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Fair Trade Coffee in Romania

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Abstract: *The article reports the findings of a study on the knowledge, awareness and potential for adoption of fair trade (FT) coffee in Romania. Based on a random sample it was found that although Romanians are daily consumers and shop in hyper and supermarkets where they unintentionally encounter FT coffee, they are not aware of the logo and the eponymous concept. This makes Romania's situation similar to those in the Visegrad Gup and Southern Europe. The data prove that lack of knowledge and awareness does not automatically imply low commitment to the potential for adoption or lack of altruism, as domestic consumers are willing to help poverty-stricken people in producing countries by buying FT coffee. As such, the domestic market is permeable and, with the exception of a small conservative group of consumers, there is plenty of scope for influence to increase awareness and adoption in domestic consumption of FT coffee.*

Keywords: fair trade; coffee; Romania; awareness; adoption potential

JEL Classification: F14, F18, P46

Introduction

'A world of fairness', the title of the map on page six of the report by Fairtrade International (2022), suggests that the eponymous movement aims to include as many countries as possible under the umbrella of fairness in world trade, whether they are producers or consumers. Since 1997, when several national organizations in their capacity as founding members contributed to the creation of Fairtrade International,

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and until now, the map has expanded considerably. It reveals that despite the increase in the idyll of human development in more and more states of the global South (UNDP, 2022: 272-275), it has a long way to go to reduce the gaps that separate it from the global North. The current state of affairs divides the world into states producing goods labelled fair trade (FT) and consuming states, and with a few exceptions, the two categories seem not to overlap. That is not as if we are saying that FT products are not sold in spaces other than those marked in that map (FairTrade Caravans, 2021). However, it is certain that the richest and most economically influential states benefit the most from FT labelling (Naylor, 2014), which is also supported by the existence of national organizations in the field. In this North/South relationship, Raynolds (2002) notes, coffee forms the core of the networks and the most consumed FT product in Europe. Also, even though FT's sales account for only 1% of global food sales (Clapp, 2020), the value of receipts is increasing.

Like a litmus paper that 'absorbs' the FT movement, the map of Europe is proof of the expansion of the process from western states to former communist countries. The youngest organizations were formed in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, but Hungary, Romania and other Eastern European countries are still not part of the 'club' of countries that have national organizations, although FT products are abundantly available on store shelves. More and more studies show that there are differences in awareness and adoption among European regions (Zysk, 2020; de Moor and Balsiger, 2019; Lekakis and Forno, 2019; Panico *et al*., 2015) and that individuals are willing to pay more for FT (de Pelsmacker *et al*., 2005; MORI, 2000). However, in Romania the level of knowledge of the FT movement is weak, and research at the local level is either descriptive, or the homonymous phrase is occasionally used in other analytical contexts (Popescu *et al*., 2021; Mușetescu and Chira, 2016; Cristache *et al*., 2017; Borza *et al*., 2009). Only recently has the research begun to be somewhat more critical (Tomșa *et al*., 2021; Stan *et al*., 2017; Petrescu-Mag and Petrescu, 2017; Moisescu and Gică, 2017), but the issue of knowledge and willingness to adopt FT products remains deficient. As such, taking into account the lack of studies in this direction, our article explores the visual identification, the degree of knowledge and the potential for adoption of coffee labeled FT.

The methodology consisted in applying an online questionnaire, and the results obtained lay the foundations for exploring the potential of FT coffee in one of the most dynamic markets in Eastern Europe – Romania. The novelty of the study is given by the lack of previous data and research applied to the FT market in Romania and, consequently, by obtaining the first quantitative results that can be compared and / or subsequently integrated into larger regional contexts. Moreover, our findings are a benchmark for future local research and enrich the literature by unveiling a previously unknown space.

Following the critical collection and analysis of the data obtained and their discussion in the context of the literature, we noticed that unlike other types of coffee visible on the shelf, the FT one apart from a label with the logo present on the packaging is not distinguishable from competing products. The direct consequence is a low level of awareness and a limited impact on coffee drinkers, and indifference is the word that best describes the relationship of consumers with coffee sold under the FT umbrella. The article also argues that despite the FT's brief knowledge in Romania, overall consumers are showing altruism and are willing to help people affected by poverty by buying FT coffee. Basically, the declarative behavior being one of universalist type and of goodwill (Doran, 2010). As such, the internal market remains open to ethical movements and, with the exception of a small conservative and inflexible group of consumers, there is a generous space of influence in order to raise awareness and adopt FT coffee in domestic consumption.

Literature analysis

Awareness and adoption of FT in the European space

In its modern form, the FT movement emerged in northwestern Europe in the late 1980s – early 1990s as a result of the collapse of the price of coffee (Clapp, 2020). In the words of Hira and Ferrie (2006), the movement integrates ethical principles (Cailleba and Casteran, 2010) with the decision-making process of consumers, who, at the same time, show universal spirit and benevolence (Doran, 2010). Thus, contrary to the objections raised by Doherty *et al*. (2013: 179), knowledge, awareness and proactive behavior are essential in increasing the market for FT certified products (Balasubramanian and Soman, 2018), even if in the initial phase it is more difficult for consumers to understand what they are buying. This is because, compared to parallel movements (eco, bio, organic), FT's products remain barely visible on store shelves and continue only to wear a logo on the label (Hira and Ferrie, 2006), so they are still below their true potential. Added to this situation is what Chatzidakis *et al*. (2007) called as neutralizing factors of the purchase decision, and Usslepp *et al*. (2021) conservatism, because there will always be a category of people for whom the principles circumscribed by FT will not matter in the purchase of a good or product.

