Ethical Consumers and E-Commerce:
The Emergence and Growth of Fair Trade in the UK

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ABSTRACT

In this article we seek to investigate the claim that active consumer choice can influence societal transformation through study of the growth in the market for 'fair trade' goods in the UK and the effect of their availability through e-commerce. We assess this phenomenon with reference to the literature on ethical consumerism and discuss the role played by the use of information and communication technologies. Changes in the nature of consumerism are identified and the issue of the impact of the consumer in societal and global change is discussed in relation to the wider issue of sustainable development.

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Introduction

The concept of ethical consumerism has emerged over the past 15 years to describe actions taken by individuals seeking to actively support products according to their perceived ethical credentials. Ethical consumerism attempts to utilise the rhetoric of consumer power to actively shape the market in a particular way. It therefore draws both on conceptualisations of the consumer society as well as the wider debate surrounding the process of sustainable development. This article explores the theoretical basis of ethical consumerism through the specific case of the growth of fair trade in the UK. In addition, the role of e-commerce is considered in terms of its potential to impact on the activity of ethical consumers.

The academic study of consumerism has developed in response to increasing interest in the social role of consumption, itself emerging as a sub-discipline of sociology. Gabriel and Lang (1995) have identified how the role of the consumer has been conceptualised by

different academic approaches. However, two major themes have emerged, one economic based on claims that consumer demand has become the fundamental driver of the economy in developed nations, and a cultural strand (Edwards 2000; Holt and Schor 2002). The latter approach is more concerned with the consumer as an individual, and has focussed on lifestyle issues such as perceived inequalities of access to goods between social groups, increasing commercialisation of services and the significance of branding (Jamison 1984; Campbell 1995; Hearn and Rosentheil 1999; Holt 2002; Miles 2002).

Focus on ethical consumerism draws on both strands of thought and has emerged from consideration of the implications arising from displacement of production to less developed countries in order to supply cheaper goods to consumers in the developed world (Miles 2002). In addition, focus on the individual which highlights the stratification of consumer groups, their consumption patterns and generation of 'needs' as lifestyle choices also provides a basis for analysing the emergence of ethical consumerism (Fine 1995; Featherstone 1998; Jones and Martin 1999; Thorpe 1999). Also the role of consumer power with regard to shaping demand for available goods has been considered (Grønmo and Ölander 1991; Moynagh and Worsley 2002; Wathieu et al. 2002). Here, ethical consumers provide a niche market making choices based on social and environmental considerations. The question of how far the consumer can facilitate actual change in global trading relations remains a fundamental issue with respect to analysing the impact of fair trade. Essentially, fair trade defines the relationship between rich consumers in the north with agricultural producers in the south, such that it can be defined as 'a concept of trade in which the trading partners seek to establish an equal basis of exchange between the developed and the less developed countries' (Strong 1997, p.1).

Discussion of such new forms of consumerism, however, should also consider the developing literature on e-commerce, which itself can have an impact on the emergence of new markets. The narrowest definitions of e-commerce refer simply to trading goods and services on-line (Zwass 1998; Chaffey 2002). A broader definition, taken from the point of view of the consumer, incorporates wider capabilities of information and communication exchange over the internet (European Union 2000; Harris et al. 2003). As a radical and disruptive technology the internet is now into the diffusion stage, but the consumer implications of e-commerce have not yet been subject to wide academic investigation. Nor is it yet understood how the process of transition to the 'virtual society' will affect concurrent moves towards sustainability, although the growing availability of

information via the internet has been identified as a significant factor in ethical and environmental activities (see for example Lax 2002; Silver 2002). E-commerce may therefore influence the emergence of new modes of ethical consumption, where emphasis is on tracing and auditing supply chain networks and evaluating accreditation. Also, e-commerce provides open, universal accessibility to products that may be difficult to obtain in local markets. In order to assess this relationship it is necessary initially to consider the nature of ethical consumerism and how it is located within the concept of sustainable development.

