283*** (4.61)	0.070 (0.96)	0.102* (1.82)	0.083 (1.32)	0.029 (0.25)	0.107 (0.88)
Intercept	2.413*** (16.64)	1.883 (11.38)	2.384*** (8.70)	1.979*** (6.71)	0.551*** (2.61)	-0.011 (0.05)	0.818** (2.53)	0.684** (2.28)	1.288*** (7.02)	0.970*** (5.15)	2.296*** (8.59)	2.108*** (7.61)	1.168*** (3.30)	0.075 (0.21)	1.679*** (7.93)	1.667*** (5.95)	-1.192 (0.46)	-0.922* (1.80)		
Adj. R ²																	0.34	0.30	-3550.73	-3516.90
N	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253	263	253

Notes: OLS regressions for the dependent variable 'self-reported frequency of Fair Trade coffee consumption' (1 = never; 4 = usually) with unstandardized regression coefficients and z-values in parentheses are reported for models 1-9. For models 10 mixed logit models with unstandardized regression coefficients and z-values in parentheses for interaction effects between the independent variables and the product attribute 'Fair Trade' in the DCE are reported. Dependent variable is 1 (0) if the alternative in the choice experiment is (not) chosen. In all models, we control for the context of the DCE (see n. 10). The full mixed logit models are reported in Supplementary Table A2. n.s. = the estimated model is not significant. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

than social norms that influence the consumption of FT coffee.

Model 6 – Subjective social status. We argued above that social status positively influences FT consumption because consumers can signal a higher social status or conform to the social norm of *noblesse oblige* when buying FT products. Our data are not compatible with this proposition, as Model 6 is statistically not significant in both samples.

Model 7 – Justice beliefs. From our theoretical discussion about justice beliefs and FT consumption, we derived the hypothesis that respondents with stronger justice beliefs report purchasing FT coffee more frequently. In accordance with our assumption, we find that respondents believing in the existence of an unjust coffee trading system purchase FT coffee more often; the corresponding coefficients in Model 7 in Table 5 are positive and statistically significant. The fit of Model 7 is rather low with R-squared of 0.05 (Germany) and 0.10 (United States).

Model 8 – Trust. Finally, we argued that consumers are more inclined to buy FT products if they trust FT organizations and their claims. Our data confirm this positive relationship for German respondents only. In this sample, the coefficient of 0.283 suggests that the more respondents trust FT standards, the more frequently they report buying FT coffee. The explanatory power for the German sample (adjusted R-squared 0.07) is comparable with that of Model 4 (social norm). For the US sample, the model is statistically not significant.

Model 9 – Full model. The joint estimation of all predictors in Model 9 gives us an indication which determinants exert a decisive influence on the consumption of FT coffee and whether the effects found in the individual models are stable when controlling for all other explanatory variables. First, the strong explanatory power of consumer identity remains even when controlling for all other predictor variables. Second, in both samples social norms, subjective social status, and subjective financial situation do not exert any statistically significant influence. While subjective social status and subjective financial situation did not have any explanatory power in the individual models (Model 2 and Model 6), social norms lose their relevance in the full model.

Finally, we find differences between respondent samples with regard to the relevance of several determinants. In the German sample, the effect of justice beliefs vanishes, and it is trust in FT institutions as well as the moral obligation to buy FT products that influence the purchase of FT coffee in addition to consumer identity; in the US sample, the personal norm loses explanatory

power, and, in addition to consumer identity, the effect of justice beliefs remains statistically significant.

Experimental Data

To contrast our survey-based findings with our experimental data on choices of coffee products, we present mixed logit models (also called random parameter logit models, Models 10 in Table 5, see Hensher, Rose and Greene, 2005, for details on mixed logit models). The dependent variable is 1 (0) if the alternative is (not) chosen in a choice set. Independent variables are the product attributes in the DCE, and interaction terms between the seven determinants and the FT attribute (interaction effects are shown in Table 5, full models are presented in Supplementary Table A2). The effect of the FT attribute is randomized over individuals, relaxing the assumption of a constant effect across respondents. As respondents can either favor the FT attribute or not, it is specified to be from a normal distribution. The interaction terms of the random FT parameter and the seven determinants determine the heterogeneity around the mean of the random parameter. Mixed logit models take the panel character of the data into account, i.e. the FT parameter varies randomly across individuals but is fixed for the 12 choice occasions for each respondent.¹⁴

Four results are noteworthy. First, comparing Model 10 in Table 5 with the full models (Model 9) shows that, again, it is FT identity, which positively influences the likelihood of choosing a coffee with a FT product attribute. In the US sample, the positive effect of FT identity is statistically significant at the 10% level only. Second, our survey-based results indicate that social norms have only limited explanatory power. From Model 10, we can see that in hypothetical choice situations, social and personal norms are relevant determinants of respondents' ethical consumption choices. In both samples, personal norms have a positive and statistically significant effect on the choice of FT coffee. FT social norms have a statistically significant effect in the US sample. For German respondents, we also find a positive effect, albeit statistically not significant.