Also, Littrell and Dikson (1999) noticed that there is a certain conditioning of the growth given by the profile of the typical buyer: middle-aged, well-educated, mostly Caucasian and upper-middle-class person. But the pattern barrier is not so rigid that it cannot be overcome. The example provided by the more than 11-fold increase in FT trade in products (Fairtrade International, 2020) shows that the movement attracts more and more followers who understand better and better what they are purchasing. Several studies (de Pelsmacker *et al*., 2005; MORI, 2000; CRC-Consommation, 1998; The Roper Organization, 1990) show that there is a growing willingness in the population to pay more for FT purchases knowing that this benefits farmers in developing countries. On the other hand, Raynolds and Greenfield (2016) argue that as mainstream sales increase, products – such as coffee, for example – are purchased more for the FT packaging and labeling and less for the underlying civic and relational values. The concept and practice of FT thus tend to become ambiguous, even to cover divergent ideas and projects says Özçağlar-Toulouse et al. (2010), as shown by data collected in France, where it mixes with conventional market products.

Awareness and adoption of FT products are higher in Western European states (de Moor and Balsiger, 2019) than in the other continental regions (Zysk, 2020; Panico *et al*., 2015). Here the consumption of FT products is already a consolidated practice. It is the result of the long collaboration of governments – which at the beginning of the movement were little interested in FT (Becchetti and Huybrechts 2008) – with manufacturers, retail companies (Reed, 2009) and professional organizations (Davies, 2009). Also, the understanding and application of effective management practices (Bezençon and Blili, 2009) supported this growth. In southern Europe, on the other hand, although the existence of the first FT organizations is somewhat old (Becchetti and Costantino, 2010), awareness is variable. This fact can also be deduced from the Fair Trade Towns International (2022) project, which proves that there is a gap between the north, the south and especially the east of Europe.

According to a study (Llopis-Goig, 2009), in Spain awareness among the population is about 36%, and sales fluctuate between 26 and 38% (Lekakis and Forno, 2019). By comparison, Italy has a higher degree of adoption, but with notable differences between north and south (Panico *et al*., 2015). Beyond this aspect, the value of gross sales is double in Italy compared to Spain, while Portugal came into contact late with the movement and its market is appreciated as a residual one (Lekakis and Forno, 2019). Finally, research involving Greece as a case study concludes that „in comparison to other European countries the Fair Trade market in Greece is still far less developed" (Titikidou and Delistavrou, 2007: 6).

FT's expansion beyond traditional Western markets has slowly led to increased awareness and knowledge accumulation in Eastern Europe as well. However, this area had a more difficult start due to the communist period that imposed a different way of thinking and consumer behavior in relation to western European countries (Soroka *et al*., 2021). For example, in the Visegrad group (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland or V4) the movement started differently, and trade in FT products developed unevenly (Zysk, 2020). The Czech Republic has both the most developed market in the region and the oldest presence of an FT organization associated with Fairtrade International (Fairtrade Cesko, 2020). Slovakia and Poland followed the Czech Republic in 2014 and 2015 respectively, but in Hungary (as in Romania) there is no independent organization affiliated to Fairtrade International (2022: 6).

Thanks to the expansion of the product range in the big retail chains, sales are increasing in the countries of Eastern Europe. In three of the V4 states, a high degree of adoption records coffee and cocoa because „There is a growing public awareness about the consequences of unfair international trade and the conditions prevailing in agriculture and processing in the countries of the global South" (Zysk, 2020: 90). However, as evidenced by the work of Śmigielska *et al*. (2015), in order to develop and reach the level of western mature markets, a public policy is needed to further raise awareness. In particular, in Hungary, the increase in consumption was a consequence of the introduction of FT coffee for sale in the OMV gas station chain in 2016, a chain with an extensive presence in Romania as well.

Level of knowledge and research of FT in Romania

The research conducted on the FT movement in scientific publications of Romanian language is overwhelmingly descriptive (Borza *et al*., 2009; Cristache *et al*., 2017) and can literally count on the fingers of both hands. The topics predominantly address the definitions of the concept and briefly explain the FT syntagma in the context of social responsibility. The articles are too little analytical, tangentially touching on commercial practices regarding certified products, consumer attitudes, level of awareness and, almost not at all, the local peculiarities FT segment.

One of the first scientific studies that approaches the subject from a somewhat more critical perspective, but without particularizing it on coffee, was conducted by Țigu *et al*. (2014). In the context of our study, the results of that research are limited because it comes down to the perception of a very small group of students regarding social responsibility. The authors only used the FT syntagma in the focus groups to probe the level of knowledge, but did not detail and customize at the national level. Also, in the context of social responsibility, the phrase is mentioned by Mușetescu and Chira (2016), but that's it and nothing more.

On the other hand, the ambitious attempt of Borza *et al*. (2009) to address the FT current at the national level failed to present the general idea of this trade and Romania as a potential source of products. The study forgets to deal with the specific mechanisms and standards of international organizations and associations that support and manage the movement since its maturation (Doherty *et al*., 2013). Similar in terms of recommendations is the diagnosis analysis of the sustainability of the Romanian beekeeping supply chain of Pocol and Ilea (2010). From these two sources, which are the mirror of a real pattern, it is inferred that the 2000 – 2010 period was marked by the phase of descriptive articles, of diagnosis, whose texts abound in recommendations of the most fanciful.

Particular cases that pay attention to FT coffee are the works of Nicolescu (2011) and Danciu (2018). But, from the perspective of the need to know the internal dynamics, they do not have much relevance since they use the global coffee market to justify the need for modern methodologies to study public policies and to describe the changes in organic marketing. But from the perspective of the need to know the internal dynamics, these studies do not have much relevance as they use the global coffee market to justify the need for modern methodologies for studying public policies and to describe the changes in ecological marketing.