Ethical Consumerism and Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development encompasses ethical aspects of both social and environmental justice, and academic analysis of ethical consumerism has emerged from this broad concept. However, the role of consumer culture in achieving sustainable development goals is disputed (Durning 1992). The most optimistic account of consumer power is found in the related ideas of 'ecological modernisation', characterised by Mol and Sonnenfeld (2000) as a 'new industrial revolution' which will radically restructure production, consumption, state practices and political discourses along ecological lines. Ethical consumerism can therefore be regarded as a process, which contributes to an ecologically sustainable future through construction of sustainable lifestyles.

Ethical consumerism is characterised by 'the use of household moralities and actions to influence the claims of trans-national products or national policy', thereby putting the green movement in the 'vanguard of new forms of consumption' (Miller 1999, p.47). Thus, new informed patterns of demand are based upon consumers' perception that global consumption patterns raise questions of social, economic and ecological debt (Taylor and Tilford 2000). Characteristics of ethical consumerism include both 'fairness' in the sense of support for producers and also environmental sustainability. This broader notion of consumerism depends not only on individual choices but involves 'temporary coalitions' between social groups according to the issues under consideration. Mol and Spaargaren (2000 p 41) identify women's organisations, employers, leisure organisations as well as consumer groups as examples of related stakeholders where 'environmental struggles cross traditional…interest lines and divisions in society'. The fair trade movement appears to exemplify such a coalition by bringing together consumers, supermarkets, farmers, and firms with various development charities.

The concept of ethical consumerism overlaps with that of sustainable consumption. The United Nations defines this as 'the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring improved quality of life, while minimising natural resource use, toxic materials and environmental waste and pollutants' (UNDP 1998). Thus the emergence of the 'ethical consumer' and 'ethical shopping' via recycling and product boycotts over the past decade demonstrates concern for sustainable consumption and social justice (Friedman 1991; Durning 1992; Friedman 1996). Miller (1995, p.46) notes that ethical consumers are forging 'a new relationship between consumption and the market'. Consumers, as concerned individuals, can orient their choice and exercise purchaser power in favour of products whose production has caused least harm to the environment. Through this process the consumer becomes connected to, and an active participant in, global social and environmental issues. Such an individual requires accessible, trustworthy and up-to-date information. Internet technology meets these needs and allows individual shoppers to develop 'buying strategies' as a route to 'ethical shopping' (Hansen and Schrader 1997; Schor 2000; Young and Welford 2002).

This approach has not gone without criticism however, as other commentators have identified consumption as a major problem both for social development and environmental sustainability. In particular Sagoff (1988) points out how individuals make choices as citizens which differ from the choices they make as consumers. While citizens have a long-term interest in protecting the environment, consumers are swayed more by short term interests and preferences. Carter (2001) claims that the rate of increasing consumption is a major problem for ecological sustainability, which encourages wasteful production strategies. He criticises ecological modernisation for the apparent assumption that once green production has been achieved, consumption will have no 'limits to growth'. He points out that, although growing fast, ethical consumerism remains a minority activity in which too few people are engaged, so that 'current gestures towards green consumerism, such as increased levels of recycling or a switch to organic food products are swamped by the dominance of consumer capitalism which seems to feed off an apparently insatiable need to consume more and more' (Carter 2001, p.321).

Carter is therefore sceptical of claims that consumers can redress global inequalities of trade simply through purchase of 'fair trade' products. Wong, Turner, and Stoneman (1996) in their study of sustainable product innovation also point out the limits to ethical consumer behaviour, noting that choice of product is not dependent solely on ethical considerations but more conventionally on price,

quality and performance. Analysing the role of ethical consumerism must take this broader picture into account, particularly in identifying its role in sustainable development. This would be helped if the relationship between social economic and environmental issues were better understood, as well as the role e-commerce takes in relation to changing consumer behaviour.

