

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILING OF FAIR TRADE PRODUCT CONSUMERS: A CASE STUDY OF POLAND

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Abstract. As globalisation accelerates, ethical production and consumption have gained increasing importance, reshaping consumer behaviour, particularly around 2020. An increasing number of consumers are turning to organic, green, and other ethical alternatives, such as Fair Trade products (FTPs). FTPs are produced under fair conditions, prioritising environmental sustainability, reducing child labour, and increasing women's participation in production. Fair Trade also empowers producers by providing ethical production channels and enabling them to sell at premium prices, although higher costs often limit demand. This study examines the socio-economic profile of FTP consumers in Poland and explores whether their attention to product attributes differs from that of non-FTP consumers. A survey conducted on a representative, random quota sample of 1,011 adult Poles revealed that FTP consumers tend to be more economically active, socially and environmentally conscious and politically aware than non-FTP consumers. Furthermore, they place greater emphasis on product attributes such as composition, origin, brand, labelling, and certification. This heightened attention to detail contributes to greater satisfaction in purchasing Fair Trade products.

Keywords: Fair Trade Products, product attributes, product detail attention, satisfaction, consumer behaviour, ethical consumption

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethical production and consumption has gained prominence alongside the growing globalisation of both production and consumption. This shift has transformed consumer purchasing behaviour, leading to increased demand for organic, green, and other ethical alternatives, such as Fair Trade products (FTPs). In an era of rampant consumerism, ethical considerations are often sidelined. However, amidst this consumer frenzy, a growing movement is emerging that prioritises fairness, sustainability, and social responsibility. At the heart of this movement are Fair Trade products, offering consumers the opportunity to make a positive impact with every purchase.

The Fair Trade movement is designed to support farmers and producers in the global South (developing countries) by ensuring fair compensation and securing their rights to production resources (WFTO, 2020). The main goal of the Fair Trade concept is to reduce global poverty by strengthening economic systems, particularly within the agricultural sector of developing countries. Fair Trade products (FTPs) are produced in a way that upholds environmental sustainability, minimises child labour, and encourages greater participation of women in the production process. By providing producers with access to ethical production channels, Fair Trade

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enables them to sell their products at prices above the conventional market price. This not only helps producers rise above the poverty line but also ensures a safe and ethical supply chain while equipping them with the resources needed to facilitate a smooth flow of goods and services (Fiedoruk, 2021).

Despite the positive message promoted by Fair Trade producers, the concept has not been fully embraced by consumers. As a result, understanding the profile and behaviour of FTP consumers is crucial for producers, intermediaries, and policymakers. The goal is not only to expand the market share of these products but also to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of Fair Trade markets.

Product attributes and the attention to detail they receive are recognised as key factors in shaping consumer behaviour. Research by Boufous et al. (2023) and Xiong et al. (2018) highlights that several factors influence consumers' willingness to purchase products, including attributes such as product origin, production conditions, consumer benefits, and additional considerations like environmental protection, climate positivity, and animal welfare. These factors shape consumer perceptions and, in turn, impact their purchasing decisions. One important factor is how product details are communicated to potential buyers. Rihn (2016) found that greater attention to these details generally increases consumers' willingness to buy. However, no studies have focused on Fair Trade products.

This paper aims to examine the socio-economic characteristics of FTP consumers in Poland. We hypothesise that the socio-economic profiles of FTP consumers differ from those of non-FTP consumers. Additionally, we seek to determine whether FTP consumers' attention to product attributes differs from that of non-FTP consumers.

The novelty of this paper lies in its focus on a specific demographic area. The findings will serve as a foundation for experiments exploring the neural correlates of Fair Trade consumers. These results can inform effective communication strategies aimed at increasing the willingness to purchase FTPs in Poland. The following sections will outline the research methodology, review the literature on Fair Trade, and present the data analysis results.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A representative, random quota sample of adult Poles aged 18-65 was selected and statistically weighted

according to criteria such as gender, age, residence size, voivodeship, and education level in accordance with data from the Central Statistical Office. The questionnaire was developed following a thorough review of the literature, and data collection was conducted through a Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) with an online panel of approximately 60,000 users. All respondents provided informed consent to participate in the study. A total sample size of 1,011 ($N = 1,011$) was obtained.

