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Yamoah, Fred and Eshun Yawson, D. (2022) Promoting global well-being through fairtrade food: the role of international exposure. *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review* , ISSN 1559-2448.

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*International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*  
Please cite this article as 'in press'; DOI: 10.22434/IFAMR2021.0078

Received: 12 June 2021 / Accepted: 8 July 2022

## **Promoting global well-being through fairtrade food: the role of international exposure**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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### **Abstract**

Social preference theory highlights an alternative explanation for consumption choices that are not consistent with rational economic decision making. In the current research, social preference theorizing is advanced by highlighting consumers' exposure to developing countries (international exposure) as a factor that increases disposition to support fairtrade. The study shows that internationally exposed consumers through direct and indirect means demonstrate social concern by engaging in fairtrade food purchasing behaviour. Managers employing social preference appeals could prioritise internationally exposed consumers and heighten perceptions of equality restoration for a global reference group. The results imply that fairtrade marketers and public policymakers should highlight the benefits of fairtrade products to promote global equity.

**Keywords:** social preference, international exposure, global reference group, ethical products, fairtrade food  
**JEL code:** L81, M3

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## 1. Introduction

Despite recent research interest in the implications of social equity perceptions and preferences, less attention has been given to consumer behaviour related to social preferences. Of special interest is how ethical choice is influenced by consumer exposure through visiting, living, following and engaging with developing countries (international exposure). This has become essential due to the compression of global distances that exposes consumers to emerging relevant others (expanded reference group). Indeed, White *et al.* (2012) recount a myriad of ethical decisions that border on social equity considerations for other people such as donating to charities and fairtrade among others. Increasing consumer interest in sustainable products and prosocial behaviour (Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Chekima *et al.*, 2017; Cotte and Trudel, 2009; Herzenstein *et al.*, 2020; UNEP, 2013) has spurred a general optimism that ethical and socially responsible consumption can contribute positively to the attainment of sustainable development globally.

These attributes and attitudes of social responsibility with the corresponding global sustainable development imperatives, inform the marketing of products such as Fairtrade. The extant literature posits that Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world who produce these products (Fairtrade Foundation, 2003; Nicholls and Opal, 2008). Also, FairtradeMark is a certification label that informs shoppers that their fairtrade purchases at a premium price ensure that commodity producers receive a fair and guaranteed price for their products and ultimately promote their livelihoods and environmental sustainability (Fairtrade Foundation, 2009). However, the extant literature indicates that the sustainable food industry has over the past three decades made remarkable progress, but its market share remains small compared to the conventional alternative (Carrington *et al.*, 2016; Chekima *et al.*, 2017; Clark, 2007; Yamoah and Acquaye, 2019). Contrary to this trend in market share, Fairtrade certified producer organisations have increased from 1,240 in 2015 to 1,822 in 2019 (including hired labour, contract production and small-scale producer organisations) representing 1.8 million farmers' networks in 2019 in more than 73 countries (Fairtrade Foundation, 2021). Also, retail sales of Fairtrade globally rose from 8.1 billion (\$USD) in 2018 to 9.8 billion (\$USD) in 2019 and 203.8 million (\$USD) paid as a premium to producers in 2019 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2021). In 2020, Fairtrade products sold compared to the conventional products were all below 20% for Coffee, Bananas and Cotton globally (Fairtrade International, 2021). Therefore, making researchers posit that, the market share of products positioned using ethical attributes including fairtrade remains relatively small compared to conventional alternatives (Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Chekima *et al.*, 2017; Klöckner and Ohms, 2009).

This makes it opportune for this study to use Fairtrade to research the factors such as consumers' exposures to developing countries (international exposure) that could increase the disposition of consumers to make choices that are not consistent with a rational economic decision such as paying premium prices for fairtrade products than conventional products as social equity preference. This is a critical study to unravel the positioning of products as ethical and elucidate the current low market shares of these products compared to the same products conventionally produced. This is also important as literature shows a strand of research has drawn on the attitude-behaviour gap as a critical inhibitor that needs to be resolved to promote ethical product marketing (Alphonse *et al.*, 2014; Cotton *et al.*, 2016; Harvey and Hubbard, 2013; Jacobs *et al.*, 2018; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015; Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2011). Besides, another strand of research posits the existence of the consumer cosmopolitan orientation and describes it as:

the extent to which a consumer (1) exhibits an open-mindedness toward foreign countries and cultures, (2) appreciates the diversity brought about by the availability of products from different national and cultural origins, and (3) is positively disposed toward consuming products from foreign countries' (Riefler *et al.*, 2012: 287).

It is however intriguing that recommendations based on these studies are yet to prove potent to close the market share gap between ethical and conventional brands (Yamoah, 2019; Yamoah and Acquaye, 2019). Thus, the problem persists for marketers of ethical products like fairtrade to still face not only determining

how to persuade consumers to choose ethical products but to finding a holistic understanding of non-pecuniary motivations in constructed and inherent preferences (Simonson, 2008) to select ethical products over alternatives promoted based on self-benefit-oriented features (Grinstein and Riefler, 2015). In an attempt to highlight and explain this problem through research, Riefler *et al.* (2012: 286-287) have conceptualised consumer cosmopolitanism as a three-dimensional, second-order construct with three distinct perspectives – a norm, an attitude, and a state of mind that is manifested as an orientation toward the outside. Comparatively, the third perspective of a state of mind that manifests as an orientation toward the outside remains sparsely researched (Riefler, 2012; Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2009). To further elucidate this marketing quagmire, Grinstein and Riefler (2015: 695) states that:

one key characteristic of the [cosmopolitan] consumer segment is the worldwide reference frame used for decision making. Personal international experiences, as well as global trends, strongly influence lifestyle and consumption choices of these consumers. This reference frame renders cosmopolitan consumers distinct from their local/national habitats.

This research paper, therefore, additionally proposes and interrogates this posit that when consumers exhibiting this orientation in the global north are exposed to others via visiting, living, following and engaging with developing countries (Riefler, *et al.*, 2012) they will be more likely to choose products with ethical attributes such as fairtrade over alternatives with self-benefit features. Our current research is in further response to the need for a holistic understanding of non-pecuniary motivations for ethical consumption and prosocial behaviour (Becchetti and Rosati, 2007; House *et al.*, 2020; White *et al.*, 2012; Zollo, 2020) by using a national survey platform to establish a relationship between international exposure and consumer social preference for fairtrade products. Therefore, making this study noteworthy to contribute to the extant literature on social preference, consumer cosmopolitan orientation and fairtrade.

The study contributes to contemporary research that suggests that highlighting ethical attributes of products including fairtrade does not consistently attract favourable purchase intention and behaviour (Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Chekima *et al.*, 2017; Yamoah, 2019; Yamoah and Acquaye, 2019). Indeed, ethical consumer behaviour can be shaped singly or jointly by a concern for justice for others (White *et al.*, 2012), product and market factors (Bezawada and Pauwels, 2013; Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2015), social group influence (Anik and Norton, 2020), habit development (Khan *et al.*, 2020; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005), self-identity (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2020) and degree of tangibility (Barros *et al.*, 2020), among other factors. The current research complements this strand of literature by highlighting that international exposure positively influences consumer responses to fairtrade products. Notably, we show that concerns about justice for relevant reference group living in geographically distant countries is engendered through international exposure to the global south.