Third, trust in FT institutions, justice beliefs, and subjective financial situation does not exert any significant influence in both samples; yet subjective social status shows a weak effect at the 10% level in the German sample. These findings are roughly in line with our survey-based results.

Fourth, and in line with our previous findings, we observe a negative gender effect in Model 10 (German sample). Female respondents are less likely to choose FT coffee. Again, this empirical evidence runs counter to findings from studies in environmental sociology and green consumerism.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary concern of our study was to contribute to the theoretical basis of research on ethical consumption. We compared seven determinants to clarify, which are more useful than others in explaining the consumption of FT coffee. Our second aim was to contrast survey-based results of simple item measures of self-reported coffee consumption with experimental data on hypothetical choices of coffee products. To gain insights into the robustness of our measurement instruments and findings, we tested our propositions using two samples of undergraduate students in Germany and the United States.

Overall, our analyses show that consumer identity and personal norms are the major motivator of FT coffee consumption in both samples; the results from survey-based simple item measures and from our experimental data are similar in this regard. In both samples and with both methods, it is personal rather than social norms that motivate the consumption of FT coffee. Moreover, our results suggest that studies based on a limited number of determinants might be misleading. Determinants such as social norm, justice beliefs, and trust loose explanatory power if other determinants are included in the analyses. Studies focusing on single or a limited number of determinants might therefore overestimate effects of these determinants (see Liebe *et al.*, 2011, for a similar argumentation and findings on environmental goods). The finding that the social norm becomes non-significant once FT identity is controlled for is also suggested in Shaw *et al.* (2000). Our study supports the notion that consumer identity and social norms might potentially overlap and are closely aligned. This underscores Akerlof and Kranton's (2000) considerations on identity as 'social image of the self' (Davis, 2007: 352) that motivates behavior. Contrary to our expectations, subjective financial situation and social status have no explanatory power. This result is in line with the findings of previous studies on the effect of income mentioned above (e.g. Sunderer and Rössel, 2012) and might indicate that consumers' budget constraint is less important for ethical consumption than expected. Yet it is noteworthy that compared with the other determinants included in this study, which were measured in direct relation to FT consumption, income, and social status are measured on a more general level. In accordance with the correspondence rule in attitude research (Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera, 1986/1987) correlations between determinants and behavior can be expected to be higher when measured on the same level of specificity.

Methodologically, contrasting survey-based data and experimental data on FT consumption proved to be

fruitful in that the effect of the same determinants on different measures of (stated) FT consumption could be compared. Yet, we did not include the availability of the product and the coffee brand as additional attributes in the DCE. This might lead to differences in the results for survey and experiment, as it is plausible that consumers in (hypothetical) choice situations might base their decisions also on these two factors. Although DCEs cannot measure 'real world' behavior, it has to be pointed out that they measure consumer behavior more directly than simple survey items. This is supported by findings regarding the so-called hypothetical bias, i.e. the divergence between stated and actual preferences (Murphy *et al.*, 2005). Respective studies show that a dichotomous-choice format generally lowers the hypothetical bias considerably compared with open question formats. Future studies especially in sociology of consumption might therefore consider DCEs as a measure for stated consumption preferences. In addition to comparing the relative effects of theoretical determinants, the magnitude of stated consumption between DCEs and other measures might be compared.

A few more remarks about the limitations of our study are in order. First, our results are based on two convenience samples. Therefore, we cannot make any inferences about the prevalence of FT or organic consumption in Germany and the United States or compare our findings in this regard. As our main objectives were to gather insights into the relevance of determinants motivating ethical consumption and to compare survey and experimental data, this limitation seems acceptable. A similar argument applies to the second potential objection—our sample of students as young and highly educated members of German and US society. Although research on ethical consumption is inconclusive regarding the relevance of socio-demographics (e.g. De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2006; Peattie, 2010), the authors see no reason to assume that the basic links between our determinants and FT consumption are influenced by these socio-demographics. Arguably, the exception to this argument is the effect of social status, as education is a common indicator for operationalizing this determinant. To counterbalance these shortcomings, we measured the subjective social status of respondents' parents and not respondents' own perception of their social standing. Nevertheless, these particular results of our study should be taken with a grain of salt, and it is advisable to test for the effect of social status using random population samples. Third, some of our measurements of determinants such as social and personal norms might be considered somewhat reductive and abstract measures of the related subjective

understandings. While we believe that our measurements provide sound empirical findings within our research design and proved to be useful in previous studies in this field, complementary perspectives on the contingent and structural aspects of FT consumption (e.g. Clarke *et al.*, 2007) should not be dismissed.