The fair trade concept, in joining the idea of both economic activity and social development, is replete with ethical and sustainable overtones. Ransom (2002, p.20) asks, 'can the process of production be democratised, ownership shared, organised labour encouraged, child labour made unnecessary, environmental sustainability and human rights promoted?' This is expected to happen through the established process of consumerism, the normal working of the market changed only slightly to ensure that a greater share of the profit is returned to the original producers (Turner and Whalen 2005). Its success embodies the idea of the informed consumer who is willing to make a political act of consumer choice, bringing the notions of citizenship and democratic participation into the act of consumption. Also the drive to extend fair trade to local communities raises questions about the movement of niches to the mainstream, as well as achieving certain goals of sustainable development through crude market mechanisms. E-commerce has emerged concurrently with ethical consumerism and its particular characteristics have implications for the wider diffusion of fair trade.

Ethical Consumers and e-Commerce

E-commerce is emerging as a significant consumer forum and its adoption is generating new ethical issues, such as a changing balance of power between distributor and consumer based on ease of information gathering (Harris, Coles and Davies 2003; Herring 1999; Fernback 1997). Miles (2002) notes the convergence of the concepts of the consumer society and post-industrial society based on access to the Internet, which is portrayed as a radical innovation promoting democratic, equitable and technologically liberating values (see Bell 1973; Webster 1995). Emergence of this 'information society' is predicated on the innocuous diffusion and use of information technology despite the disruptive social implications of discontinuous technologies (Dutton 1996).

Related research on e-consumers has noted how availability of new technologies affects the means by which consumption can take place (Hearn and Roseneil 1999). Miles (2002) identifies a number of barriers to the success of e-commerce such as inequality of access and the consequent exclusion of certain social groups. From

a consumer perspective, security concerns and control of unsolicited information are foremost (Johnson 2001; Bynam 2001). However, the impact of e-commerce on ethical consumerism has attracted relatively little research interest to date (Durrschmidt 1999; Elgin 2000), although it has been claimed, from the ecological modernisation paradigm, that adoption and increased use of information technology to purchase goods and services allows the e-consumer to save material resources, energy, travel, and distribution costs (Spaargaren and Van Vilet 2000).

Transferring consumer activity to the Internet requires adoption of some of the values intrinsic to the technology. One aspect is the availability of free information identified as part of the web 'gift culture'. Kelly (1998) encouraged the building of business capital through distribution of free information, a gesture of 'enlightened generosity' to build a customer base in what he dubbed the new 'gift economy'. This ethic resonates with the activity of fair trade (which is itself more than just economic exchange), but the nature of information as a 'gift' is not well understood. Belk (1995, p.69) discusses three paradigms in which gift giving takes place: exchange, altruism, and personal reward. He describes gift giving as 'symbolic interpersonal communication' and gifts as a form of social or economic exchange in which cultural differences can be noted. There appears, then, to be congruence between the ethics of fair trade and of web use where social exchanges take place between individuals who are spatially remote and unknown to each other. With web users the gift is information while with fair trade it takes the form of a contribution to social welfare.
The institutionalisation of free information on the internet can therefore be seen as social rather than economic exchange and establishes a precedent for the existence of information exchange as a non-economic activity that is difficult to either eliminate or control by business (Denegri-Knott 2004). Commercial sites must sit side by side with free information sites, not necessarily a contradiction for organisations involved in fair trade where there is an amalgamation of commerce with socio-economic and environmental campaigning (Barbrook 1998).

There has been some discussion in the academic literature centring on the impact on the consumer of e-commerce. Pitt, Berthon, Watson and Zinkhan (2002, p.8) claim that, in the short term, an individual consumer has little power to influence the market but this changes with e-commerce which 'does more than permit one-to-one communication among consumers; it also facilitates one to many communications'. Pitt et al. suggest that this facility will strengthen consumers' power. This is achieved both through a range of brand information and through communications such as

recommendations, community building projects and spoof sites which can damage a firm's reputation.

More profoundly, Breen (1995) suggests that 'virtuality is about a politics of convenience', which is itself a specific manifestation of contemporary consumer culture. In this sense, convenience is facilitated over the web through increasing the speed by which items are located, and guaranteeing their availability. However, Breen claims that not only can the difference between knowledge and information become blurred in virtual space, they can also become confused. The individual may gather information virtually but cannot evaluate its meaning in a decontextualised environment. However, Breen suggests that the web used as a means of communication can help overcome this split and can help to recontextualise information through the interaction of networks as co-operatively organised tools that can interpret information. Jarratt (2003) investigates further claims of empowerment of the e-consumer through building on-line communities to exploit the interactive nature of the medium, giving consumers control of the consumption process. Web consumers are not empowered simply because of their access to information but also due to a collective identity and a collective voice online. Jarratt claims that 'network economics' takes into account relationships between consumers so that they become embedded within the social relations of the Internet.