To the best of our knowledge, this research is novel because it is the first to highlight and merge the theorising of international exposure with the research on social preference and ethical consumption. Establishing the influential role of international exposure does not only open up the frontiers of ethical consumer research but also extends the scope of social preference and prosocial marketing research. Doing so provides a novel contribution to ethical consumerism because the fairtrade context offers a distinctive circumstance where international exposure of consumers in the global north is relevant. This unique context offers the necessary conditions for understanding factors that give rise to concerns for relevant others (expanded reference group) in far distant countries. This is because fairtrade is directly associated with commodity producers in developing countries and also 'elicits putting more immediate self-interests aside in favour of doing something positive for others' (White *et al.*, 2020: 8). Hence, the amalgamation of international exposure with the body of knowledge on social preference and ethical consumption show international exposure to developing countries can be an important explanatory factor towards engendering concerns for others. Thus, when consumers in the global north are exposed to relevant others in a developing country or countries, they will be more likely to choose products with ethical attributes such as fairtrade.

Social preference and ethical consumerism research frequently interrogate alternative explanations (like concerns about justice for others), driving social choices such as ethical and socially responsible consumption that are not consistent with rational economic decision making. However, these two bodies of research seldom focus on what gives rise to these driving factors – a further attestation of the novelty of this research contribution. This study also substantiates the third dimension of the consumer cosmopolitan construct as an identified gap for further research by Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009) as depicted in Riefler *et al.* (2012: 300) by testing the potential drivers in their nomological network using travels, visits, expatriate stays, following and engaging developing countries. Thus, contributing to the literature on how cosmopolitan orientations are formed and alternate practical profiling variables for the segment.

Additionally, this current research suggests that international exposure to developing countries engenders concerns about equity for and not the action of relevant others (expanded reference group) in geographically distance countries. Therefore, differentiating our social preference interpretation based on international exposure to developing countries; which is induced concerns for the expanded reference group, from other extant research (Awais *et al.*, 2020; Gupta and Ogden, 2009; Salazar *et al.*, 2013; Shao, 2017) that hinges on the anticipation of 'significant others' by depending on the actions of 'other individuals that serve as a reference group' (Salazar *et al.*, 2013: 174).

This research, therefore, contributes to research understanding of the social influence on ethical choices. This is achieved by demonstrating that international exposure to developing countries' influence on social preference does not depend on specified group membership. This position challenges some of the enduring understanding in the extant research on social influence on ethical choices. Thus, a sense of social identity that bypasses a perceived membership in a relevant social group, can be activated through international exposure with commodity producers in far distant countries within the context of fairtrade. In essence, this share of a consumer's self-concept is engendered through an expanded reference group instead of a formal or informal group membership. The study thus further extends the frontiers of knowledge on self-identity and group membership research, such as self-identity emanating from group memberships generally (Goldstein *et al.*, 2008; Welsch and Kühling, 2009) and self-identity resulting from belonging to a specific ethical and/or pro-environmental group (Han and Stoel, 2017; Pinto *et al.*, 2020).

The literature on social preference, fairtrade purchasing behaviour and consumer cosmopolitanism is reviewed in the next section. The model of the study is then explained and the hypotheses are stated before presenting the methodology and the results of the regressions. The discussion section is then presented and followed by implications for theory and managerial practice.

## 2. Social preference and fairtrade purchasing behaviour

Seeking to expand the frontiers of the extant literature on ethical decision making (Chen *et al.*, 2020; Correa *et al.*, 2019; Seguró, 2019; Yamoah and Acquaye, 2019), the current study draws on social preference to highlight how consumer concerns about equity for others, engendered through a developing country exposure (international exposure), can promote the choice of products branded with ethical attributes. A designated fairtrade label on a product signifies to the consumer that commodity producers receive a fair and guaranteed return for their commodity, leading to better livelihoods and environmental sustainability (Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Yamoah *et al.*, 2014a). Indeed, fairtrade is a 'social movement that aims to set fair prices for products, alleviate poverty, and assist producers marginalised by the traditional economic model' (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 6).

Fairtrade sales across the world showed a remarkable growth post mainstreaming into supermarkets (Karjalainen and Moxham, 2013; Nicholls, 2010; Yamoah *et al.*, 2016). As a consequence, it was suggested by both fairtrade researchers and practitioners that the growth indicated the general public is steadily becoming conscientious and driven by ethics in their purchase behaviour (Karjalainen and Moxham, 2013; Yamoah *et al.*, 2016). Notwithstanding the growing interest in ethical consumer behaviour research, ambiguity and intellectual

tensions persist regarding what motivates consumers to purchase ethical products. It is noteworthy that Yamoah *et al.* (2016) found that fairtrade purchase intention is driven by both societal and self-interest values.

Undoubtedly, ethical and socially responsible consumption has the potential to accelerate efforts toward global sustainable development. This sense of optimism has engendered the integration of social preference theory in marketing research (Klor and Shayo, 2010). Notably, the application of social preference theory has happened against the backdrop of the inability of the standard self-interest preference approach to fully account for ethical and socially responsible consumption phenomena (Becchetti and Rosati, 2007; Hosta and Žabkar, 2016). Becchetti and Rosati (2007: 6) draw on two social preference studies, Fehr-Falk (2002) and Li (2006), to opine that an individual:

exhibits social preferences if he does not only care about the material resources allocated to her but also cares about the material resources allocated to other relevant reference agents or, more generally, when a person cares about the well-being of other individuals, or a fair allocation among members in society, in addition to their own material benefits.

The reference to a 'relevant reference agent or group' as a target/subject of social preference reinforces the role of social identity commonly referred to as an individual's 'sense of self-derived from perceived membership' in social groups (Chen and Li, 2006: 1). Thus, social identity is known as one of the key precursors to exhibiting social preferences such as vicarious reward and prosocial behaviour (Costa-Font and Cowell, 2015; Hackel *et al.*, 2017; Różycka-Tran, 2017). Unquestionably, social identity research has consistently shown that people are more altruistic toward an in-group member (Chen and Li, 2006).

### 2.1 Consumer cosmopolitanism and social preference

The extent literature provides three alternative perspectives on cosmopolitanism: (1) a moral/ethical imperative (e.g. Roudometof, 2005); (2) an attitude (e.g. Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006); and (3) an orientation (Riefler, 2012; Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2009; Riefler *et al.*, 2012). Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009: 415) described a cosmopolitan consumer as:

an open-minded individual whose consumption orientation transcends any particular culture, locality or community and who appreciates diversity including trying products and services from a variety of countries.

Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009) provided the descriptors for consumer cosmopolitanism orientation which was later validated as consisting of 12 items in Riefler *et al.* (2012: 711). These items are 'When travelling, I make a conscious effort to get in touch with the local culture and traditions'; 'I like having the opportunity to meet people from many different countries'; 'I like to have contact with people from different cultures'; 'I have got a real interest in other countries'; 'Having access to products coming from many different countries is valuable to me'; 'The availability of foreign products in the domestic market provides valuable diversity'; 'I enjoy being offered a wide range of products coming from various countries'; 'Always buying the same local products becomes boring over time'; 'I like watching movies from different countries'; 'I like listening to the music of other cultures'; 'I like trying original dishes from other countries'; and 'I like trying out things that are consumed elsewhere in the world'.