A particular strength of our research design is the replication of our study in the United States and the contrast of survey-based data and experimental data. Nonetheless, we find (natural) field experiments (e.g. Hainmueller, Hiscox and Sequeira, 2011) to be a suitable methodological approach to test for the causal relationships proposed by theories on FT consumption. In settings of natural field experiments, problems of social desirability and demand characteristics can be avoided as participants are not aware that they a part of an experiment.

From a theoretical perspective, future research would profit from a look beyond ethical consumer choices and account for the social embeddedness of FT consumption practices. Considering theoretical concepts from research on social capital, social movements, and collective action offers the opportunity to account for the social and political structures by which individual consumer behavior is linked to narratives of social justice (Bryant and Goodman, 2004) and organizational forms of morally oriented collective action (Barnett *et al.*, 2005).

With regard to practical policy measures, our study suggests that it is not so much consumers' trust in FT—and the credibility of FT labeling schemes—but rather their personal norm and FT identity that motivate ethical consumption. Appealing to consumers' personal moral obligation to buy FT products and to their FT identity in terms of the behavioral expectations connected to the social category of 'ethical consumer' might therefore prove to be useful starting points for strategies that are to expand individual FT consumption.

Notes

- 1 In 2001, the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) defined FT as '[...] a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. [...]' (EFTA, 2006).
- 2 See for example the work by Sunderer and Rössel (2012) on justice beliefs or Adams and Raisborough (2008) on social status.

- 3 We deliberately refrain from comparing the two samples in terms of overall magnitude of FT consumption or size of coefficients, as we do not aim to explain any cultural differences.
- 4 Other issues of consumer trust arise, for example, in online purchasing. In these settings, consumers' trust can potentially be exploited in that products purchased online are damaged or not delivered at all. Analyzing online consumer victimization, van Wilsem (2011) suggests that consumers' negative experiences with online shopping leads to decreasing levels of generalized trust.
- 5 The original questionnaire was designed in German. US respondents received an English translation of the questionnaire that was validated by a senior US researcher in survey methodology.
- 6 We also asked respondents to report their purchasing frequency of regular and organic coffee. As the focus of our study is FT consumption, we leave aside consumption of regular and organic coffee. To take into account that the error terms of these three measures might be correlated, we estimated Models 1–9 in Table 5 using Zellner's (1962) seemingly unrelated regression approach; the Breusch–Pagan test confirms this assumption for both samples. The results do not differ from OLS models. Therefore, we opted for the OLS models, which are more common and easier to interpret.
- 7 The item 'In my opinion, there are justified differences in wealth between developing and industrialized countries.' was excluded because the item triggered a two-factor solution in the US sample. The additive scale with all four items exhibited a low Alpha of 0.53.
- 8 We used a d-efficient design based on a conditional logit model including fixed priors to select the 12 choice sets of 110.592 possible groupings of attribute and level combinations $[(3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 4) \times (3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 4) \times (3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 4)]$. Priors were obtained from a study by Cranfield *et al.* (2010). The basic aim of the Bayesian design approach is to select choice sets in such a way that they minimize the standard errors in the estimation model given the prior values. The aim of other design approaches that work without priors is to minimize the correlations between attributes. See Rose and Bliemer (2009) for an introduction to efficient designs.
- 9 Again, the original DCE was designed in German. US respondents received an English

translation of the choice sets. These are identical except for two aspects: prices and amount of coffee. For German respondents, prices are denoted in euros, and the amount of coffee is indicated as 500 g. For US respondents, prices are denoted in US dollars, and the amount of coffee is indicated as 1 lb.

- 10 Originally, we designed the DCE to analyze the effect of social context on ethical consumption behavior. We used an experimental approach to randomly assign respondents to four different framing conditions (and a control condition) and varied the degree of anonymity of fictitious purchase situations. Respondents in the control group received a standard DCE typical for economic valuation studies. Respondents in one of the four treatment groups received additional information about the social context of their hypothetical coffee purchases in the introductory section of the questionnaire and above each choice set. The follow-up questionnaire was identical for all respondents, regardless of the framing in the DCE. To ensure that the framing in the DCE does not bias our survey-based measures, we control for it in all the models we present in this article.
- 11 In all models, we control for context of the DCE; see n. 10.
- 12 Our dependent variable has four answer categories, and ordered logit models might also be used for model estimation. We estimated ordered logit models for Models 1–9 in Table 5. As there are no remarkable differences regarding the signs and significance of coefficients, we opted for the OLS models, which are more common and easier to interpret.
- 13 An analysis of potentially influential observations was performed in both samples showing that our results are robust with regard to extreme values.
- 14 The mixed logit model results in a better model fit than the conditional logit model based on more restrictive assumption such as a constant FT effect across respondents (results are provided by the authors upon request).

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

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