The initial phase of data analysis focused on assessing consumer awareness of Fair Trade Products (FTP) in Poland, with a particular emphasis on comparing the socio-economic profiles of FTP and non-FTP consumers. Descriptive statistics were applied to both groups within the dataset, measuring characteristics such as age, gender, monthly income, place of residence, occupation, political views, and attention to product attributes. In the following steps, a correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between attention to product details and satisfaction with purchasing Fair Trade products. Product attributes were visualised using Excel, and the correlation measure was computed using SPSS.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to *A Charter of Fair Trade Principles*:

Fair Trade is 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. Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.

(WFTO and Fairtrade International, 2009).

In 2001, FINE – an informal platform comprising four key umbrella organizations in Fair Trade (FLO, now known as Fairtrade International; IFAT, now known as World Fair Trade Organization; NEWS, formerly the Former Network of European World Shops; and EFTA, the European Fair Trade Associations of FT importers) – formulated a definition of Fair Trade that emphasises fairness in trading practices.

From a marketing and consumer behaviour perspective, Fair Trade markets remain relatively under-researched and less understood compared to mainstream markets (Golding and Peattie, 2005). The first notable study on Fair Trade product consumers was conducted in 2008. In her research, Sirieix (2008) raised the question: “What do purchasers of Fair Trade products want?” To address this, she designed a questionnaire to explore consumers’ purchasing motives and the barriers that explain the gap between attitudes and actual behaviour. She focused on motives such as universal personal values, alongside factors like taste and quality, which are tied to self-oriented values. The study also examined barriers such as lack of awareness, social norms, perceived behaviour control, perceived consumer efficiency, price, and taste.

In addition, Chen et al. (2009) compared four strategies to promote Fair Trade products. They surveyed 100 college students, asking them to evaluate two campus sports celebrities on attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness and to assess how these qualities influenced their intention to purchase Fair Trade coffee. Castaldo et al. (2009) explored the relationship between consumer perceptions of a company’s social orientation (specifically, a Fair Trade company) and consumers’ intention to purchase products from that company. Using computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI), they collected 400 valid surveys (217 in Milan, and 183 in Florence, Italy).

Bezençon and Bili (2010) developed a tool to measure consumer involvement, the factors influencing it, and its impact on behaviours related to ethical product consumption, using Fair Trade as a case study. They employed a comprehensive questionnaire to assess all the relevant constructs and items. Boenning (2009) introduced the concept of Fair Trade, emphasising its goal of supporting marginalised producers and workers to achieve economic security and a decent standard of living. Kingsbury and Schultz (2010) noted an increase in the number of Fair Trade products but also pointed out that awareness of the Fair Trade movement remained relatively low, suggesting that increased awareness could drive further growth. Finally, Spendel (2010) critically examined the Fair Trade model, contrasting it with free trade and rebranding it as “just” trade.

The history of the Fair Trade movement and research in Poland is relatively recent. An informal coalition, “Fundacja Koalicja Sprawiedliwego Handlu,” began in

2009 when several NGOs and small businesses came together to promote ethical trade.

Today, Fairtrade Polska plays a pivotal role in developing Fair Trade by promoting Fairtrade-certified products, supporting Polish companies with Fairtrade certification, and raising consumer awareness through initiatives like the Fair Trade Communities campaign. The organisation also contributes to global education and advocacy activities, such as promoting sustainable public procurement (Fairtrade, 2018).