The research framework is not broadened too much even regarding the articles of the Romanian authors and the literature customized on Romania and published in a language of international circulation. While some works still remain at a descriptive level or occasional mention of FT (Popescu *at al*., 2021; Tudorache *et al.,* 2017), it is noted that after 2010 others become deeper, more analytical. Authors manage to disseminate their results in publications with international visibility and to integrate the subject of FT in specific contexts such as: awareness, ethics, behavior and perception of consumers, information on purchased products and cultural / local peculiarities on consumption (Tomșa *et al*., 2021; Fukukawa *et al*., 2018; Petrescu-Mag and Petrescu, 2017; Moisescu and Gică, 2017).

Pop and Dabija (2014) present the reality of the FT a bit more clearly and point out well the place and role of coffee as the central product of the movement, alongside cocoa. Like many articles, this one is about social responsibility and its influence on customer loyalty. However, a truly critical and knowledge-impacting review was undertaken by Stan *et al*. (2017). Bringing precious information about the preferences and perception of Romanians regarding the quality of organic vs. conventional products, the study concludes that the FT attribute is little known and understood by the Romanians and, therefore, it is on a low position in the criteria that give quality to the products.

The level of information and the effective reading of labels, for example to search for logos of different standards, is not a frequent concern in Romania (Petrescu-Mag and Petrescu, 2017). As a particularity, FT products are perceived as exotic, and the principles on which they are based do not influence much the purchasing decision of Romanians (Festila *et al*., 2014). Similar to other cultures (Kim *et al.,* 2010), in the Romanian cultural context regarding the appreciation of the value and social responsibility associated with FT, demography plays a moderating role (Moisescu and Gică, 2017).

As such, although briefly treated in the national context, the final assessment of Sterie and Ion (2022) according to which a thorough research of FT products is needed at Romanian level, becomes an urgent necessity. By virtue of this idea, our study deals with this aspect below, using coffee as an emblematic product for the FT movement (Fairtrade International, 2022: 17) both in the countries of Western Europe (de Moor and Balsiger, 2019) and in the Eastern European ones (Zysk, 2020) among which Romania is also part. Moreover, our analysis can also be seen as a continuation of the study by Petrescu *et al*. (2020) because it highlights the consumption potential of FT coffee and, respectively, the potential consumers for whom quality indicators – the existence of the logo on the packaging – contribute to the choice of healthier and ecological products.

Methodology

The research is structured on two successive and interdependent levels. In summary, the first involves the analysis of the literature where the awareness and adoption of FT products in the European space and, respectively, the level of knowledge and research in Romania were examined. The second, or the case study, investigates the degree of knowledge, awareness and the potential of adopting the FT standard among consumers in Romania with coffee as a benchmark.

The first level, that of the specialized literature analysis, aims to establish the framework for the manifestation of the FT movement in the European space. At the beginning of the section, the consulted literature points out the factors that influence the development of the FT market; after that, the age and size of the adoption of FT products in the consumption of the inhabitants of different European regions are exposed, simultaneously with a review of the existing similarities and differences. At the end of the literature, since Romania is at the beginning of the road, we highlighted what is known and what and how much has been researched on this topic by Romanian researchers. The theoretical information thus structured was discussed in the context of the questionnaire results.

The second level involved the application of an online questionnaire highlighting the degree of knowledge of FT coffee among Romanian consumers. More specifically, the questionnaire investigates the level of visual identification of the FT symbol, the meaning of this standard for coffee, the aspects with which it is associated and the extent to which consumers are willing to adopt this type of coffee and help farmers in need. In addition, the article is also based on data about the frequency of consumption, the place of purchase, the sources of information and the choice criteria specific to Romanian consumers (Table 1).

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

No.	Question content	Question code	Question type	Answer Type	Observations
1.	*How often do you drink coffee?*	Frequency	Introductiv	precoded	-
2.	*Where do you usually buy your coffee?*	Place_purchase	Introductiv	precoded	-
3.	*Do you also drink your coffee in the city?*	Drinking_coffee_out	Introductiv	precoded	-
4.	*In general, where do you get information about the quality of the coffee you consume?*	Information	Buffer	precoded	-
5.	*What are the criteria by which you choose your coffee?*	-	Buffer	precoded	multiple answer
6.	*Do you know what this image represents?*	Logo_ recognition	Filter	precoded	the image represents the FT logo

No.	Question content	Question code	Question type	Answer Type	Observations
7.	*How familiarized are you with the following aspects of coffee production and marketing?*	ECO_knowledge BIO_knowledge FT_knowledge	Buffer	precoded	-
8.	*When you hear in the case of food, so including coffee, using the phrase 'fair trade' you think of...*	FT_association with...	control, opinion	precoded	-
9.	*How often do you look on the label with information on coffee packets?*	Label_ information	Control	precoded	-
10.	*Which country do you prefer the coffee you drink to come from?*	-	Control	precoded	one open question
11.	*Are you willing to turn to fair trade coffee and give up the coffee you consume constantly?*	FT orientation	Filter	precoded	-
12.	*Would you be willing to turn to fair trade coffee knowing that it is generally more expensive than the classic, ordinary or generic one?*	FT orientation_ high price	Control	precoded	-
13.	*If you answered YES to question 12, what would be the main reason?*	-	Opinion, opțional	Open	respondents were asked to use short phrases
14.	*If you answered NO to question 12, what would be the main reason?*	-	Opinion, opțional	Open	
15.	*On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that by buying a pack of fair trade coffee, you can help people affected by poverty?*	Help_poverty	Opinion	precoded	-
16.	*On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that by buying a pack of fair trade coffee, you can help people affected by poverty in other countries of the world?*	Help_poverty other country	Control	precoded, scale of 1-10	-