To summarise the discussion so far, these issues represent an emerging academic research area, and there are a number of specific themes that have not yet been comprehensively addressed. In particular, consumer studies has started to identify a role for 'ethical consumers', particularly where consumer choice has taken a lead in selecting products related to social and environmental sustainability. The case of fair trade in the UK illustrates some of the ways in which consumers are enacting their ethical credentials online. A key question is how e-commerce might help to bring the niche markets of fair trade into the mainstream of consumer activity.

The Position of Fair Trade in the UK

Although the global movement for fair trade originated around 30 years ago, each country has its own specific national organisations involved in promoting sales (see James 2002 for information on the USA). Fairly traded goods carry a guarantee that part of the price is devoted to a social premium, which is invested in the welfare of the producers. The developing market indicates that some consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for such products. In the UK

the Fairtrade Foundation was established in 1992, as a certification organisation, by a number of charitable and community organisations concerned with sustainable development in the third world[1]. The UK Fairtrade mark was launched in 1994 on its first three products, Green and Black's Maya Gold organic chocolate, Clipper tea and Cafedirect instant coffee. Globally a process of certification is essential to guarantee that products have reached acceptable standards of production and are systematically audited as such. In the UK the Fairtrade Foundation certification mark guarantees that:

• Farmers receive a fair and stable price for their products
• Farmers and plantation workers have the opportunity to improve their lives
• Farming methods demonstrate greater respect for the environment
• Small-scale farmers gain a stronger position in world markets
• Fair trade products enable a closer link between consumers and producers (Fairtrade Foundation 2005a)

The business of fair-trade goods took off rapidly. In 1997, an 'early day' motion was tabled in the House of Commons by MPs Glenda Jackson, Simon Hughes and Peter Bottomley in support of the Palace of Westminster serving fair trade refreshments. This was supported by over 100 MPs. By March 2000, Co-operative Society had launched the first supermarket own brand of fair trade product, a chocolate bar. Two years later, the supermarket switched its own brand chocolate to fair trade. The same year Costa coffee became the first national chain of coffee shops to offer fair trade coffee. By 2002 all the major UK supermarkets offered a range of fair trade goods (Fairtrade Foundation 2005b; Co-operative Society 2002; Sainsbury's 2002)[2]. Sales of fairly traded produce have been growing exponentially in Britain, and in 2004 the UK became the biggest market in the world for fair trade sales, overtaking Switzerland for the first time with annual sales of over £140m, a 51% rise since 2003 (Duffy 2005).

This growth in availability of fair trade marked products was a response to a rapid emergence of the ethical consumer (Irving et al. 2002). The Fairtrade Foundation commissions an annual consumer awareness poll by the national organisation Mori. The poll demonstrates a rapid growth in consumer recognition of the meaning of, as well as support for, the fair trade certification mark (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of MORI poll results

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Recognition of Fairtrade mark	19%	20%	25%	39%
Understanding of Fairtrade mark[3]	19%	24%	33%	42%

(Source: Fairtrade Foundation 2005c)

This effect of increasing awareness appears to be predominant among middle aged women of higher social class[4], although it belies the fact that there are growing student campaigns in UK universities to become recognised as fair-trade organisations, starting with Oxford Brooks, which in October 2003 became the first university to be granted fair trade status (Gainsburg 2005). There is a wider campaigning aspect to the business of selling fairly traded goods, such as through the annual fair trade fortnight which is supported by the major participating organisations. It has been described as the UK's 'official ethical food festival' with around 7500 local and national events in 2005 (Vidal 2005). In addition over 100 towns and cities have been awarded fair trade status, with Garston in Lincolnshire being the first (Vidal, 2005). In 2004 the number of fair trade certified products in the UK exceeded 800, with coffee the biggest market followed by bananas, chocolate and tea (Fairtrade Foundation 2005a)[5]. The UK sales figures for the most important commodities are documented in Table 2. The successful growth of the market has encouraged conventional businesses to evaluate the market, bringing fears for the potential dilution of standards from a proliferation of certification marks (Wall 2005).

