



## Fair Trade Advertising: What Messages Do Fair Trade Fashion Brands Send to Consumers?

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**Introduction.** The success of fair trade brands is evident that U.S. consumers spending on fair trade products rose by 37% from 2010 through 2014 (Fair Trade USA 2011, 2015). Fair trade business, however, has faced some criticisms such as the lack of transparency and accountability in production and supply chain system (Fair Trade Fact Sheet, 2016). To tackle the challenge, brands make significant efforts towards the communication in which they advertise fair trade activities as well as accountability issues to resonate with certain consumer groups across society. In the fashion business literature, however, little is known about the communication aspect of fair trade advertising. The aim of this research is to address this oversight by exploring what types of approaches and messages are commonly used in fair trade advertising in the fashion business sector from the social marketing advertising perspective.

**Literature Review.** The present study draws upon Zharekhina and Kubacki's (2015) framework of social marketing contents, which states that social marketing and ad campaign evolves into two approaches (empowerment and patronizing) and two consequences (positive and negative consequences). The empowerment approach incites people to take control of their choices by promoting the notion of freedom of choice (Zimmerman, 2000) and includes three subcategories: freedom of choice, storytelling, and efforts to engage in personal development. The 'freedom of choice' subcategory encourages consumers' free will within the advertising messages by delivering information that helps informed consumption decisions (Rissel, 1994) (e.g., "A simple pair of shoes can have impact on child's lives"). The 'storytelling' subcategory uses stories, questions, and behavioral language (Rappaport, 1995) by which brands drive consumers to think about their brand messages and persuade them to reach their own conclusion (e.g., "... & When you see this symbol, we have a story to share..."). The 'personal development' subcategory emphasizes on communicating how a product and/or values beyond the product itself fit into individuals' day-to-day experience to make them better, happier and more fulfilled thereby helping them reach new heights of judgment (John et al., 2009) (e.g., "You are letting the world know that there is a way how our products can be valued"). On the other hand, the patronizing approach involves multiple parties (e.g., consumers, companies, society), wherein one party affects others to obtain a desired behavior. Three patronizing subcategories include: no freedom of choice, nudging, and negative emotional appeal. First, the 'no freedom of choice' tactic directs people to accept a behavior without choice (Hastings & Saren, 2003; Schwartz, 2004) (e.g., "The consumers should buy fair trade products"). Second, the 'nudging' technique guides a brand, as an expert, to provide positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions for a desired consumer behavior (e.g., "With every product you purchase, Toms will help a person in need"). Lastly, the 'negative emotional appeal' tactic uses such feelings as fear, shame and guilt in ads to disengage people from being opposed to desired behaviors by triggering a defense mechanism (e.g., "This is a man made disaster").

**Method.** This exploratory study employed content analysis for systematic and objective inferences of characteristics in fair trade ads (Prasad, 2008). A total of 19 fair trade video advertisements from eight fair trade brands in the U.S. were obtained from YouTube.com. Using NVivo10 software, the advertisements were transcribed and analyzed. In addition to the key techniques developed by Zharekhina and Kubacki (2015), a new theme was identified (i.e., positive emotional appeal utilizing appreciation, proud and happiness). For each ad, the valence of consequence (positive or negative) together with its beneficiary (i.e., company, society, or consumers) was identified. Two coders completed coding with the use of “nodes” reflecting thematic content (NVivo). The unit of analysis was a paragraph (transition in the ad content), yielding 98-code units in total. The inter-reliability was confirmed (>.90).

**Results.** The empowerment approach was shown to use four subcategories (i.e., freedom of choice, story telling/questions/behavioral language, personal development, positive emotional appeal). Likewise, the patronizing approach was observed to use three elements (i.e., no freedom of choice, nudging, negative emotional appeal such as fear, shame, guilt, and sadness) (Table 1). Notably, our results indicated that the empowerment subcategories were far more dominant in the fair trade fashion advertisements ( $f=67$ ) than the patronizing tactics ( $f=25$ ). Within the empowerment approach, the ‘storytelling/questions/behavioral language’ tactic was the most frequently used ( $f=31$ ), followed by the ‘freedom of choice’ ( $f=20$ ), ‘personal development’ ( $f=8$ ), and ‘positive emotional appeal’ ( $f=8$ ). In the patronizing approach, ‘nudging’ ( $f=16$ ) was the most popular tactic, followed by ‘no freedom of choice’ ( $f=7$ ) and ‘negative emotional appeal’ ( $f=2$ ). Interestingly, the ‘positive emotional appeal’ tactic was more prominent than the ‘negative emotional appeal’ in the fair trade fashion ads. As for consequences, positive consequences ( $f=19$ ) were more significantly featured than negative consequences ( $f=7$ ). Especially, society ( $f_{positive}=16, f_{negative}=7$ ) was most commonly mentioned as the beneficiary across both consequences.

**Discussion.** By analyzing different extant approaches, this study enriches the current understanding of strategic communication techniques and ad messages in fashion fair trade business. This study also provides marketers with practical insights. In order to add fresh interest and draw consumers’ attention, fair trade brands may need to look into potential patronizing approaches in brand communication and advertising development.

Table1. Frequency of Fair trade fashion brand advertising by approaches and consequences

	Empowering				Patronizing			Positive Consequences			Negative Consequences		
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Ads	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
<i>n</i>	20	31	8	8	7	16	2	3	16	0	0	7	0
<i>N=98</i>	67				25			19			7		

Note. *f* of Empowerment. 1 = freedom of choice, 2=story telling/questions/behavioral language, 3=personal development, 4=positive emotional appeal (appreciation/proud/happiness), *f* of Patronizing. 1= no freedom of choice, 2=nudging, 3=negative emotional appeal (fear/shame/guilt/sadness), *f* of Positive consequences. 1=company, 2=society, 3=consumer, *f* of Negative consequences. 1=company, 2=society, 3=consumer.

\*\*\*References upon request