

A Marketing authenticity and fair trade: toward a new relationship?

Case of cooperatives in Souss Massa region

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Abstract

Fair trade has based on values such as trust, fairness, transparency and proximity, which are often displayed on the product's packaging to meet the postmodern consumer's need. This later asks for authenticity that rejoins the principles promoted by fair trade. Our paper is in line with this. It aims to explore the relationship between fair trade and authenticity through marketing approach. On the literature review's section, we propose a state of the art on the marketing of authenticity and fair trade. Then, in the empirical section, we present a qualitative study with eight cooperatives in Souss Massa region on their practices and perceptions of this relationship. The key result is that despite the flowering of terroir products, the cooperatives display a certain ambiguity in their marketing's manners. We advise cooperatives to consider this association: fair trade products and authenticity. Successful international trade would not always mean the marginalization of the local consumer: achieving international certification is a guarantee of quality, but satisfying local expectations is a guarantee of peripety.

Keywords: marketing of authenticity, fair trade, authenticity, cooperative, Souss Massa

JEL Classification : M31

Introduction

The fair trade has been launched as a tool to improve the situation of small producers in the South. It aims to rebalance international trade. Its roots go back to Aristotle's work on the natural management of the good family and its resources (Pouchain, 2012a). The fair trade movement revives a rather earlier tradition that positions consumption as a social and political commitment. This association between fair trade and consumption is very important for economic and social science. It is linked to consumption (Pouchain, 2016; Gendron et al., 2009; Wright, 2004) by redefining the roles of each actor in international exchanges, and thus it is legitimately integrated into management sciences, and more particularly in marketing.

In this sense, this association also deserves to be questioned by the conditions of postmodern consumption. Research has been highlighted that demand is undergoing a radical change in ways that refute the utopia of modern times (Rosselin, 1994). The main proposition of the research hypothesis is the link between authenticity and fair trade. In this sense, the quest for the authentic is one of the characteristics of postmodern society. The object of this paper is to explore the association between the quest for the authentic and fair trade. It's structured as following: on the literature review's section, we propose a state of the art on the marketing of the authentic and fair trade.

Then, in the empirical section, we present a qualitative study of cooperatives in Souss Massa region on their practices and perceptions of this relationship.. Finally, we underline that despite the flowering of terroir products, the cooperatives display a certain ambiguity in their marketing's manners.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. What is the marketing authenticity ?

Authentic is a term that has been interested research since its first appearance at 13th century (Rey, 2012). Thus, researchers have emphasized that it would accept several views depending on the research area. Because, it is difficult to use it without relating it to specific research object and context (Camus, 2002). In this sense, according to the recommendations of Cova and Cova (1995) the consideration of what the consumer is looking for would be grateful for designing an authentic product. Furthermore, these researchers suggest to manufacturers to establish a relationship of compromise with consumers in order to reduce the contradiction between business context and authenticity.

A response to the postmodern quest...

Postmodern consumption is sliding towards a new problematic. This orientation is manifested in the ways of consumption as well as in its rituals. The object is empty of meaning until the moment of its consumption (Baudrillard 1970). This moment is not presented any more like a simple act, but it is a search for the sense answering a, often, subjective imaginary (Carù and Cova, 2006). This understanding leads us to understand reality in the form of a negotiable foundation from one person to another. We would no longer witness a single globalizing reality linked to the values of technological progress (Hetzl, 2002 ; Napoli, 2016 ; Oh et al. 2019).

Since his research, Cova (1995) emphasizes that uncertainty and doubt would be quite frequent characteristics of postmodern consumption. Also, the space the local are important determinants of this postmodern quest. The old know-how and ways of the past would reappear as values sought by contemporaries (Caru and Cova, 2006 ; Camus, 2002). Despite the differences in the approaches used, the authors agree that the ingredient of authenticity and locality in the making of objects are important for postmodern societies (Camus, 2007 ; Beverland and Farrelly 2010). All in all, the quest for authenticity is closely linked to a return to products made by local hands, as they allow conveying values sought by the latter such as the old-fashioned way, certainty and health, or the implementation of narratives around the product speaking about the author behind its making (Camus, 2007). Indeed, these authors have been interested in the study of the authentic in a market framework in a general way, without relating it to a well-defined type of trade. This paper aims to relate this quest of authenticity to the fair trade. This choice is argued by the existence of links between the two research objects: the values sought in a quest for the authentic are the same strengths promoted by fair trade. In this sense, it deals with fair trade, as

a context research of authenticity's quest, in order to trace the links between the two conceptual constructs of our research and then we outline our experimentation.