The questionnaire contains 16 questions of several types. It was administered between November 25, 2020 and May 12, 2022 and gathered a total of 470 respondents. It was built on the online platform iSondaje.ro and distributed using several means: Facebook, WhatsApp and e-mail. The questionnaire was addressed only to those who consume coffee, regardless of frequency. The average age of the respondents is 33.2 years and varies between 14 and 77 years. The presence of the significant number of young people who responded to our request (Table 2) helps to understand the consumption trend and, respectively, outlines some guidelines regarding young people's interest in ethical consumption and their intention to buy FT labeled coffee (Robichaud and Yu, 2022). 140 men and 330 women responded to our request. The geography of the places they come from is very varied and covers all the historical regions of Romania. Although the questionnaire was constructed in Romanian, and the respondents are all ethnic Romanians, there were also situations in which the respondents mentioned that they currently live outside the borders.

Table 2: Respondents' features: age, gender and education.

Age	Number of respondents	Gender	Education
under 25	171	74.8 % women; 25.2 % men.	9.9 % higher education; 86.0 % secondary education; 4.1 % primary studies.
25-59	283	68.9% women; 31.1% men.	88.3 % higher education; 9.5 % secondary education; 2.2 % primary studies.
60 and over	16	50.0 % women; 50.0 % men.	68.7 % higher education; 31.3 % secondary education.

Results and discussion

The results of the questionnaire outline the culture of coffee consumption in Romania. The accounting of the resulting values shows that Romanians have a certain frequency of drinking coffee. Moreover, it proves that in Romania there is a clear structure of the choice criteria, a certain pattern of information and a solid practice of the preferred place for consumption. It also shows the level of knowledge of FT coffee and the degree of availability regarding its adoption in domestic consumption. Availability to help coffee growers in the developing state by breeding FT coffee, termed by Maaya *et al*. (2018) *altruism*, is also scored in the results obtained (Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of participants' responses to the questionnaire items

Question code	average	median	standard deviation	variance	amplitude	min	max
Frequency	3.60	4	1.279	1.636	4	1	5
Place_purchase	2.70	2	1.353	2.356	4	1	5
Drinking_coffee_out	2.69	3	0.704	0.495	3	1	4
Information	5.64	6	1.874	3.511	7	1	8
Logo_recognition	2.06	2	0.719	0.517	2	1	3
ECO_knowledge	3.00	4	1.417	2.009	5	1	6
BIO_knowledge	3.44	4	1.300	1.690	5	1	6
FT_knowledge	3.68	3	1.651	2.725	5	1	6
FT_association with...	3.53	4	1.111	1.235	1	1	5
Label_information	3.26	3	1.586	2.514	5	1	6
FT orientation	2.25	3	0.917	0.841	2	1	3
FT orientation_high price	2.04	2	0.934	0.873	2	1	3
Help_poverty	8.41	9	2.153	4.634	9	1	10
Help_poverty other country	8.32	9	2.183	4.769	9	1	10

Frequency, information and places of purchase and consumption

First of all, the data prove that Romanians are undoubtedly daily consumers of coffee. No less than 69% of respondents drink coffee daily or several times a day (Figure 1), a value significantly higher than the results in some western areas (Maaya *et al*., 2018). In all age categories, the most important segment is that of people who drink coffee daily, but substantial variations are observed: elderly – 70.5%, adults – 46.4% and young people – 37.7%. It is curious that, if for adults 1/3 drink more than one coffee a day, the percentage drops substantially among the elderly, and among young people the second position is occupied by those who drink very rarely. The rural/urban structure shows small differences, in the sense that people in rural areas who drink one or more coffees daily are in a lower percentage than the average, and the urban is slightly above. By far the most visible differences are reported in terms of education, almost 78% of respondents with higher education consume one or more coffees daily (Table 4).

Figure 1: Frequency of coffee consumption

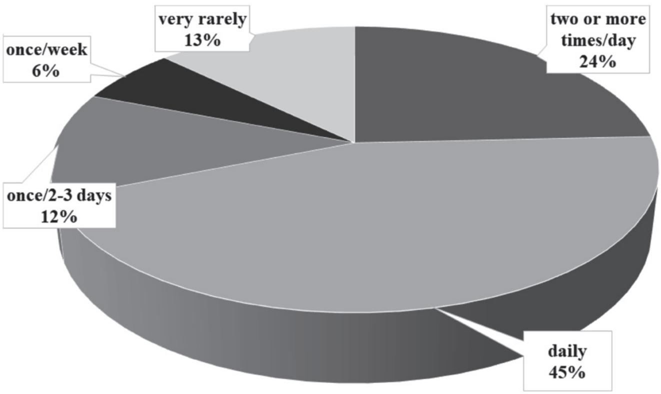
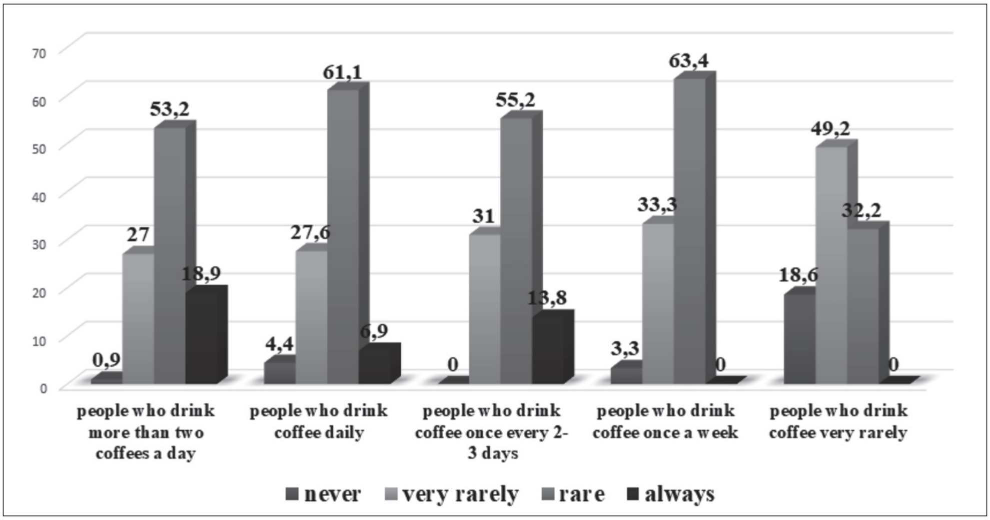