Table 2: UK Sales Figures of Fair Trade Commodities

Retail value (£ million)*	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Coffee	13.7	15.0	15.5	18.6	23.1	34.3
Tea	2.0	4.5	5.1	5.9	7.2	9.5
Chocolate/cocoa products	1.0	2.3	3.6	6.0	7.0	10.9
Honey products	n/a	> 0.1	0.9	3.2	4.9	6.1
Bananas	n/a	n/a	7.8	14.6	17.3	24.3
Other	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.2	3.5	7.2
TOTAL	**16.7**	**21.8**	**32.9**	**50.5**	**63.0**	**92.3**

*assumes a margin of 40% for retailers (30% on bananas)
(Source: Fairtrade Foundation 2005d).

E-commerce and Fair Trade

The diffusion of e-commerce has many potential impacts on the conventional retail sector. Not least of these is the potential for consumers to become involved in the sourcing of the products they purchase through utilising the web attributes of free information gathering and exchange. Thus, as discussed earlier, web users may become empowered 'ethical consumers', who have access to a much wider range of products than those that available locally. In fact the growth in use of the web, not only for straight commercial purchasing but also for information gathering, has paralleled the growth in ethical trading over the past decade. This is particularly true for fairly traded goods.

The value of sales of fairly traded products has been growing in conjunction with the emergence of e-commerce sites for ethical consumerism. Dedicated virtual shopping sites have been developed - Oxfam and Tradicraft, two of the original supporters of fair trade, having joined forces to launch on-line facilities (Oxfam 2005). In addition, a portal site, Ethical Junction, which claims to be a one-stop (virtual) shop for ethical trading, includes fair trade products in its directory. The aim of this site is to promote the idea of ethical consumerism, to make it easier for consumers to 'adopt a more ethical and rewarding lifestyle' and to help contribute to making the world of commerce fair and sustainable (Ethical Junction 2005). One of the roles facilitated by web trading is to bring producers and consumers together in a more personalised and intimate relationship. A number of fair trade websites feature pictures of the producer farms and their families who are benefiting from the fair trade schemes (e.g., Clipper Teas 2005). This is an extension of the practice developed to feature information about the farmers on the product packaging and helps to both overcome issues relating to geographical separation of producer and consumer and the impersonal nature of the supply of goods. It also demonstrates that the principle of free information on the internet, often seen as a problem for conventional business, works in this case to the advantage of business/consumer communication.

If one effect of e-commerce is to bring the consumer into 'virtual space' with the producer, the consumer must trust that the purchasing chain will act in the way it purports. This may also arise in a more conventional purchase, although trust in the standards of behaviour of national retailers may be more developed than that of web-based organisations. One issue centres on the trust the consumer has in the institutions which are selling these products. Major charities could be expected to behave in a trustworthy

manner. However, more commonly, fair trade claims are judged on whether the product carries the certification mark, administered in the UK by the Fairtrade Foundation. This mark is a useful guarantee of authenticity for e-commerce consumers where purchases can be made from sites of vendors with unknown reputations (Fairtrade Foundation 2005e). The Fairtrade Foundation web site provides an extensive amount of information about fair trade activities, especially regarding the products available in the UK and their outlets, both virtual and conventional. It thus embodies yet another aspect of trust building, providing both background information on the individual products and the benefit of a shopping directory, while distributing current information via an on-line quarterly newsletter. The diversity of information available on the website demonstrates the link between online community building and increasing consumer power.