Grinstein and Riefler (2015) report some characteristics of the cosmopolitan consumers as a segment that is frequent flyers and have tendencies of cross-national lifestyles and consumption habits. They are also found to purchase exotic products, typically educated and financially affluent. Extant literature in marketing has been sparse on the relationship of these variables on fairtrade purchases. However, the general literature on fairtrade acknowledges they may have relationships (Bird and Hughes, 1997). Littrell and Dickson (1999) earlier posited that fairtrade buyers were demographically homogeneous and consisted of highly educated, well-off Caucasian women in their forties, with a large portion being teachers, health professionals and social workers. having a child(ren) or not. Also, Cowe and Williams (2000) described typical fairtrade shoppers as

the affluent professionals between 35 and 55 years of age, well educated, metropolitan people with a sense of power as consumers. Further, De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) found that consumers most ready to pay the exact premium price (fairtrade lovers) were mainly aged 31-45 years. This fairtrade shopper segment was also reported to be the consumer segment between the ages of 35 and 55 by Moore (2004). Additionally, Nicholls and Opal (2008) indicated that there was an emerging fairtrade consumer segment among younger age groups. A study by Globescan (2019) showed that fairtrade enthusiasts tend to have higher-level education. The same Globescan (2019) study found minor differences between fairtrade purchases in terms of the number of adults within households in the UK and this confirms Nicholls and Opal's (2008) classification of the fairtrade shopper based on how consumers deal with the intervening internal factors such as reference group (household) influence. Yamoah *et al.* (2014b) included income group, age group, gender and education qualification of fairtrade buyers as descriptive indicators of their sample. Whereas Nieratschker and Peters (2014) observed income group, age group, gender and education as important demographic variables for fairtrade buyers. Insight from the extant literature indicates the role of demographic factors such as age, income level, level of education and number of adults within households in the purchasing behaviour of fairtrade, hence their inclusion in the current study. Therefore, these characteristics make these profiles relevant to this study as they may have the tendency for fairtrade purchases and international exposure. Thus, we opt to include these characteristics as attributes and control variables in the study. A summary of relevant supporting literature sources is shown in Table 1.

## 2.2 Conceptual framework and model development

The extant literature portrays that social preference research within the global context is emerging (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016; Simonson, 2008). It is an essential research discipline, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is characterised by market integration and compression of geographical distances (Whalley, 2005). Such integration will have prospects for an expanded reference group (Becchetti and Rosati, 2007) that could have major implications for marketing theory and practice at all levels. For example, the suggestion is that due to globalisation, consumers in developed economies are likely to be influenced in their purchase decision making towards fairtrade products. This behaviour is envisaged to be driven by a sense of solidarity and interdependence with commodity producers living in remote countries of the world (Becchetti and Rosati, 2007). The findings of this study offer critical insights for marketing research and raise important research questions such as: how do consumers in industrialised countries, develop a sense of solidarity and interdependence with people living in developing countries? It is also important to note that social preferences are driven by inequity aversion which is known to explain the important facet of humans' fairness in many decision-making contexts (Fehr and Schmidt, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2018; Tricomi and Sullivan-Toole, 2015). Albeit, how do the dimensions of consumer cosmopolitanism play a role in social preference decision making? The empirical applicability of inequality aversion has been confirmed in many research disciplines including psychology, economics and other disciplines (Fehr and Schmidt, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2018). Inequality aversion refers to a state of mind where an individual 'resists inequitable outcomes not only when they receive less than others but also when they receive more' (Li *et al.*, 2018: 2).

Whereas inequality aversion theory suggests a preference for fairness and general objection to economic inequality, social preference theory posits an alternative explanation for social choices such as ethical and socially responsible consumption that are not consistent with rational economic decision making. Thus, what are the underpinnings of consumer cosmopolitanism which can be used to profile and understand this social behaviour?

Despite the increased research focus on such discipline the need for further understanding of ethical and socially responsible consumption phenomenon is warranted and heightened by contemporary marketing, sustainable development and supply chain equity imperatives. Firstly, the ethical and socially responsible consumption market share relative to conventional alternatives remains small (Carrington *et al.*, 2016; Chekima *et al.* 2017; Yamoah and Acquaye 2019). Secondly, global social equity is still a critical theme of global sustainable development goals (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Thirdly, international trade and industry reports

**Table 1.** Summary of relevant supporting literature sources for the study.

Construct	Illustrative studies
Fairtrade definition	Fairtrade Foundation (2003); Fairtrade Foundation UK (2009); Nicholls and Opal (2008)
Attributes of Fairtrade	
Social and ethical attributes	White <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Sustainable products and prosocial behaviour	Cotte and Trudel, (2009); UNEP (2013); Carrington <i>et al.</i> (2010); Chekima <i>et al.</i> (2017); Herzenstein <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Factors affecting Fairtrade	
Attitude-behaviour gap	Jacobs <i>et al.</i> (2018); Cotton <i>et al.</i> (2016); Van Doorn <i>et al.</i> (2011); Terlau and Hirsch (2015); Harvey and Hubbard (2013); Alphonse <i>et al.</i> (2014); Yamoah and Acquaye (2019)
Consumer cosmopolitan orientation	Grinstein and Riefler (2015); Riefler, <i>et al.</i> (2012); Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009)
Non-pecuniary motivations to ethical consumption and prosocial behaviour	Becchetti and Rosati (2007); White <i>et al.</i> (2012); House <i>et al.</i> (2020); Zollo (2020)
Fairtrade as a purchasing behaviour	Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2005); Klöckner and Ohms (2009); Khan <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Factors affecting ethical consumer behaviour	
Concern of justice for others	White <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Product and market factors	Van Doorn and Verhoef (2015); Bezawada and Pauwels (2013)
Social group influence	Anik and Norton (2020)
Habit development	Khan <i>et al.</i> (2020); Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2005)
Self-identity	Goldsmith <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Degree of tangibility	Barros <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Consumers' exposure to developing countries	
International exposure	Riefler <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Direct international exposure (visiting, living)	Grinstein and Riefler (2015); Riefler, <i>et al.</i> (2012); Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009)
Indirect international exposure (following, engaging)	Grinstein and Riefler (2015); Riefler, <i>et al.</i> (2012); Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2009)
Consumer characteristics of Fairtrade buyers	
Income group	Yamoah <i>et al.</i> (2014b); Littrell and Dickson (1999); Nieratschker and Peters (2014)
Age group	Yamoah <i>et al.</i> (2014b); Littrell and Dickson (1999); Nieratschker and Peters (2014)
Gender	Yamoah <i>et al.</i> (2014b); Littrell and Dickson (1999); Nieratschker and Peters (2014)
Education qualification	Yamoah <i>et al.</i> (2014b); Littrell and Dickson (1999); Nieratschker and Peters (2014)
Having a child(ren) or not	Yamoah <i>et al.</i> (2014b); Littrell and Dickson (1999)

are replete with supply chain injustices that impinge on the livelihoods of primary commodity producers (Bick *et al.*, 2018; Fearn *et al.*, 2005; Mani *et al.*, 2016). Admittedly, these trends support the need for a holistic understanding of non-pecuniary motivations for individual behaviour to advance inequality aversion and social preference theorising within an ethical and socially responsible consumption context. Before our research, the key drivers and precursors to inequality aversion that trigger the sense of solidarity and interdependence with distant people remained empirically unexamined and conceptually undeveloped beyond the broad framework of the global integration effect.