Table 4: Frequency of coffee consumption by age, sex and place of residence

category of respondents	very rarely	once/week	once/2-3 days	daily	two or more times/day
	percentage values				
Young	21.7	10.3	20	37.7	10.3
adults	7.2	4.3	8.3	46.4	33.8
Elderly	11.8	5.9	0	70.5	11.8
higher education	8.8	4.8	8.5	47.6	30.3
secondary education	19.9	8.5	18.8	39.3	13.5
primary studies	22.2	11.1	33.4	22.2	11.1
Rural	20.5	2.3	20.5	43.2	13.5
Urban	12.2	7	11.5	44.4	24.9

The majority of purchases are made from hypermarkets and supermarkets, which creates the conditions for increasing the contact between buyers and FT coffee. As such, similar to the V4 countries (Zysk, 2020) and in Romania, the widest range of FT certified coffee can be found on the shelves of large stores. At the opposite pole are people who buy from a neighborhood store, and a quarter do not give importance to the place from which they get their supplies. The data on the place of purchase helps to correctly read the values related to the consumption premises. Although only 5% of respondents admit that they do not drink their coffee in the city, 87% declare that have do this behavior rarely and very rarely, which confirms that the majority buy their coffee and prepare and consume it at home. Correlating the results of the frequency with the place of consumption shows that no person who drinks rarely or very rarely chose the 'always' option for drinking coffee in the city, instead this was the option of those who drink daily or at least once every 2-3 days (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The percentage of people who drink their coffee in the city based on consumption frequency



The information is done from various sources for almost 1/4 of the interviewees, but also from friends and relatives, or by reading the packaging. The information collected from coffee shop salespeople and those on the Internet recorded a somewhat lower frequency, but not the same as the leaflets or commercials, which almost do not matter (Figure 3). However, the third option in preferences was 'I don't inform myself, I just buy'. The breakdown of responses to the frequency of consumption reveals two aspects: these 'disinterested' are mainly among those who drink coffee daily and when consumption decreases, the trend of interest in information also decreases (Table 5).

Figure 3: Main sources of information

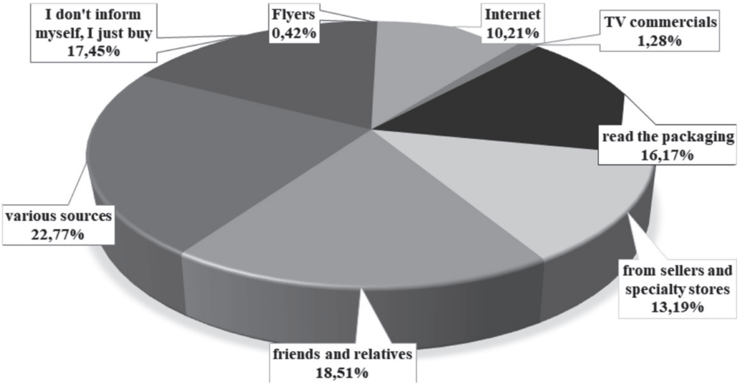


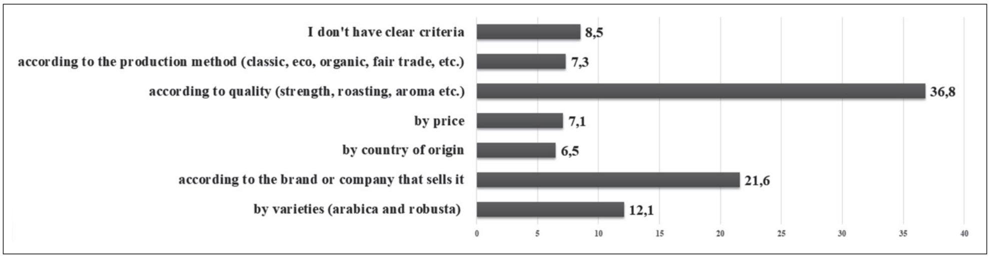
Table 5: Sources of information according to frequency of consumption (number of respondents)

category of respondents	Flyers	Inter-net	TV com-mercials	Read the packaging	From sellers and specialty stores	Friends and relatives	Various sources	I don't inform myself, I just buy
people who drink more than two coffees a day	1	7	2	17	16	12	34	25
people who drink coffee daily	1	25	3	38	30	38	47	28
people who drink coffee once every 2-3 days	0	3	1	8	10	13	12	9
people who drink coffee once a week	0	7	0	5	1	8	5	4
people who drink coffee very rarely	0	6	0	8	5	16	9	16

Selection criteria

For more than 1/3 of the respondents, quality matters, and for almost 22% the brand. In other words, quality and brand are the criteria by which the majority are guided, being influenced by managerial strategies, organizations involved in promotion and the commitment of companies (Reed, 2009; Bezençon and Blili, 2009). The varieties (arabica and robusta) matter, but somewhat less (12.1%). However, the most insignificant aspects are the country of origin and the price. As expected, there is a percentage of respondents, which tends to 9%, for whom the criteria do not matter at all in consumer behavior (Figure 4). By correlating the responses, it was found that individuals who do not inform themselves and do not have clear purchase criteria amount to 4.5% of the total. Also, 5.5% do not take into account where they buy from and at the same time do not have clear criteria.