1.2. Fair trade mouvement

A natural movement...

Research on fair trade has its roots in Aristotle's work focused on the management of the family economy (Pouchain, 2012a). It's in this natural economy that the head of the family has the goal of satisfying the needs of his family (Aristotle, 1993). This relationship is based on limited quantities since the objective isn't speculation but it's to ensure a happy life. In this perspective of small-scale trade, possession is necessary because it aims at the utility of use and the will to 'trade well'. Thus, in some cases, self-sufficiency is difficult to achieve. Natural chrematistics counteracts purely commercial chrematistics, which is the acquisition of wealth for pleasure and money (Aristotle and Ross, 1971). This natural practice commands the good life in all aspects of the economy in which money isn't an end in itself (Berthoud, 2002). The economic agent is concerned with respecting the justice that produces happiness for the whole community and that is located in the middle and not in the excesses. Within this reasoning of the good chrematistic that the trade wants to be just. It aspires to the existence of a consumer who desires a product at the right price.

... which corrects the injustices...

The concept of fair trade, in spite of its notoriety, remains difficult to define it in a single ideology. With the thought of Adam Smith, trade is originally an activity for the love of self and the love of others, it rhymes with morality (Berthoud, 2002). The exchange is a practice that has been born in the respect of justice. In another sense, the use of the expression 'fair trade' underlines a paradox of practice, as in the Marxist thought, the market logic does not lead to the equity between people (Berthoud, 2002 ; Daniel, 2008). However, this question of the contradiction of ideologies is not the object of this article. In this respect, fair trade combines social logic with market logic (Hervieux, et al 2010).

In 2001, the international group Fine defined fair trade in the 'Fine consensus' as follows: 'Fair trade is a trading partnership that aims to be an alternative to traditional international trade and whose objective is to achieve harmonious and sustainable development of disadvantaged and marginalized producers. It does this by offering better trading conditions, by attracting public attention and by campaigning.' The Fine Group refers to the initials of the following actors' names: the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO); the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT); the European Network of World Shops (NEWS); and the European Fair Trade

Association (EFTA). In this definition, FT has been seen as a lever for development and for reducing distinctions between producers. It is a form of exchange based on relational ethics (Ballet and Carimentrand, 2008). The relationship is important to establish confidence in the act of purchasing a fair trade product on disadvantaged producers. Thus, this alternative trade makes it possible to fight poverty in the South based on the formula 'Trade and not charity' (Raynolds et al., 2004), because this later doesn't make possible to build a sustainable economy. To achieve this, justice must be repositioned in the market sphere, by using norms to match the social with the market (Hervieux et al., 2010).

This exchange leads to the weaving of social ties between the consumer and the producer based on social equity (Raynolds, 2002). In view of the above, we can conclude that FT is not a simple commercial phenomenon, but a social movement aiming on equity and fair prices in the market, in order to combat the poverty of producers, especially those located upstream of the production chain. Also, it covets a spirit of political consumerism based on the principle 'I buy therefore I vote' (Pouchain, 2012b), and that this consumption becomes a lifestyle (Nicholls, 2015).

...by a fair price...

Faced with the inequalities generated by the conventional market system, the fair trade project puts forward another price (Béji-Bécheur et al, 2005). It's a question of charging a price that guarantees the dignity of the lives of poor producers, especially in the case of monoculture of raw materials (De Ferran et al, 2013). In other words, this price allows them a healthy, happy and valuable life. Again, it's necessary that it is competitive (Pouchain, 2016 ; Boinon, 2013), which means that it is linked with the conventional price.

Also, this price has been placed on the side of the consumer and his perception by focusing its value on utilities (Robert-Demontrond, 2008). In another fairly recent reflection, the fair price also refers to the quality of the fair trade's product. Besides social equity, it defends the flavor sought by the consumer (Pouchain, 2016; Gendron et al., 2009; Wright, 2004). In his work on fair trade coffee advertising, Wright emphasizes that the effort is articulated on the benefit derived by the British consumer and not on the ethical value of his act of consumption. In this sense, Gendron refers to the adoption of the term 'better' than 'fair', he explains that in some cases, the price in the fair trade sphere embodies the better price for a better quality than a fair trade price and that the assent of Mexican producers to the fair trade movement has allowed them to enrich the quality of the coffee but also, to increase the production costs. However, although the FT aims for product quality, balancing between fairness and quality seems necessary not to touch the foundations of fair price (Pouchain, 2016).