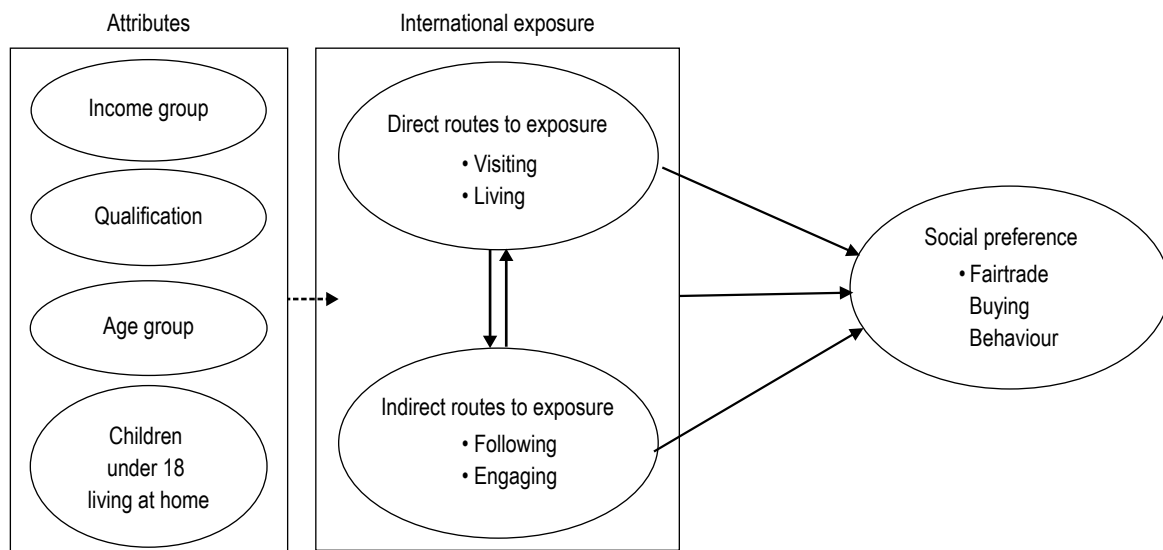
The scope of this paper is to broaden inequality aversion and social preference fields by revealing with a conceptual model and empirical analysis, based on a nationwide survey, how visiting, living, following and engaging with developing countries (international exposure) has expanded reference group that is factored into social preference decision. Our position fundamentally agrees with the view of Becchetti and Rosati (2007: 827) that the choices made by people in the industrialised global north countries are likely to be influenced by 'a sense of solidarity and interdependence' with people living in other geographically far countries. We do however propose the specific angle of international exposure through visiting, living, following and engaging with people in developing countries, as an attempt to identify potential drivers of the nomological attributes of consumer cosmopolitanism instead of the general phenomenon of global integration, as the underlying factor influencing a sense of connection to an 'enlarged' reference group considered when social preferences are constructed by people in Western industrialised countries.

We advance inequality aversion and social preference theorising by highlighting the role of international exposure in ethical decision making within the context of fairtrade. This emanates from examining the stepwise multidimensional conceptualisation of international exposure in developing countries which activates inequality aversion, which is expressed through social preference. A model that incorporates visiting, living, following and actively engaging with the global south as constituent factors to the international exposure construct, is developed and tested empirically within a sustainable purchase behaviour context.

In systematically studying the multi-staged, interrelated, reinforcing complementary theories of inequality exposure (Sands, 2017) and social preference, we thus make important conceptual contributions to the theorisation of international exposure, as reflected in the distinctive theoretical model that we developed as presented in Figure 1. In this model, international exposure is conceptualised as having two components, direct and indirect routes to exposure. International exposure and each component are envisaged to influence social preference.

### 2.3 Research hypotheses

The research draws on the social preference framework to highlight that international exposure to developing countries serves as a factor that partly explains global north consumers' willingness to patronise fairtrade. We show that consumer receptiveness to fairtrade attributes that producers receive a fair and guaranteed



**Figure 1.** A model of international exposure and Fairtrade buying choice.

return for their commodity, leading to better livelihoods and environmental sustainability (Nicholls and Opal, 2005) is boosted through visiting, living, following and engaging with developing countries associated with fairtrade commodity producers.

Indeed, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterised by many people visiting, living and working abroad and becoming exposed to other people, places and cultures. Such an outward seeking lifestyle promotes direct international exposure that is encouraged partly by the ease of travel to foreign countries and locations around the world by air, land and sea. It is important to highlight that many other people get exposed to other countries and their way of life indirectly through mass media and other means without being personally present in those countries. They gain enormous international exposure through following actively what goes on in developing countries through television news, television documentaries, newspapers, reading magazines, religious groups and charities (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016). Also, international exposure accrues to people who engage in activities to support countries of interest via regular charity donations, disaster relief support, volunteering or working for a charity, special appeals like comic relief and fundraising events (Riefler, 2012).

Thus, we propose that through direct and indirect means some consumers in the global north have been exposed to developing countries where commodity producers associated with fairtrade reside. We further posit that such an exposure tends to foster concerns for social justice for others – the commodity producer associated with fairtrade, or the expanded reference group positioned to benefit from a guaranteed price under the fairtrade premium pricing arrangement. Therefore, when consumers gain international exposure to developing countries associated with fairtrade commodity producers they are more likely to choose products with ethical attributes such as fairtrade. Thus, when global north consumers are directly or indirectly exposed to developing countries connected with fairtrade commodity producers, we propose the following:

**H1:** Consumers will purchase fairtrade food over non-fairtrade alternatives when they are exposed to developing countries associated with fairtrade commodity producers.

Furthermore, there is research evidence that many people are exposed to other countries through following media reports (Saleem, 2007) and participating in activities connected with foreign countries. Drawing on Saleem (2007) and Crowne (2013), we further explore whether when consumers are directly exposed to developing countries through visits and living (direct international exposure), they are more likely to prefer fairtrade than consumers indirectly exposed through following the media and engaging in activities to support developing countries (indirect international exposure). This proposition hinges on the notion that all things being equal, direct exposure will elicit a stronger sense of concern about justice for fairtrade commodity producers (expanded reference group) in developing countries than indirect exposure – minus physical presence. Thus, when global north consumers are directly exposed to developing countries connected with fairtrade commodity producers through a visit and living out there, we predict the following:

**H1(a):** Directly exposed consumers to developing countries associated with fairtrade food through visits and living abroad will prefer more fairtrade products.

**H1(b):** Indirectly exposed consumers to developing countries associated with fairtrade food through active following of media information and support activity engagement will prefer less fairtrade products.