Figure 4: The criteria by which coffee is chosen (%)

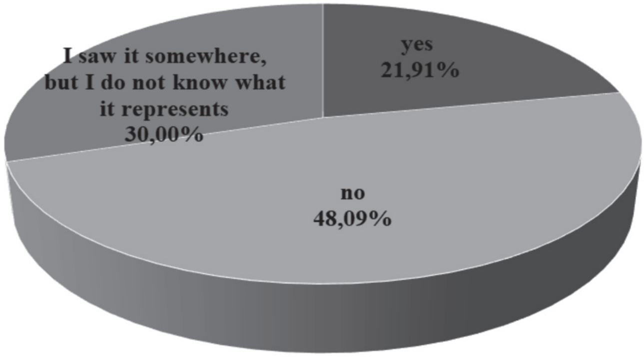


Despite the fact that the country of origin no longer matters at all, a separate question still tested the importance of the place of origin. Although the majority had selected to the question five other criteria by which they are guided in consumption, 91.1% chose to this question one of the existing producing countries in the answer options. The rest of 8.9% chose the option ‘other’, and the predominant answers were those like: ‘it doesn’t matter’, ‘I don’t care’ or ‘I chose another criterion’. According to the data, Brazil is the country where 45% of respondents want their coffee to come from. In addition, Colombia (27.9%), Ethiopia (10.6%) and very little Peru stood out.

FT coffee knowledge level

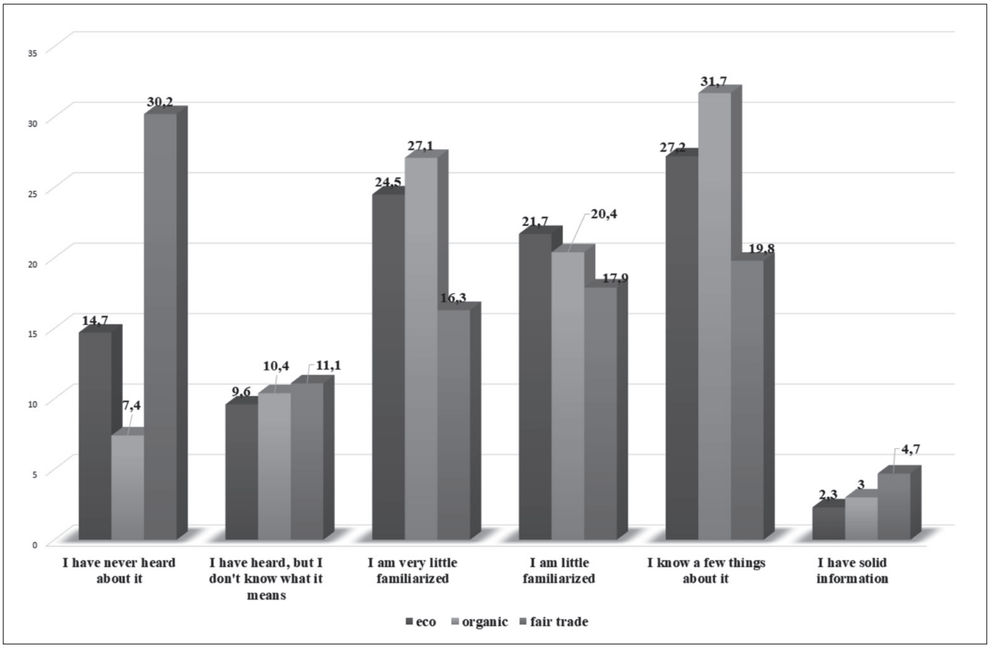
This is one of the two central elements of the research and the third component of the questionnaire. The other is the adoption readiness. In the FT logo identification test, only a small percentage of respondents chose the ‘yes’ option, which translates into – know the image. This confirms the assessment of Cristache *et al*. (2017) that few Romanians know the logo and it is not much different from southern Italy and Portugal (Skuland 2020; Simeone *et al*. 2015), but it ranks well below the European average. As such, the data is not at all encouraging because 4/5 admitted either that they do not know or that they saw the logo somewhere (Figure 5), but they do not know what they represent, reinforcing the results of Petrescu-Mag and Petrescu (2017) that too few are those who look after the labels with special logos. Thus, unlike the mature European markets, the Romanian one is too little developed, tending towards an increasingly clear similarity with Greece (Titikidou and Delistavrou, 2007) and with the V4 group (Zysk, 2020). For example, the core of the FT logo’s unknowers also wears previously encountered features: 86% of those who do not inform themselves, 78% of those who do not look at the label with information of the packaging, 58% of those who do not have clear criteria of choice and 40% of those who do not take into account where they buy do not know the FT logo either.