In terms of fair trade, for example, the e-commerce customer is not restricted to what is available in the local high street, nor to repeat purchases from a known web site – although no doubt the latter limits much on-line activity. Demonstrating the possibility of information gathering, the customer can search for other fair trade sites of the same type, but in addition it is possible to gain access to much wider information about the global activities of fair trade proponents. It is easy to discover the principles on which fair trade goods are certified and how such standards are established and maintained. It is possible to discover the differing 'ethical principles' on which different types of organisation are based (see for example Ethical Junction 2005) and to compare these at an international level. Information is available on the background of organisations promoting fair trade as well as international campaigns and educational activities. It could be argued that it is this function of web use, of providing an unprecedented level of knowledge to the web user, which will have the greatest restructuring effect between offline and online business activities. Evidence that certain fairly traded products are moving from a narrow niche market into the mainstream of retail in the supermarket is testament to the purchasing power of the informed consumer. As access to the Internet widens, the opportunity for information diffusion about niche products will certainly grow (see for example Sainsbury's (2002) statement on their fair trade product range).

The information available on the web has enabled data from geographically diverse groups (producers and consumers) to be brought together and product information is globally disseminated for mutual benefit. The rapid growth of sales in fair trade products to date is testament to the interest and commitment of wealthy consumers in the North. Furthermore, seller and customer can

interact; ask questions, leave messages and exchange recipes, among other things. In particular, firms can seek to inform the customer about the recognition of high quality products (for example Clipper tea). This is a unique opportunity for a small firm that would not usually be able to get this level of interaction with its customer base. More globally, consumers can obtain information online which enables them to compare a range of fair trade labelling standards available internationally and to investigate the reputation of firms which have fair trade certification. The web is particularly suited to the growing interest in fair trade due to its unusual position of both facilitating traditional consumer purchasing behaviour and enabling individual involvement with a campaigning movement.

Discussion

Case studies of the emergence of fair trade in specific countries can help to reveal the conditions necessary to stimulate the wider development of markets for such products. In the UK there has been a steady increase in consumer awareness of the meaning of the fair trade mark in conjunction with market growth. Such trends are testament to the success of a developing supply, which is a credible alternative to established sources such as the multi-national companies, which dominate the commodities trade globally. The emergence of fair trade goods in retail and on the internet can be said to have developed purposefully, in the sense that it was promoted through co-operation and campaigning activities of heterogeneous social groupings (including charities, small firms, and community groups). The market, in contrast, has grown through consumer decisions based on individual ethics. The figures for the UK suggest that growing consumer awareness of the meaning of the fair trade certification mark is matched by a growing market demand.

The groups committed to a campaigning approach to develop broad based awareness of fair trade issues cannot always be said to be systematically co-ordinated but they have a shared objective. Developing a consumer base for fair trade goods involves a much wider involvement from groups involved in ethically inspired campaigning than for conventional goods which respond only to supply and demand. Another issue is the interaction between regional, national and global factors. Towns have achieved fair trade status through raising awareness and encouraging local retail outlets to stock goods. Firms importing goods can achieve a national certification to supply the whole country. In addition,

on the web they manage global networks which inform the consumer about the activities of farmers' co-operatives and the local projects they are supporting through the social premium on the price.

Building an alternative source of supply of goods which fits into the existing systems of retail can be seen as a success in contrast to the difficulties involved in attempting to reform the dominant system from the outside. This would involve campaigning to put pressure to change the established sourcing practices of large firms, which typically strongly resist change especially in incorporating any consideration beyond straight price competition (Wall 2005). A successful fair trade sector demonstrates the existence of consumer demand for these commodities. Established firms, which want to enter this sector, must then subject their supply practices to external verification before they can claim fair trade status.

The role of e-commerce has also worked in favour of both vendor and consumer, for retail sales and for information dissemination and communication. Both groups require information about the cumulative impact of sales and availability of new products that lie outside the more traditional aspects of retail. The ethic of free exchange of information on which communication over the web is based facilitates both the individual action of purchasing fair trade products and wide dissemination of information about communities that are part of the social welfare projects. In effect the web facilitates economic and social exchanges, acting as a forum for retail and sales and as a vehicle for information sharing and communication. These aspects of e-commerce, while enabling sales over the web and potentially putting increased power of selection and decision making in the realm of the consumer, are not specific to ethical trade. In utilising the potential of the web for communication and information exchange, consumers can participate in campaigning and coalition building activities demonstrating how commerce may encompass at least some of the values espoused by sustainable development. One issue raised by this discussion relates to the means by which web ethics is itself partly embedded through its technological construction, which primarily facilitates unfettered information exchange and communication. The adaptation of the web for commerce has been secondary and has lead to purposeful modifications of web technology (Harris et al. 2003). Emerging here is a conceptualisation that the 'open exchange' ethic is mutually reinforcing the values of ethical consumerism.