The use of Fair Trade products (FTPs) in Poland is steadily increasing. Current studies indicate that FTPs are becoming more popular among consumers, with growth expected to continue. In 2022, the net wholesale sales value of Fairtrade-certified products reached PLN 749 million, marking a 34% increase from 2020. This growth in sales reflects the rising demand for these products, highlighting the importance of Fair Trade as a key area of study (Fairtrade Polska: Raport 2022). Fair Trade agri-foods, such as coffee, bananas, chocolate, cocoa, sugar, and flowers, are the main products used in Poland. The two most important Fair Trade products in Poland are cocoa and coffee. Sales of cocoa, measured in kilograms, increased from 55,283 kg in 2015 to 5,383,085 kg in 2023, reflecting an 81% increase in sales from 2022 to 2023 (Fairtrade, 2025).

The formation of the informal Fair Trade coalition in Poland also sparked academic interest in the field of FTPs. Wielechowski and Roman (2012) identified main FTPs, such as bananas, cocoa, coffee, and cane sugar. Śmigielska et al. (2015) provided a detailed list of the benefits of the Fair Trade label, such as reduced transaction costs and improved product quality. They also discovered that, although small, there is a market niche for FTPs in Poland.

Teneta-Skwiercz (2016) evaluated the potential for Fair Trade market development in Poland. Woźniak (2016) conducted research on consumers in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship and found that knowledge of the Fair Trade label was relatively low, suggesting the need for ongoing promotion to raise awareness. Polynczuk-Alenius et al. (2017) discussed the moral dimensions, arguing that discourses of ‘solidarity through legitimisation’ and ‘solidarity through affinity’ serve moral education, aiming to foster sustained commitment to supporting producers in the Global South.

Kulig-Moskwa et al. (2017) investigated consumer behaviour and identified three key motives for choosing

FTPs: the appeal of innovative and trendy products, a willingness to try new products, and support for initiatives aimed at addressing social and environmental challenges.

Horodecka et al. (2019) distinguished the concept of Fair Trade from traditional economic values such as profit and utility maximisation, efficiency, and competition. Similarly, Śliwińska (2021) emphasised that Fair Trade markets ensure decent working conditions, while Fair Trade certifications guarantee product quality.

Zalega (2022) explored the consumption behaviour of young Polish singles in relation to sustainable consumption and the Fair Trade movement. The study found that while young Polish singles partially embrace the concept of sustainable consumption, some misinterpret its core principles. Additionally, the proportion of respondents who reported following sustainable consumption practices was notably higher among women, university graduates, and those residing in large urban areas.

Attention to detail is recognised as a key factor in consumer behaviour in both the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and The Theory of Consumption Values Perspective (TCV). TPB offers a framework for understanding how attention to product details may arise from consumers' attitudes, behavioural intentions, and behaviour. According to this theory, behaviour is shaped by relevant information or beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). In contrast, TCV focuses on the values influencing consumption choices, associating greater attention with higher product quality, which subsequently impacts consumption values (Pousa et al., 2014; Mason et al., 2023). These studies aim to test the applicability of these theories to Fair Trade products.

RESULTS

Awareness of Fair Trade Products Among Consumers

Among the 1,011 consumers surveyed, one-third (328, or 32.4% of consumers) were familiar with Fair Trade products. However, only 16.8% could recognise the Fair Trade logo. When asked to identify the logo's colour, fewer than 3% of the respondents provided the correct answer. This underscores the need for increased visibility and promotion of the Fair Trade logo (Fig. 1).

Among those who purchase Fair Trade products (310 responders), 44.5% learned about Fair Trade through

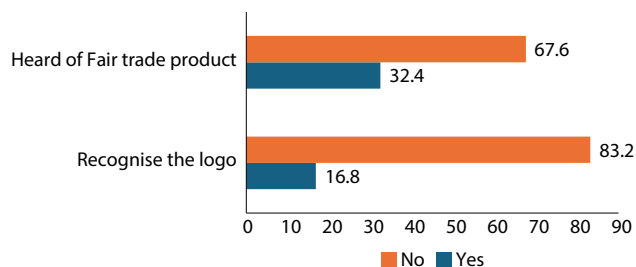


Fig. 1. Awareness of Fair Trade products among consumers in Poland (%)

Source: own elaboration.

its website (Fig. 2). Social media and product packaging were equally important sources of information, with 33.5% of consumers citing each. Product packaging was particularly noted as a key information channel. In contrast, promotional campaigns proved to be the least effective, with only 15.8% of consumers reporting that they became aware of Fair Trade through these efforts. This finding suggests that promotional campaigns must be better tailored to reach a wider audience.