... towards sustainable development.

Sustainable development and fair trade are two consensual concepts. Fair trade products contribute to the achievement of the goals assigned by sustainable development (Goworek, 2011; Strong, 1997; Bacon, 2008; Levi and Linton, 2003). Indeed, even FINE's definition of fair trade proclaims sustainable development as an important pillar of its project. Fairness requires a sustainable chain of production (Auroi, 2003). It is a commercial exchange with an ethical and ecological vocation (Béji-bêcheur et al, 2005). However, the consumption of fair trade products is fueled by an ecological and sanitary motive for the consumer (Wright, 2004). In its website, the international organization FLO (2005) prohibits the use of pesticides by fair trade farmers while promoting fair trade cultivation. However, driven by its social and economic will, FT shows limitations and contradictions with environmental protection. It endures a lack of reflection on the transport of goods (Diaz Pedregal, 2006), requiring extensive debate to find global common ground (Theys, 2002).

This ecological imperative makes the work of disadvantaged producers more difficult (Le Velly Ronan, 2009), in this point, it is a question of arbitration between different producers who do not share the same working conditions. Should we propose a green mode for fair trade agriculture? In many research studies, such an approach complicates the task of the fair trade project and encourages tensions between its actors (Gendron, Bisaillon and Torres, 2009; Bonnin-De Toffoli, 2010; Robert-Demontrond and Joyeau, 2010), who are divided into two groups, those who see FT as a vector of social integration and others who see it as a tool for in-depth transformation of the economic system (Robert-Demontrond and Joyeau, 2007). In the face of this dissimilarity generally stake out an equitable project at the ecological pace, attention must be paid to the inequalities between producers from different areas and the divergence of interests, in order to be able to establish an enriching dialogue considering the differences in value (Ranter, 2004; Le Velly, 2009).

From the above-mentioned, we have seen that, in general, fair trade holds out the hope of establishing a just and equitable world for sustainable development, especially for small farmers. Here we choose to focus specifically on fair trade cooperatives of Agri-food products. It appears to us this context as 'an entry key' to respond to the quest for authenticity. In addition to its contribution to the realization of the objectives already mentioned (justice, equity, sustainability), *the fair trade terroir product would always respond to a movement favoring the natural and the earth: its first vocations, which also draw similarities with the authentic movement, we synthesize the salient similarities in the following table:*

Table 1. Synergy between quest for authenticity and fair trade products

Fair trade product	Quest for authenticity
Made by the small farmers.	Local : an important ingredient
Fair price	Price is secondary
Belongs to a well-known figure	The author of the object is important
Meeting in the market	The link is important
Sustainable development	Rejection of modernist utopia

Source : authors

2. Methodology

This paper plans to establish the link between the quest for the authenticity and the fair trade cooperative. It aims to answer the following topic research: to what extent could the fair trade cooperative respond to the quest for the authenticity? It uses an interpretive paradigm. The sample concerns eight fair trade cooperatives in the Souss Massa region. Authors opted for semi-directive interviews lasting an average of 35 minutes. The interview guide is composed of two important axes:

Table 2. Themes of the interview guide

Theme	explanation
Fair trade practices:	origin, emergence of the intention, stages, difficulties encountered, help and support, social and societal utility
Authentication manner:	conditions, production methods, approaches to authenticity, animation and functioning with different stakeholders, relationships, labeling, social links.

Source : authors

Interviews were entirely recorded then rewritten. Thematic analysis was chosen as the content analysis technique for the collected verbatim. Automatic analysis was then dedicated by using INVIVO software.

3. Results and Discussion :

3.1 Product as the face of its cooperative.

The knowledge of the farmer behind the product allows a weaving of social links: *'Fairness for me is to speak about all the participants in the production, even the small ones, sometimes I find it difficult to explain the value of a small task for the whole product' (N° 1).*

Indeed, a first distinction of the fair trade products is based on the meeting, sometimes directly with cooperative. This effort of the FT serving to value the small producer, meets one of the characteristics of the quest of the authentic, namely the knowledge of the author of the product. It can be understood in the actions of these leaders to promote their activities: *'I insist that I speak on my fair trade vocation to my customers, to reassure them on our social, after, and economic objective ... certainly not everyone adheres to my idea, but I am a little satisfied with my customers for the moment' (N° 2).* Our results meet those of Le Velly 2004 who underlined that this human exchange is a determining principle for fair trade. Indeed, this contact tempers an atmosphere of proximity and sharing of the modes and values of consumption, so it allows sharing narrations on the modes of production what also, according to Camus 2007 a way of supporting the authenticity of the terroir products in question.