Finally there is a question over the relationship between growing demand for fair trade in the north and sustainable development for the farmers predominantly in the south. This is more difficult to judge in part due to the many definitions of sustainability, although the requirement to move towards environmentally sustainable agriculture is a positive point. Also it is part of a sustainable development agenda to support the viability of small farmers and to increase local control over the fate of their products, where the alternative is to move to larger agricultural units with a more intensive agri-chemical regime in competition in global markets. However, this must be set against the long distance movement of fair trade products, which might have negative environmental impact, and the export orientation of international trade which may lock producers into a particular model of production.

Conclusion

The emergence of ethical consumerism should be viewed as an outcome of discourses both about the primacy of the market in affecting production and from considerations of the nature of sustainable development. Thus ethical consumerism is an attempt by individual consumers to participate in the process of social and ecological change by using commerce in a beneficial manner. This paper has considered the position of fair trade as a specific aspect of ethical consumerism incorporating the role of e-commerce in building a niche for fair trade products.

The practice of fair trade appears to fit the moniker of ethical consumerism in a number of ways. Significantly through the social and environmental premium built into the price, but also via the heterogeneous coalition of stakeholders involved. Thus a guarantee of ethical sourcing is also brought into play, gained not only by product sales but also through campaigning. As discussed above, the ethics of the web appear to have a mutually reinforcing 'fit' with the requirements of ethical consumerism. The fact that product availability shares space with information sharing, communication and community building is integral to the function of the web, and, as noted above, is extremely difficult for any one actor to control. In some commercial situations such activities are viewed with suspicion, however in the case of fair trade these attributes are complementary and supportive.

It seems pertinent to consider whether the experience of one country in developing a market for fair trade is a useful exemplar for its emergence in other national situations. This paper has been concerned with identifying the conditions which have led to the

rapid emergence of a fair trade sector in the UK and relating that to a discussion of the role of ethical consumption. In conclusion, key factors affecting this process can be identified as:

- The role played by a coalition of heterogeneous social groups
- Development of independent certification as a guarantee of authenticity
- Emergence of diverse retail outlets, including e-commerce, resulting in a high level of availability
- Further use of the web as an information and communication medium
- Political support and action at a national and local level
- A radical and unconventional supply of goods, which required only incremental change to current retail practice.

Finally, it should be noted that fair trade seems to fit the ecological modernisation idea of the role of the individual citizen/consumer in changing the parameters of demand towards a fairer deal for third world commodity producers.

Footnotes
1. CAFOD, Christian Aid, New Consumer, Oxfam, Traidcraft and the World Development Movement. The Women's Institute, who have a long running 'Make Trade Fair' campaign joined soon after.
2. A more detailed chronology can be found on the Fairtrade Foundation website www.fairtrade.org.uk
3. This is the percentage of consumers polled who could correctly associate the Fairtrade mark with the definition "guarantees a better deal for third world producers".
4. The Mori polls indicate that awareness of fair trade is higher among professional and managerial social classes (from 25% in 2001 to 33% in 2004) and for the age group 45-54 year olds (up from 25% in 2001 to 31% in 2004). Twice as many women recognise the Fairtrade Mark than men.
5. The estimated retail value of coffee sales growing from £13.7m in 1998 to £34.3m in 2003 and £49.3m in 2004. Sale of Bananas in 2004 was £30.6m (up from £24.3m in 2003 and from £7.8m in 2000), chocolate (£13.6m in 2004, up from £9.2m in 2003) and tea (£12.9m in 2004, up from £9.6 in 2003). Source: Fairtrade Foundation 2005b

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