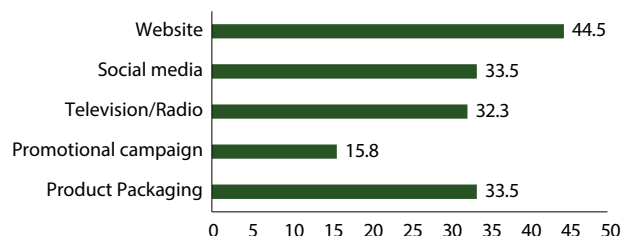


Fig. 2. Sources of knowledge about Fair Trade products among Fair Trade consumers in Poland (%; multiple responses allowed)

Source: own elaboration.

Profile of Fair Trade Product Consumers Age, Gender, and Education of Fair Trade Product Consumers vs. Non-FTP Consumers in Poland

Age: Fig. 3 compares the ages of Fair Trade product (FTP) consumers and non-FTP consumers. The results show that the proportion of FTP consumers is higher among younger groups (up to 44 years), while older consumers tend to purchase these products less frequently.

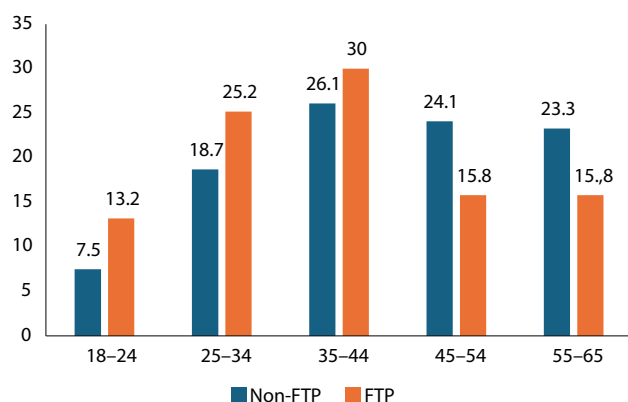


Fig. 3. Age of FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)

Source: own elaboration.

Gender:

No significant gender difference was found between FTP consumers and non-FTP consumers, with approximately 55% of both groups being female (Fig. 4 a, b).

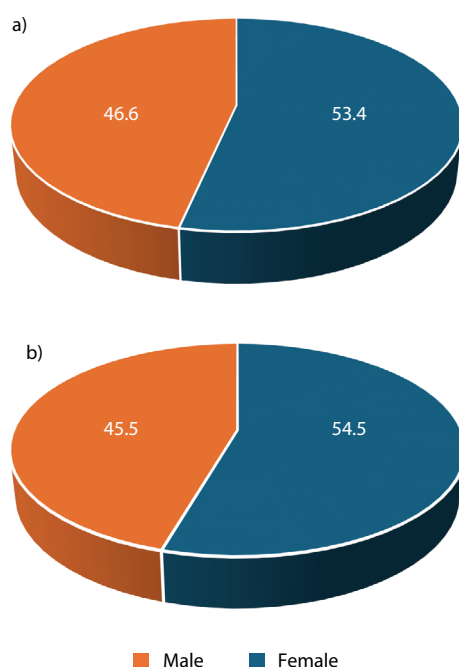


Fig. 4 a. Gender of non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)

Fig. 4 b. Gender of FTP consumers in Poland (%)

Source: own elaboration.

Education:

The education category was divided into 11 groups, ranging from the lowest to the highest level of education (Fig. 5). The study found that a higher percentage of FTP consumers had attained higher levels of education, from postsecondary education to PhD. In contrast, non-FTP consumers were more likely to have lower levels of education, ranging from basic education to technical school. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that FTP consumers tend to be more highly educated than non-FTP consumers in this study.