Figure 5: Recognition of the FT movement logo



Furthermore, the results provide a reasoned picture of how familiarized the respondents are with organic, eco and FT practices applied to coffee cultivation and marketing. If about eco and organic coffee 15%, respectively, 7% of the participants had not heard anything by the time of completing the questionnaire, about FT coffee 30% knew nothing. Thus, our findings confirm almost ten years later that the meaning of FT is not known, as noted by Țigu *et al*. (2014). The 'know a few things about this coffee' category is the most important in the case of eco and organic coffee, while for FT the main place is occupied by those who had *never* heard about this type of coffee. One explanation is that unlike eco and organic products, which are visible on the shelf, apart from a label containing FT's logo, eponymous coffee is not visibly distinguishable from competing products (Hira and Ferrie, 2006). In addition, five out of 10 people who knew nothing about FT coffee, were not able to recognize the logo either. The rest of those who did not recognize the logo appreciated that they are little and very little familiarized, or that they have heard about this practice but do not know what it represents. In general, all three types of coffee are little known as seen in Figure 6, and respondents who declare themselves holders of solid information vary between 2.3% and 4.7%. Indeed, the correlation of the results confirms that the people who declare that they have solid information are the same as those who recognize the logo.

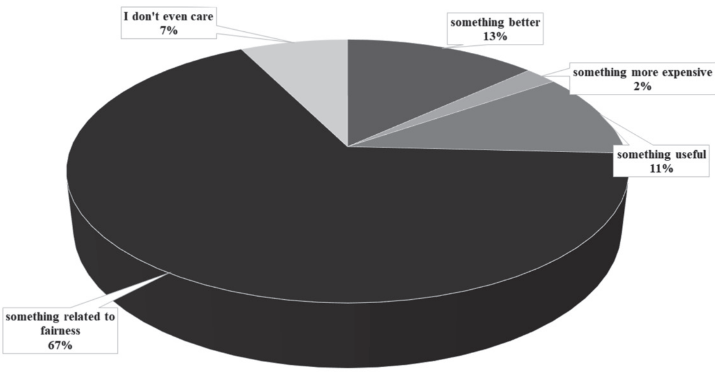
Figure 6: Level of awareness of organic, eco and FT coffee production and marketing practices (%)



The data of logo identification and knowledge of the FT movement demonstrates that the level of awareness of the phenomenon *is limited* to a small percentage of the coffee drinking population. The FT practice has an effect on one in four interviewees as only 25% of respondents have solid information or know some aspects about FT coffee. Interestingly, the profile of the person specific to that segment is not much different from that drawn up by Littrell and Dikson (1999: 228-229) in relation to the typical purchaser of FT products. In contrast, many respondents did not hear about FT coffee being talked about around them, did not read about it, and did not see it in any context. And if the opposite happened, however, they most likely weren't motivated to find out more. The fact remains that those familiarized or little familiarized show indifference and passivity towards products sold under this umbrella (Pocol *et al*. 2017). And, even if the situations are different in terms of age, variety, availability and accessibility regarding FT coffee, respondents in these categories show ambiguous assessments, as Özçağlar-Toulouse et al. (2010) had observed in the situation of France, but the causality here is different. In France, the ambiguity is generated by the age of the practice and the inability of buyers to differentiate conventional products from FT ones as a result of the extended availability, while for Romanians the ambiguity is caused by novelty, lack of variety and popularization projects.

The most surprising result in the context of what is already exposed is the question ‘When you hear in the case of food, so including in the case of coffee, using the phrase ‘fair trade’ do you think of...’. The surprise comes from the fact that most of them, we have already seen, do not own or have very little knowledge in this field. The fact that we presented the sentence in Romanian made the respondents overwhelmingly choose the answer ‘something related to fairness’, putting the result here in an inverse proportional relationship with the previous findings. The next two important choices indicate an association with something better and useful (Figure 7). However, there remains also a small percentage of conservative people here (Usslepp *et al*., 2021) for whom FT products continue to be something insignificant and on whom the principles behind FT standards will most likely have no effect in the purchasing decision (Festila *et al*., 2014).

Figure 7: The association of the phrase ‘fair trade’ with...



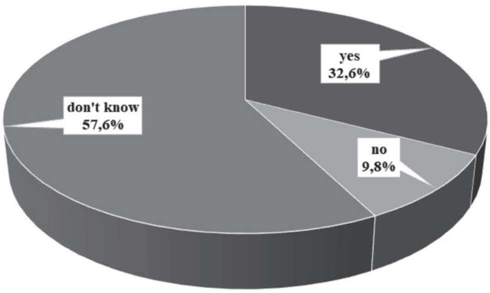
Willingness to adopt FT coffee and altruism

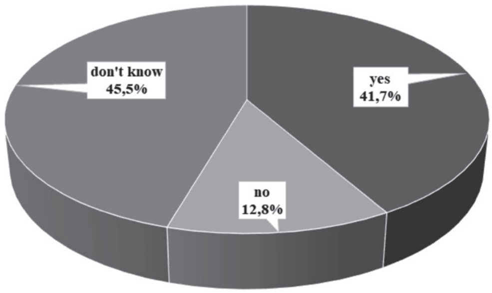
The role of this last component is to understand the awareness of the FT movement among the respondents. In addition, it questions *the willingness* to adopt this type of coffee, along with the intrinsic help given to producers in disadvantaged states and regions. Therefore, three essential aspects arise from these questions: (1) how willing are respondents to adopt FT coffee in their own consumption, (2) what are the reasons for accepting or rejecting it, and (3) how important is the help that they can grant it to producers involved in the value chain.

For example, the finding for the first aspect is that the Romanian coffee drinkers are *totally undecided*. Six out of 10 admit that they don’t know if they are willing to give up the coffee they regularly consume. Almost 10% chose the ‘no’ option without restraint, and the remaining almost 33% would agree to accept the change (Figure 8a). And to make the accuracy greater, we launched a second, control question that included a new element regarding the higher price level for FT certified coffee. The results have changed, but not dramatically (Figure 8b), proving that price is a neutralizing factor only for some buyers (Chatzidakis *et al*., 2007) who prefer cheaper coffee over FT ones, somewhat more expensive (Maaya *et al*., 2018). The undecideds dwindled, migrating to the other two variants. Suggestively, 3/4 migrated to the 'yes' variant and the rest to the opposite option. The values thus structured confirm the findings from the initial question on the choice criteria, where the 'price' option was the second least important criterion.