### 3. Methods

To facilitate the testing of the stated hypotheses a survey of UK consumers was undertaken nationwide. Research participants were screened to only include consumers mainly responsible for their household food shopping. Quota sampling was used to ensure representativeness of household incomes resulting in 20% of respondents from the highest income groups, 25% of respondents from the medium income group and 55% of respondents from the lowest income group. In all, 1,054 fully completed surveys were collected which represented an adequate ratio of a sample size to observed variables (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and met the non-response

bias test based on the selective extrapolation method (Armstrong and Terry, 1977). The survey instrument (Table 1) was designed using formative items from scales in literature (Grinstein and Riefler, 2015; Riefler *et al.*, 2012: 711) and from social equity considerations (Becchetti and Rosati, 2007; Crowne, 2013; Sands, 2017) such as visiting, and living abroad (direct exposure), following via media and engaging in supporting activities (indirect exposure) for the measurement of international exposure. Visiting was measured by 5 items: (1) visiting family; (2) visiting friends; (3) business trips; (4) leisure; and (5) eco-tourism. Whereas, 'living' was measured by 3 items: (1) studying; (2) working; and (3) researching. For indirect exposure, following via media was measured by 6 items of information from: (1) TV news; (2) TV documentaries; (3) newspapers; (4) reading magazines; (5) religious groups; and (6) charities. Engaging in support activities was measured with 6 items using: (1) regular charity donations; (2) disaster relief support; (3) volunteering for a charity; (4) working with a charity; (5) special appeals like comic relief; and (6) fundraising events. The survey instrument was administered online.

### 3.1 Variable measurement

In line with extant research that has sought to understand social preference for ethical products, fairtrade purchase behaviour (amount of fairtrade products purchased per week) was adopted as the model output representing consumers purchasing fairtrade products (Yamoah *et al.*, 2014a). In all, there are eight different direct exposure measures and twelve different indirect exposure measures. Given the many measures of both direct and indirect exposure measures, we follow previous studies (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2020; Gyapong *et al.*, 2015) and constructed an index (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001), separately for direct exposures and indirect exposures. Since there is a dearth of studies using a reflective indicator to measure these variables and also as the variables are observed variables that are assumed to cause latent variables effects it is appropriate to measure it by the formative indicators as argued by extent literature (Bollen and Lennox, 1991; Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001; MacCallum and Browne, 1993) Thus, we constructed the direct exposure index from the eight different direct exposure measures and the indirect exposure index from the twelve different indirect exposure measures. The indexes are constructed as follows:

$$Index_{jt} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{jt}} x_{ijt}}{n_{jt}} \quad (1)$$

Where  $Index_{jt}$  = either the direct exposure index or the indirect exposure index;  $n_{jt}$  = either the number of direct exposure measures or indirect exposure measures for the  $j^{th}$  participant at time  $t$ ;  $n_{jt} = 8$  for direct exposure index and  $n_{jt} = 12$  for indirect exposure index;  $x_{ijt} = 1$  if the answer is yes for the participant  $j$  at time  $t$  and 0 otherwise. Thus,  $0 \leq Index_{jt} \leq 1$ . Finally, to derive the total exposure, we add the direct exposure index and indirect exposure index together.

Given the nature of this study, we employ ordinal logistic regression. This is because our main dependent variable has more than two categories (1 to 6) (Wood, 2016). To lessen the possibility of incorrectly rejecting a hypothesis when in fact it should be accepted and vice versa (Bartov *et al.*, 2000), we control for five different variables that are likely to affect the propensity of someone patronising fairtrade products. These control variables include income group, having a child(ren) or not, age group, gender and educational qualification. We also cluster the standard errors at the participant level to account for heteroscedasticity (Petersen, 2009).

To answer the question of whether direct exposure influences fairtrade purchases, we propose the following model:

$$pmsfipw_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Directexpo_{it} + \beta_2 Incgroep_{it} + \beta_3 Chilah_{it} + \beta_4 Agegrp_{it} + \beta_5 Gend_{it} + \beta_6 Qulft_{it} + \mu_{it} \quad (2)$$

To answer the question of whether indirect exposure influences fairtrade purchase, we propose the following model:

$$pmsfipw_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Indirectexpo_{it} + \beta_2 Incgroep_{it} + \beta_3 Chilah_{it} + \beta_4 Agegrp_{it} + \beta_5 Gend_{it} + \beta_6 Qulft_{it} + \mu_{it} \quad (3)$$

To answer the question of whether the combined effects of direct and indirect exposures influence fairtrade purchases, we propose the following model:

$$pmsfptw_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Totalexpo_{it} + \beta_2 Incgroep_{it} + \beta_3 Chilah_{it} + \beta_4 Agegrp_{it} + \beta_5 Gend_{it} + \beta_6 Qulft_{it} + \mu_{it} \quad (4)$$

In all regression models,  $pmsfptw$  = fairtrade purchase per week;  $Incgroup$  = income group categories;  $Chilah$  = whether the participant has child(ren) or not;  $Agegrp$  = age group categories;  $Gend$  = gender of the participant;  $Qulft$  = the level of qualification of the participant.  $Directexpo$  = direct exposure index;  $Indirectexpo$  = indirect exposure index;  $Totalexpo$  = the sum of direct and indirect exposures index.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

The results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. The results show that the direct exposure index is 0.0981, meaning that 9.81% of participants have had direct exposure. The mean indirect exposure index is 0.1920, suggesting that 19.20% of the participants have had indirect exposure. The total exposure index is 0.1544, indicating that 15.44% of participants have had both direct and indirect exposure. In terms of the individual exposures, the results in Table 2 show that the participants who have had different kinds of direct exposure range from 2.23 to 30.08%. Regarding the different indirect exposures, participants' experiences range from 6.55 to 40.42%. These suggest that participants have had more indirect exposures than direct exposures. In terms of the control variables, the average participant has 1.6594 children. The age of the average participant is between 31 years and 50 years. Female participants are 54.46% compared with 45.54% for male participants. In terms of income groups of the participants, 20.40% belong to the high and very high group, 24.60% in the medium and 55.00% in the very low and low-income bracket respectively. For the qualification of the participants, the results show that the majority hold technical or trade certificates.

### 4.2 Preliminary analysis

To test the reliability and suitability of all the constructs, we rely on Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach alpha test has been used because it is considered a more efficient means of evaluating construct reliability and suitability (Pavot *et al.*, 1991). According to the Cronbach alpha values presented in Table 2, the constructs are considered reliable and suitable if the values are 0.60 and above (Murphy and Davidshofer, 1988; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Generally, a high Cronbach alpha suggests a causal relationship exists whereas a low value indicates a weak relationship (Sekaran, 2000). The results, which are presented in Table 2 show that the Cronbach alpha of all the constructs is above the minimum threshold of 0.60 and ranges from 0.6063 to 0.8162. The average Cronbach alpha is 0.6548 for the direct exposures and 0.8216 for the indirect exposures. The results suggest that the constructs used are of a high degree of reliability and therefore suitable.

### 4.3 Pearson correlation matrix

The results of Pearson's correlation matrix are contained in Table 3. The results show that the propensity to purchase fairtrade products is statistically significant and positively correlated with direct exposure (0.2429), indirect exposure (0.3609) and total exposure (0.3833). These initial positive correlations are consistent with our hypotheses and show that both direct and indirect exposure improve fairtrade product purchases. The rest of the results show that the correlations between the other variables are well below 0.50%. However, direct exposure on one hand and indirect exposure are highly correlated to the total index exposure (0.6426 and 0.9374, respectively). This raises multicollinearity concerns (Field, 2005). These high correlations are due to the way direct exposure and indirect exposure are combined to derive the total index exposure. Schroeder (1990) recommends a way to deal with collinear independent variables by including the affected variables in separate regression models. We, therefore, follow (Schroeder, 1990) and include these three variables in

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of scale items used for the constructs.