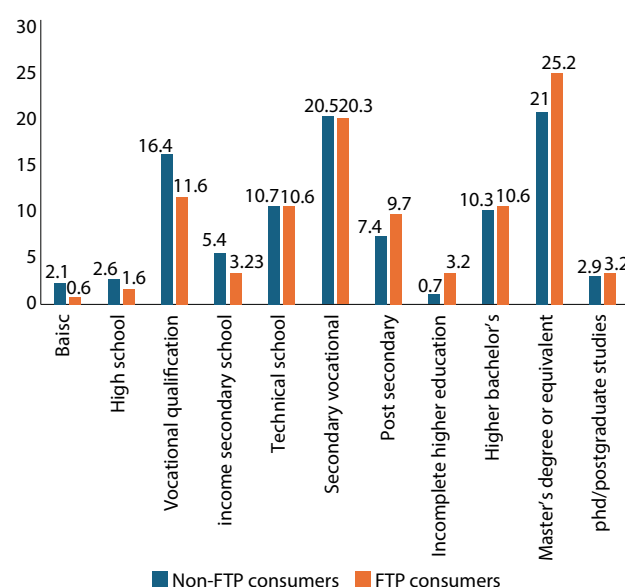


Fig. 5. Education of FTP consumers and non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)

Source: own elaboration.

Monthly Net Income per Person in the Household (PLN) of FTP Consumers vs. Non-FTP Consumers in Poland

Income plays a crucial role in the consumption of FTPs. Since these products are priced higher than regular items, consumers' willingness to purchase them is influenced by their disposable income. The results show that FTP consumers are more frequently found in the higher income categories (from 4,000 PLN to over 10,000 PLN per person) compared to non-FTP consumers (Fig.6). This indicates that FTP consumers generally

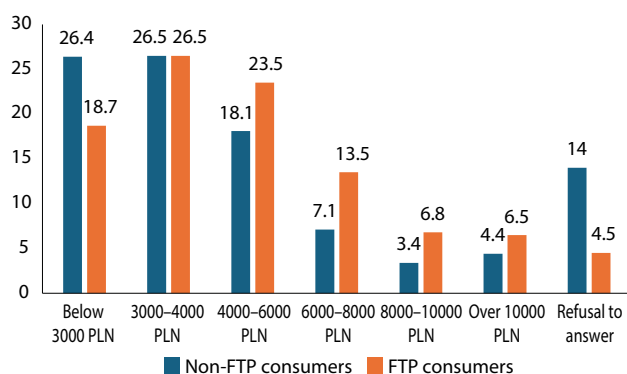


Fig. 6. Monthly net income per person of FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: own elaboration.

have higher monthly net incomes, suggesting that higher-income individuals are more likely to purchase FTPs due to their quality characteristics.

Place of Residence and Occupation of FTP Consumers vs. Non-FTP Consumers

One-quarter of surveyed FTP consumers live in villages (Fig. 7), whereas 32.4% of non-FTP consumers reside in villages. FTPs are more popular among residents of large cities (over 500,000 inhabitants). The distribution of consumers in cities with populations between 19,000 and 500,000 shows little difference between the two groups.

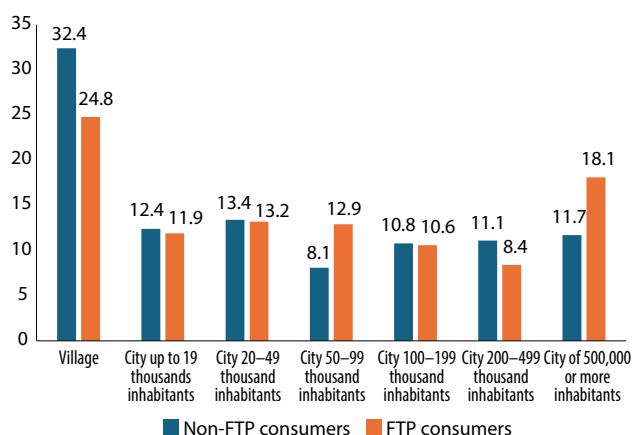


Fig. 7. Place of residence of FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: Own elaboration.