3.2 Fair price reflecting the transparency and simplicity of the Product:

In the literature, as we have seen previously, the fair price represents the sacrifice to be paid by the consumer to remunerate all the farmers fairly, an idealized image of the latter against the big machines, often linked to conventional trade. But in practice, this image is also dependent on a small price:

Figure 1. Price' Cloud in verbatim



Source : authors

Figure 1 shows that « price » is the most word appeared in verbatim. Also, respondents mentioned that it is very difficult to speak about it in the context of fair trade for terroir products and their authenticity.

'The selling price poses a big problem for us, we have to establish fairness between the different stakeholders but we encounter problems of justification for our customers' (N° 5); "...a fair price even poses a problem for cooperative, but we try to be as fair as possible..." (N° 7). In the same way, Cova and Cova (2004), supported the idea of establishing a compromise between the producer of authenticity and the consumer. One of the pillars of this relationship is the price. The latter should not be reducible only to a monetary expense or to the remuneration of a superior quality, but the price policy should transmit the social value behind its consumption more than its utility.

Thus, it is a question of setting up a profit strategy based on the sale to the largest public, several buyers, and the attachment with the customers by the weaving of the bonds of proximity, by avoiding the gap between the reality and the expectations of the consumers (Daniel and al, 2008). We can also say that this small producer does not necessarily need to meet the expectations of the North, but, in some cases, the local, terroir product, could bring virtues more than complexity and difficulties. Here we put our hand on the local fair trade. Without defending a particular relationship: North-North or North-South or South-South, we underline that: more cooperative knows the consumer, more their ways of consumption and demands. It could satisfy his demand better. Thus, we cannot refute that the situations of marginalized producers in Northern countries are different to those in Southern countries.

3.3



Contextual authenticity : in order to promote the main vocation of Fair Trade, the cooperative emphasized that the context where the product is displayed must be consistent with its nature (often a specialized point of sale) :

Source : authors

Figure 2 shows that authenticity is often linked to the « value », « context » and « south product ». Cooperative mentioned: *“I could say that the FT is not justified only by the label, because the majority of my customers didn’t look for it for the first purchase, on the contrary, they trust the context of my exhibition and my explanations”* (N° 6). In this sense, the short distribution circuit has a very competitive advantage over other channels.

Because it is not discriminatory and it is homogeneous with the principles of this trade: *“ ... to speak about my values, I must reduce the intermediaries between the product and my customer, because more than there will be other intervening parties I would have a chain of marketing with problems”* (N° 7). Several principles of fair trade find their place in the short circuits and especially the knowledge of the producer behind the product, which constitutes a crucial motivation for the quest for authenticity, these results thus refer to the work on marketing authenticity (Camus, 2003; Cova and Cova, 2004).

3.4 Label that sometimes poses a problem.

Undoubtedly, the label constitutes a channel for transmitting information between farmers and consumers seeking to make their consumption actions more responsible. Their appearance has allowed the referencing of these products in supermarkets. However, this system faces operational and credibility limits: *“Labeling my product requires an effort that is sometimes beyond me, or that requires a certain cultural level for the members of the cooperative”* (No. 3); *“...from my experience I can confirm that labels are less often requested by my clients who do not know enough about this system* (No. 8). This result refers to the work of Ballet 2008, which highlights the limitations of the system of controlling the fair management of the cooperative.

Conclusion

This paper tried to make a contribution to the study of the association between fair trade and the quest for authenticity. This subject puts the dialogue between the practices of the cooperatives and the expectations of the consumer. It pointed out that despite the flourishing of fair trade products, cooperatives display a certain ambiguity in their operational ways. According to our interviews, we have touched a limit of the marketing approach adopted by the cooperatives we interviewed. They rarely carry out studies of local consumers' expectations upstream of labeling projects, in our case, the fair trade label.

In this sense, they often come up against the problems of marketing and satisfying the expectations of the postmodern consumer. We invite these cooperatives to consider this association; also it is opportune to think about the differences and limits of this association's object: fair trade products and quest for authenticity. Successful international trade would not always mean mastering a local competitive advantage. The other side of this success remains in the marginalization of the local consumer: achieving international certification is a guarantee of quality, but satisfying local expectations is a guarantee of peripety.

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