Construct	Variables	Codes	Mean	Std. dev. <sup>1</sup>	Cronbach $\alpha$
Direct exposure		direct_expo	0.0981	0.1494	0.6548
	visiting family	dcervf	0.1101		0.6213
	visiting friends	dcerfr	0.0712		0.6046
	visiting via business trip	dcerbt	0.075		0.6323
	visiting for leisure	dcerle	0.3008		0.6515
	visiting for ecotourism	dceret	0.038		0.656
	living via study	dcerlids	0.0797		0.6063
	living via working	dcerlidw	0.0778		0.6063
Indirect exposure	living via researching	dcerlidr	0.0323	0.2192	0.6077
		indirect_expo	0.192		0.8216
	television news	dcesitv	0.4042		0.8031
	television documentaries	dcesitvd	0.3653		0.8051
	newspapers	dcesinp	0.3567		0.8025
	reading magazines	dcesimg	0.1632		0.8095
	via religious groups	dcesirg	0.0693		0.8149
	via charities	dcesich	0.1632		0.8013
	regular charity donations	dceaercs	0.2249		0.803
	disaster relief support	dceaedrs	0.1546		0.8067
	volunteering for a charity	dceaevfc	0.0911		0.8159
	working with a charity	dceaewwc	0.0655		0.8162
Total exposure	contributing to special appeals like comic relief	dceaesacr	0.1414	0.1617	0.8138
	fundraising events	dceaefre	0.1044		0.808
		total_expo	0.1544		0.8179
	visiting family	dcervf	0.1101		0.8154
	visiting friends	dcerfr	0.0712		0.812
	visiting via business trip	dcerbt	0.075		0.815
	visiting for leisure	dcerle	0.3008		0.8193
	visiting for ecotourism	dceret	0.038		0.8175
	living via study	dcerlids	0.0797		0.8132
	living via working	dcerlidw	0.0778		0.8132
	living via researching	dcerlidr	0.0323		0.8105
television news	dcesitv	0.4042	0.8049		
television documentaries	dcesitvd	0.3653	0.8076		
newspapers	dcesinp	0.3567	0.8039		
reading magazines	dcesimg	0.1632	0.8055		
via religious groups	dcesirg	0.0693	0.8083		
via charities	dcesich	0.1632	0.8062		
regular charity donations	dceaercs	0.2249	0.8052		
disaster relief support	dceaedrs	0.1546	0.8065		
volunteering for a charity	dceaevfc	0.0911	0.8079		
working with a charity	dceaewwc	0.0655	0.8074		
contributing to special appeals like comic relief	dceaesacr	0.1414	0.8133		
fundraising events	dceaefre	0.1044	0.8085		

<sup>1</sup> Std. dev. = standard deviation.

**Table 3.** Pearson's correlation matrix.<sup>1</sup>

Variables	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fairtrade purchase per week		1							
Direct exposure	0.0981	0.2429*	1						
Indirect exposure	0.192	0.3609*	0.3356*	1					
Total exposure index	0.1544	0.3833*	0.6426*	0.9374*	1				
Income group	2.2375	0.0910*	0.0556	0.0741*	0.0808*	1			
Children under 18 living at home	1.6594	0.1902*	0.1047*	0.1142*	0.1316*	0.1078*	1		
Age group	3.7776	-0.1318*	-0.1844*	-0.0557	-0.1136*	-0.0139	-0.1891*	1	
Gender	1.5446	-0.1706*	-0.0888*	-0.0214	-0.0503	-0.0974*	-0.0105	-0.0269	1
Qualification	3.2924	0.0455	0.2054*	0.1843*	0.2260*	0.1202*	-0.0068	-0.1135*	-0.0696*

<sup>1</sup> \* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

alternative regression models. Thus, the high correlations between direct exposure, indirect exposure and total exposure are not an issue.

#### 4.4 Regression results

The ordered logistic regression results are reported in Table 4. Columns 1 and 2 contain the two direct exposure indexes – visit index and stay index, respectively. Columns 3 and 4 contain the two indirect exposure indexes – follow index and support index, respectively. Columns 5 to 7 report the results of the direct exposure index, indirect exposure index and total exposure index, respectively.

##### ■ Direct exposure and fairtrade preference

Regarding the two direct exposures, the results in column 1 show that visit exposure is statistically significant and positively related to a fairtrade purchase ( $\beta=1.829$ ,  $t$ -statistics=4.29). The results show that a 1% increase in visit exposure leads to a 1.829% increase in a fairtrade purchase. The results in column 2 show a statistically significant and positive relationship between stay exposure and fairtrade purchase ( $\beta=2.091$ ,  $t$ -statistics=5.54). Specifically, the results show that a 1% increase in stay exposure leads to a 2.091% increase in a fairtrade purchase.

##### ■ Indirect exposure and fairtrade preference

Next, we examine the results of indirect exposures to following and supporting activities. The results in column 3 show a statistically significant and positive association between following exposure and fairtrade purchase ( $\beta=2.138$ ,  $t$ -statistics=9.51). The results show that a 1% increase in 'following' exposure leads to a 2.138% increase in a fairtrade purchase. In column 4, the results show that the relationship between supporting exposure and fairtrade purchase is statistically significant and positively related ( $\beta=2.246$ ,  $t$ -statistics=7.94). The results show that a 1% increase in supporting exposure results in a 2.246% increase in a fairtrade purchase.

##### ■ Total exposure and fairtrade preference

Next, we turn our attention to the direct exposure index, indirect exposure index and total exposure index. The results in column 5 show that total direct exposure is statistically significant and positively related to a fairtrade purchase ( $\beta=2.513$ ,  $t$ -statistics=5.33). Specifically, a 1% increase in total direct exposure leads to a

**Table 4.** Results of ordered logistic regression analysis.<sup>1,2</sup>

Dependent variable	Fairtrade purchase per week	Fairtrade purchase per week	Fairtrade purchase per week
Direct exposure	2.513*** -5.33		
Indirect exposure		3.214*** -10.29	
Total exposure index			4.578*** -10.61
Income group	0.061* -1.81	0.044 -1.27	0.049 -1.46
Children under 18 living at home	0.259*** -4.19	0.224*** -3.63	0.223*** -3.56
Age group	-0.083** (-2.03)	-0.119*** (-2.99)	-0.094** (-2.31)
Gender	-0.545*** (-4.39)	-0.597*** (-4.82)	-0.559*** (-4.49)
Qualification	-0.030 (-0.76)	-0.062 (-1.57)	-0.086** (-2.14)
Constant	2.598*** -7.07	2.748*** -7.63	2.947*** -7.97
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	92.66***	178.88***	177.62***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.037	0.0701	0.0728
n	932	932	932

<sup>1</sup> \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \* $P < 0.05$ .

<sup>2</sup> Standard error figures shown below parameter estimates.