Occupation was categorised into 11 groups (Fig 8). Around half of both FTP and non-FTP consumers were employed in private companies, with about 10% working in public institutions. Notably, non-FTP consumers were more likely to be pensioners, unemployed, or not professionally active, whereas FTP consumers were more frequently students, employed in public institutions, or running businesses.

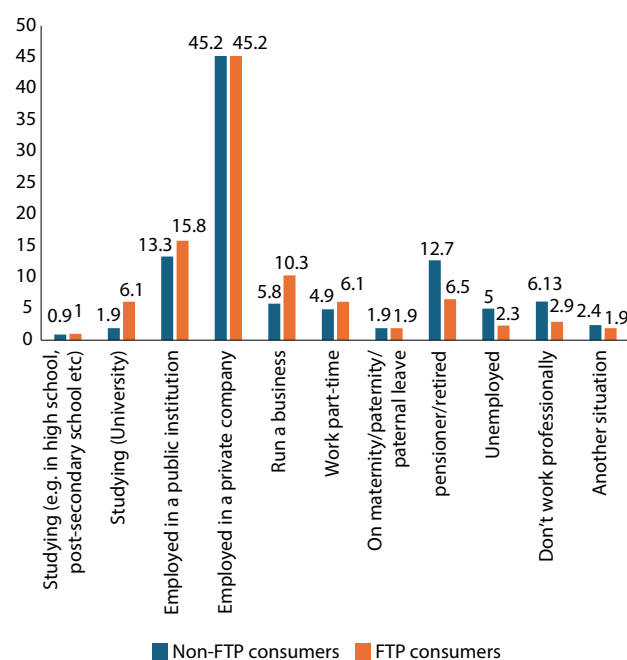


Fig. 8. Occupation of FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: own elaboration.

Political Orientation, Volunteering, Social Project Involvement, and Environmental Concern of FTP Consumers vs. Non-FTP Consumers in Poland

The data (Fig. 9) show that FTP consumers are more politically engaged compared to non-FTP consumers. Over 72% of FTP consumers were able to express their political views, whereas only 60% of non-FTP consumers could do the same. Among FTP consumers, 29% identified as right-leaning, 24% as left-leaning, and around 20% as centrist.

Consumers were also asked about their involvement in volunteering and participation in social projects (Fig. 10). The results revealed that FTP consumers are more active in volunteer work, with over one-third of

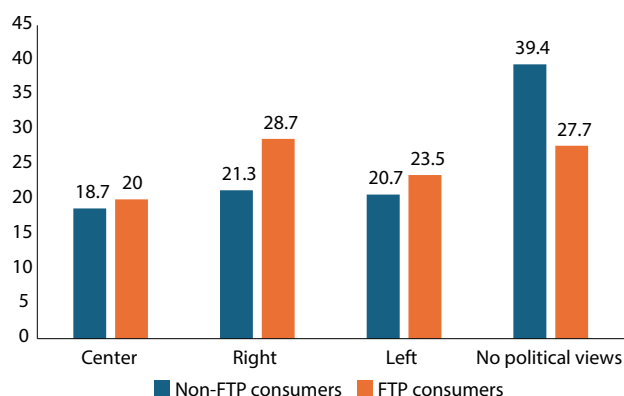


Fig. 9. Political views of FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: own elaboration.

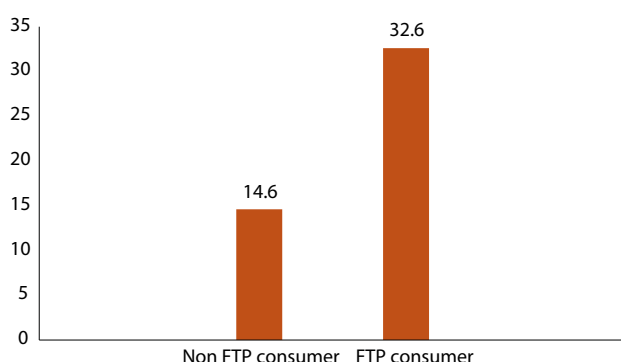


Fig. 10. Volunteering among FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: own elaboration.