2.513% increase in fairtrade purchases. In column 6, the results show that the relationship between total indirect exposure and fairtrade purchase is statistically significant and positive at 1% ( $\beta = 3.214$ ,  $t$ -statistics = 10.29). The results show that a 1% increase in total indirect exposure results in a 3.214% increase in fairtrade purchases. Finally, the results in column 7 show that total direct and indirect exposure is statistically significant and positively associated with the fairtrade purchase ( $\beta = 4.578$ ,  $t$ -statistics = 10.61). Specifically, the results show that a 1% increase in the total direct and indirect exposure leads to a 4.578% increase in fairtrade purchases. Overall, the results depict interesting findings, which demonstrate that, although direct and indirect exposures increase fairtrade purchases, the combination of direct and indirect exposures results in a higher propensity for fairtrade purchases.

Regarding the control variables, income and children are positively related to fairtrade purchases, whereas age, gender and qualification are negatively associated with fairtrade purchases. Specifically, higher-income earners, people with children, younger people, females and lowly qualified people are more likely to purchase fairtrade products. However, income is only significant in columns 1, 2 and 5. Children, age and gender are statistically significant in all columns. Qualification is only significant in column 7.

#### ■ Sensitivity analysis

To test whether our main results are robust to alternative regression model estimates, we follow previous studies and employ the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. The results of the OLS estimation are presented in Table 5. In all, the results in columns 1 to 7 are qualitatively consistent with the main results in Table 5, except that the coefficients from running the ordinal logistic regression are much higher than the coefficients from running the OLS regression. In particular, the results in column 5 show that the coefficient

**Table 5.** Results of ordinary least squares regression of sensitivity analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Dependent variable	Fairtrade purchase per week	Fairtrade purchase per week	Fairtrade purchase per week
Direct exposure	1.428*** -5.7		
Indirect exposure		1.717*** -11.12	
Total exposure index			2.434*** -11.69
Income group	0.03 -1.63	0.024 -1.35	0.024 -1.4
Children under 18 living at home	0.154*** -4.36	0.131*** -3.95	0.125*** -3.8
Age group	-0.051** (-2.23)	-0.068*** (-3.14)	-0.054** (-2.48)
Gender	-0.320*** (-4.55)	-0.339*** (-5.07)	-0.316*** (-4.73)
Qualification	-0.009 (-0.42)	-0.028 (-1.33)	-0.038* (-1.80)
Constant	2.725*** -14.21	2.729*** -15.41	2.638*** -14.83
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	18.93***	38.09***	38.89***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.111	0.192	0.199
n	932	932	932

<sup>1</sup> \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \* $P < 0.05$ .

<sup>2</sup> Standard error figures shown below parameter estimates.

of the direct exposure index is positive and statistically significant at the 1% level ( $\beta = 1.428$ ,  $t$ -statistics = 5.70). In column 6, the results show a positive and statistically coefficient of indirect exposure index at the 1% level ( $\beta = 1.717$ ,  $t$ -statistics = 11.12). The results in column 7 also show that the coefficient of the total exposure index is positive and statistically significant at the 1% level ( $\beta = 2.434$ ,  $t$ -statistics = 11.69). These suggest that our results are robust to an alternative regression model estimate.

## 5. Discussion

The current research shows the modes of direct and indirect international exposure engender ethical consumer choice. Collectively, the research on direct, indirect and total exposure suggests that when consumers in the global north are exposed to a developing country or countries (international exposure) they choose products with ethical attributes such as fairtrade over alternatives with self-benefit features. Within the context of the direct exposure research scope, we accentuate the direct influence of exposure through visits and staying/living in a developing country on social preference, manifesting that these two modes of direct exposure culminate in preference for products promoted based on ethical attributes such as fairtrade. In terms of direct exposure relativity, we demonstrate a higher staying exposure influence on product choice compared with visiting. This evidence is in agreement with conventional knowledge that confirms the longer period of exposure the higher the familiarity engendered, as epitomised by the visiting versus staying direct exposure effects on ethical product preference.

The indirect international exposure facet of the study covered consumers active in following what goes on in developing countries 'following exposure' using a diversity of information sources (television news and television documentaries, newspapers, reading magazines, religious groups and charities), demonstrably



depicted a positive influence on ethical product choice. Similarly, consumer active engagement in activities geared towards supporting developing countries (regular charity donations, disaster relief support, volunteering for a charity, working with a charity, contributing to special appeals like comic relief and fundraising events); manifestly affects product choice. Comparatively, there is evidence confirming that while indirect exposure via both following and active engagement in supporting actions associated with developing country effectively encourage consumer choice of ethical alternatives, the relative effects differ in favour of active engagement in supportive actions. Juxtaposing such evidence on the well-known three domains of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) provides context for the graduation of influence from intellectual, to interest, attitudes and values to actions. Thus, depicting a spectrum or a continuum of effect from the following exposure through information assimilation cognitively, to active engagement in 'supportive actions' exposure.

Taken together, the international direct exposure through following and active engagement in supporting actions associated with developing countries effectively encourages decision making in favour of ethical alternatives. Similarly, the study further confirms a considerable collective appeal to social preference induced through indirect international exposure. Contrary to conventional knowledge, we adduce evidence to the effect that indirect exposure (visiting and staying) contributes more to kindle preference for sustainable choice than direct exposure through visiting and staying in a developing country. This evidence confirms the realities of the modern world that is characterised by compression of geographical distances (Whalley, 2005), improved information access and market integration. Overall, our results have shown that direct and indirect exposures promote ethical preferences evident through increased fairtrade purchases. It is also interesting to recount evidence showing that the combination of direct and indirect exposures results in a higher propensity of social preference option of fairtrade decision making.

### *5.1 Theoretical implications*

The research presented underlines the role of international exposure (direct and indirect and total exposure) in social preference and ethical product choice. We propose a theoretical model indicating that international exposure conceptualised as having two components, direct and indirect routes to exposure stimulates preference for products promoted through ethical attributes. Essentially, when consumers in the global north are exposed to a developing country or countries (international exposure) directly or indirectly, they choose products with ethical attributes such as fairtrade over alternatives with self-benefit features. Principally, we exhibit that our proposed framework – international exposure – is valid by way of evidencing that visiting/staying in a developing country or following/actively engaging in supporting activities associated with developing countries engenders a favourable social preference for ethical choices. Thus, we advance knowledge on social preference with a novel theoretical contribution by showing that direct and indirect exposure to a developing country or countries (international exposure) pathway can drive consumer social preference choice.

The current research complements contemporary scholarship that suggests that highlighting ethical attributes do not consistently attract favourable purchase intention and behaviour by demonstrating that international exposure influence consumer responses to ethical products. Specifically, we establish that concerns about justice for relevant reference group living in geographically distant countries is engendered through international exposure to the global south.

We also build on previous research on social preference and ethical consumption by highlighting that the fairtrade context offers distinctive circumstances where international exposure of consumers in the global north is relevant. We show that the amalgamation of international exposure with social preference and ethical consumption literature highlights international exposure to developing countries can be a salient explanatory factor that kindles concerns for others in the specific research domain of fairtrade or ethical consumerism in general. Significantly, we show novelty in theorising by venturing into the rare research focus of interrogating the rationale behind the drivers of social choices akin to the two strands of literature – social preference and ethical consumption.

Another theoretical contribution of the current research is that international exposure to developing countries engenders concerns about equity for and not the action of relevant others (expanded reference group) in geographically distance countries. An additional contribution of the current work is that international exposure to developing countries' influence on social preference does not depend on a specified group membership contrary to some of the enduring understanding within the social influence on ethical consumption research. This set of theoretical contributions of the current work represents a significant first step towards understanding the role of international exposure in prosocial consumer behaviour and complements the existing scholarship on social preference, ethical consumption and fairtrade.