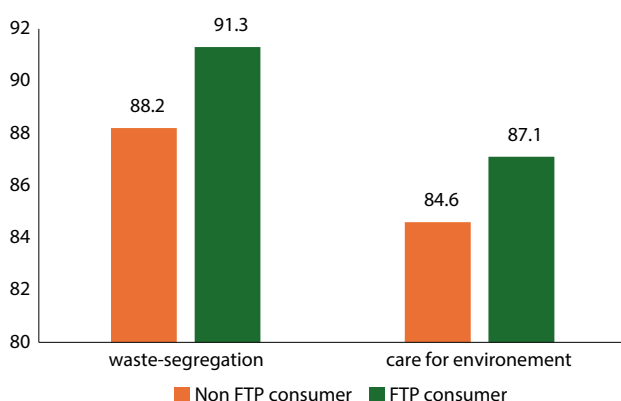


Fig. 11. Environmental concern among FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)
Source: own elaboration.

them participating, compared to only one-tenth of the non-FTP consumers.

When asked about environmental attitudes, such as the importance of waste segregation or caring for the environment (Fig. 11), more than 90% of the FTP consumers considered waste segregation important, compared to 88.2% of non-FTP consumers. Additionally, a higher percentage of FTP consumers identified themselves as caring about the environment compared to non-FTP consumers.

Attention to Product Details of FTP Consumers vs. Non-FTP Consumers in Poland

In the survey, respondents were asked about their attention to product attributes. These questions included:

- Do you pay attention to the composition of products (e.g., lack of preservatives, number of calories, sugar/salt content, quality/quantity of ingredients)?
- Do you pay attention to the country of origin of the product?
- Do you pay attention to the product brand?
- Do you pay attention to information markings on products?
- Do you pay attention to product certificates (e.g., eco/bio/Fair Trade certificates)?

Responses were recorded on a binary scale (“yes” or “no”).

The study reveals that FTP consumers are more attentive to the composition, origin, brand, labelling, and certifications of products compared to non-FTP consumers. Most FTP consumers (88.4%) pay attention to the composition of products, 82.5% focus on information markings, and 84.8% consider the product’s origin and brand. The difference is also evident regarding certification, as over three-fourths of FTP consumers focus on product certificates, while only one-third of non-FTP consumers do the same. This underscores the importance of promoting product certifications to raise consumer awareness of the quality of FTPs.

To further analyse the relationship between attention to product attributes and satisfaction with Fair Trade products, we correlated these factors with satisfaction levels, which were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied”.

Spearman’s rank correlation between attention to product details and satisfaction derived from FTPs was moderately positive and statistically significant

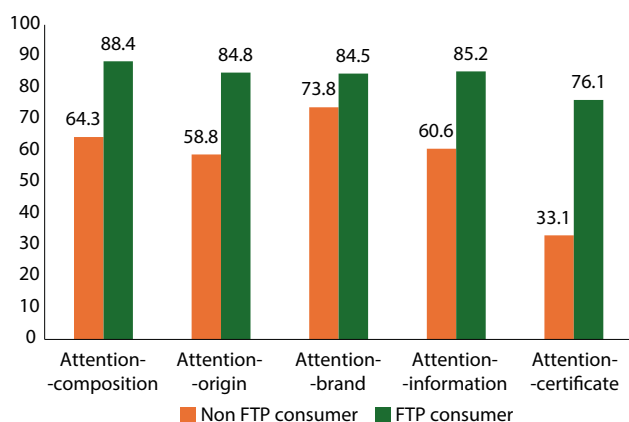


Fig. 12. Attention to details of product attributes among FTP consumers vs. non-FTP consumers in Poland (%)

Source: own elaboration.

(Table 1). This indicates that greater attention to product details – such as composition, origin, brand, and labelling – is linked to higher satisfaction with purchasing FTPs.

Table 1. Correlation between satisfaction derived from Fair Trade products and attention to product details

Attention-composition	Attention-origin	Attention-brand	Attention-information	Attention-certificate
.228**	.191**	.248**	.198**	.241**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Consumers play a crucial role in promoting the Fair Trade concept. By purchasing Fair Trade products, consumers support agricultural producers in developing countries and advocate for better living conditions, equal trade practices, and sustainable food production. This study outlines the socio-economic profile of Fair Trade consumers in Poland. It reveals that only one-third of consumers have heard of Fair Trade products (FTP), and just 16% can identify the Fair Trade logo. These findings suggest that awareness of Fair Trade remains low in Poland and needs to be increased. This is

further supported by the limited impact of promotional campaigns, highlighting the need for stronger promotional efforts to raise awareness.

The results indicate that FTP consumers are generally younger, more educated, and earn higher incomes than non-FTP consumers. This contrasts with Dąbrowska et al. (2019), who found that Fair Trade products primarily appealed to older age groups (50–59 years old). However, studies from Greece, Belgium, and the Czech Republic report that younger or middle-aged individuals are more likely to purchase FTPs (Delistavrou et al., 2009; Pedregal, 2011; de Pelsmacker et al., 2005, 2006; Plavakova et al., 2017). This study suggests that younger consumers in Poland are increasingly interested in Fair Trade products. Similar to Fernández et al. (2024), this study shows that most FTP consumers have completed secondary education. Additionally, Zalega (2022) found that the Fair Trade idea is most popular among women (aged 30–34) with higher education.

Moreover, FTPs are more popular among the residents of large cities (more than 500,000), aligning with previous research (Dąbrowska et al., 2019; Zalega, 2022). Since a place of residence often influences social status, it may shape consumer behaviour – particularly when purchasing Fair Trade products serves as an expression of personal values (Ladhari et al., 2015). Our findings further indicate that FTP consumers are more economically active, while larger percentages of pensioners, unemployed individuals, or those not professionally active belong to the non-FTP group. The correlation between higher income and FTPs consumption is also supported by Pedregal (2011), who found that higher-income individuals are more likely to purchase Fair Trade products, given their relatively higher price. Economic factors, such as income and pricing, remain key determinants of consumer behaviour despite other social and cultural influences (Szwacka-Mokrzycka et al., 2021).

Additionally, FTP consumers were more politically engaged than non-FTP consumers, with more than 72% expressing political views, compared to 60% of non-FTP consumers. This aligns with Usslepp et al. (2021), who found that political ideology influences Fair Trade purchasing decisions.

The study also confirms that FTP consumers exhibit greater social engagement and environmental awareness than non-FTP consumers (Dąbrowska et al., 2019). They are more likely to participate in social projects

and volunteer work, as well as show higher concern for environmental issues. This is consistent with Beldad et al. (2018), who suggest that environmental awareness is a strong predictor of Fair Trade purchasing behaviour.

Moreover, FTP consumers pay closer attention to the product attributes, including composition, origin, brand, labelling and certification. The most significant gap between FTP consumers and non-FTP consumers was in their attention to product certification. This supports Ruggeri et al. (2020), who found that consumers value certification and are willing to pay a premium for certified Fair Trade products. Furthermore, greater attention to product details among FTP consumers is linked to higher satisfaction with their purchases, emphasising the importance of clear product information and certification.

In conclusion, FTP consumers differ significantly from non-FTP consumers in terms of demographics, purchasing behaviour, and social engagement. To improve Fair Trade awareness and increase adoption, promotional campaigns should be tailored to the specific profile of FTP consumers, emphasising social and environmental issues in a global context. Further research on behavioural and psychological factors influencing Fair Trade purchasing decisions would help deepen the understanding of this consumer segment.

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