### 5.2 Implications for managerial action

The research offers insights and guidance for practitioners using or intend to use ethical cues and policymakers aiming to generally promote social preference behaviour. Research evidence abounds that creating awareness of ethical products and nudges (Yamoah and Acquaye, 2019) and guilt appeals (Peloza *et al.*, 2013) have not substantially addressed the attitude-behaviour gap associated with product choice, including fairtrade. White *et al.* (2012) recount how the internet and improved transportation have resulted in increased globalisation and thus confirm the compression of global distances that exposes consumers to emerging relevant others (expanded reference group). Such a globalised environment accentuates the importance of this research on international exposure and its implications for ethical marketing practitioners. We demonstrate within the context of fairtrade that there is an important ethical product segment in people in the global north exposed to developing countries – (host nations of commodity producers in the global south regions associated with fairtrade products). Research further indicates that nudges and subtly appeals have not significantly changed the often unresponsiveness of consumers to ethical products on the market and thus highlights the practical potential of the current research for actionable recommendations. Additionally, the extant research before this study confirms marketers ought to find creative ways to offer ethical products such as fairtrade to consumers.

Firstly, the finding that there is a constituent (a market segment) in the global north who is driven by international exposure to the desired ethical products associated with the global south origins, is a firm basis to combine provenance and ethical appeals in fairtrade marketing communication. A specific actionable recommendation based on this finding is that there is a market prospect to pursue co-branding promotion strategy involving the use of place of origin designation and ethical attributes of target products in communication messages.

Importantly, the current research further points to a need for managers tasked with promoting ethical products to target potential customers beyond those driven by direct exposure to cover customers indirectly exposed to developing countries by embedding promotional messages in information sources as well as events and activities associated with developing countries in the global south, to enhance the attractiveness of fairtrade products. For example, mainstream and social media sources of information on developing countries access to the global north prospective customer could be a fertile target for promotional messages. Besides, direct or indirect collaboration with champions and organisers of charity donations; disaster relief support; and contributing or sponsoring appeals like comic relief and fundraising events, are likely to accentuate supporting fairtrade products. This is because the findings of the current work have shown that engagement in such activities engenders a higher social preference for ethical choice and for that matter fairtrade products.

An additional implication of the current research lies in providing promotional messages at entry and exit points of travel such as airports, seaports, train stations, taxis and other cars within the travel and tour industry hold prospects for fairtrade patronage especially since the study found the longer the period of exposure the higher the familiarity engendered. However, this segment is not the total target since the findings of this work have shown that people do not necessarily need to visit or stay in developing countries to have an exposure that encourages consumer choice of ethical options. Rather, non-travellers in the global north ought not to be discounted in designing marketing communication strategies for ethical products that are directly associated with developing countries of the global south. This is particularly important as the findings of this work on the relative magnitude of influence between directly and indirectly exposed consumers to developing

countries show a greater magnitude of influence through indirect exposure. The evidence offers an amply basis to suggest that there are more people encouraged to undertake a prosocial behaviour like fairtrade choice who have never visited or stayed in any developing country than a consumer with such travel experiences.

Another area of actionable recommendation worth highlighting is the need for marketing managers to promote ethical products in light of the collective research findings of this work to properly gauge the appropriateness of a self-benefit appeal in the context of fairtrade. The reason is that the 'self-concept' appears to become embedded in the collective within the framework of emerging relevant others (expanded reference group) due to the compression of global distances. Thus, employing a self-benefit appeal via a direct mail for example, in the privacy of the customer (Peloza *et al.*, 2013) may not activate thoughts about supporting others since beneficiaries of fairtrade are perceived per the findings as 'relevant others' and not just a vulnerable group with a high degree of need.

Finally, comparing the overall outcome of the research to the background story of the ethical product sector, in terms of relative market shares and the prior research recommendations to marketers, there are ample grounds to question whether the shift from niche to mainstream strategy by way introducing fairtrade into supermarkets two decades ago was the appropriate strategy. Indeed, our findings indirectly point to a need to seriously reconsider shifting from mainstream to niche marketing strategy. Based on our findings, we recommend and do so highlight that marketers of ethical products change the tactics of nudges and subtly activation of emotional appeals to assiduously find people (including those exposed to developing countries), who like and are ready to pay more for fairtrade products, target them exclusively instead targeting everybody.

### 5.3 Direction for further research

Several potential openings for further research emerging from the current findings are: first, further research could examine how and why exposure to a developing country through direct and indirect means encourages consumer choice of ethical alternatives such as fairtrade. These research areas stem directly from the novel findings of the current study which demonstrates that international exposure plays an important role in consumers' social preference for ethical options. Thus, understanding how this phenomenon engenders such social preference action and behaviour will provide salient insight and enhance the applicability of international exposure in ethical product positioning strategy.

Furthermore, answering the important question as to why consumers' international exposure motivates social preference appeal will massively complement the current work that has sufficiently covered the 'what' question, to the effect that social preference appeal for fairtrade is driven by international exposure through visiting, staying, following and engaging in activities associated with developing countries. Acknowledging the existence of other ethical labels that are associated with the global south, further research might also examine ethical appeal due to international exposure within the context of other ethical labels beyond fairtrade. There is also the opportunity to explore a comparative study across various ethical labels contexts.

Further research could explore disaggregation of direct and indirect exposure cues to provide a typology of influence of the individual cues which will be critical and useful in the design of best marketing tactics to communicate with consumers. Previous research suggests that fairtrade purchase intention is driven by both societal and self-interest personal values (Yamoah *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, a worthwhile direction for further research will be to examine the role that personal values play in the international exposure and social preference relationship for ethical products. It will be interesting to understand if consumers driven by societal versus self-interest values when exposed to developing countries associated with ethical options such as fairtrade, will respond similarly or differently.

National culture is known to influence consumer behaviour toward ethical and sustainable products (Hassan and Shiu, 2017; Hazen *et al.*, 2012). As the findings of the current work are based on British consumers, replicating the current work within different countries in the global north such as Continental Western

Europe (France, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia) and North America holds the potential for a more insightful research understanding.

Based on prior research evidence, other factors such as societal values of consumers' concern about social justice (Yamoah *et al.*, 2014a), it is plausible such factors may act alongside international exposure to drive fairtrade preferences. It is also possible that those who care more about social justice may be more likely to purchase fairtrade products and more likely to travel to developing countries. Therefore, a further study that incorporates both international exposure and social justice constructs will be worth pursuing. Additionally, understanding the direction of causation – international exposure versus social concern will serve an excellent research purpose both from a conceptual standpoint and a marketing perspective. In such a study it would be important to understand the direction of causality for marketers to effectively act on the insights from this potential study. Another future research enquiry could focus on assessing the relative ease or difficulty for marketers of fairtrade products to identify consumers with deep concerns about social justice as against identifying consumers with direct international exposure.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of the current work represent a foundational insight on international exposure and an important step towards promoting consumer social preference by marketers tasked with the management of ethical products. This research provides understanding into a hitherto uncharted area of international exposure that can potentially promote the use of ethical features and cues in positioning and promotional mix strategy to enhance ethical and sustainable product purchase and consumption.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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