The level of indecision remains high, both among people who have a better degree of knowledge of the phenomenon and among those who do not inform themselves, do not have clear criteria for buying and so on. Moreover, regardless of the frequency of coffee consumption, age, residence and education level indecision remains high, because in the terms formulated by Stan *et al*. (2017) the criteria to which Romanians pay attention in judging the quality of a product are different. The FT criterion, as found in their study, is negligible because it is relatively new, little known and understood.

Figure 8: Willingness to adopt FT coffee (%): a – left and b – right





The pros and cons justifications are the second aspect of this section and of extraordinary abundance. At the same time, together with the altruism discussed below, they become important points of support for one of the three challenges of the FT movement enunciated by Hira and Ferrie (2006) – how much can FT contribute to development? From the motivations of the respondents pro-adoption of FT coffee, the following ideas emerged: the correctness of the practice, helping small farmers and disadvantaged local communities, the consumption of a quality product, respecting the environment and eliminating intermediaries from the supply chain. Leaving aside the novelty and curiosity invoked by a few, we have captured the depth and accuracy of justifications such as: 'FT coffee offers balance; the work of the people who pick up the coffee and prepare it is rewarded correctly', 'the quality of the product and the safety of the correctness of the processes from harvesting to sale are the reasons why

I would choose this coffee' and 'FT contributes to improving the living conditions of small coffee producers'. By far the most elaborate and almost scholastic argument was the following: 'The main reason is its fairness, both to small local producers and to large companies. Although it may have a higher price than generic coffee, it would be justified by providing growers with the power to negotiate the price of the product on the basis of global market tariffs at the time.'

By comparison, the counter variants, visibly fewer in number, with small exceptions, seem puerile and template. The predominant motivations show a stronger commitment to traditional coffee (Cailleba and Casteran, 2010) and can be synthesized in the form of key words, such as: conservatism ('I like 'my' coffee'), habituation ('I'm used to classic coffee'), self-sufficiency ('I buy what I find in the shop' or 'I'm happy with the coffee I'm drinking now'), price ('I prefer cheaper coffee', 'it's a function of price', 'price too high' or 'I'm not willing to pay more money') and lack of knowledge of the practice ('I don't know the concept', 'I don't have enough information' and 'because I don't know what the concept means, I'm abstaining').

With the results so far it is possible to move on to the third aspect investigated which we have called *altruism*, namely the willingness of consumers to help disadvantaged farmers by buying FT coffee. The value 8.4 suggests that on a scale of 1 to 10, it matters quite a lot to the consumers interviewed that they can help people involved in growing coffee and who are struggling to escape poverty. Last but not least, the final question had a similar value (8.3), which was designed to control whether the importance that respondents attach to altruism changes knowing that the beneficiaries are from other countries. The coffee drinkers confirmed that the importance attached to altruism does not change despite the fact that the money goes to people abroad. Thus, the findings prove an obvious universalist spirit (Doran, 2010) for Romanian consumers, and at the declarative level they show goodwill. The results thus obtained place our research among those showing that Europeans (Plesmacker et al., 2005; MORI, 2000), and therefore Romanians as well, are willing to pay more for a FT coffee.

When breaking down altruism by frequency, information, criteria and place of purchase, logo recognition, education, residence environment and age category, some nuances emerge. The first would be that the frequency does not change the mean value, on the contrary. People who drink coffee once a week have an altruism value of 9.9, basically the highest of all selected categories. In contrast, the most notable difference is that the value drops to 6.9 for respondents who disregard the phrase 'fair trade'. They are closely followed by the elderly with a score of 7, and the score remains below 8 even for uninformed respondents with no clear criteria and who do not take into account place of purchase. The results here are in agreement with Moisescu and Gică (2017) who find that consumer demographics play a moderating role in the appreciation of social responsibility. Nonetheless, urban, rural, youth and adult respondents, as well as those with higher education, remained in the middle range.

Conclusions

The study contributes to the literature by complying with the request of Sterie and Ion (2022) to investigate FT products in detail in the Romanian context, in this case – coffee, and provides future research with the first quantitative information gathered from one of the very little known Eastern European emerging markets. In addition, the study also contributes by identifying the peculiarities of coffee consumption and revealing the knowledge of local consumers about FT coffee and the potential for adoption in Romania. In this way, our analysis enriches the specialized literature of the Eastern European space and brings a substantial contribution to the article by Petrescu *et al.* (2020) highlighting the consumption potential of FT coffee on the Romanian market.

Overall, the study shows that the coffee market in Romania is supported by steady consumption. It is provided by people who drink coffee daily or several times a day, mostly with higher education, who buy their coffee from hypermarkets and supermarkets, get their information mainly from several sources and, very importantly, base their purchasing decisions on the quality of the coffee and the brand that produces it. However, given these facts, similar to V4 countries, the typical consumer is set up for increased contact with FT coffee.

So, although they unintentionally 'met' FT coffee in supermarkets and hypermarkets, the results prove that the Romanian consumer did not notice the logo on the packaging. As a result, the logo is very little known, as in other European countries, and knowledge about FT in general and certified coffee in particular is extremely poor. Romania is thus part of a kind of pattern that can be found both in the V4 countries and in southern Europe, especially in Greece and Portugal. Unlike organic and eco-labelled coffees, which enjoy greater popularity, FT coffee is a definite unknown as only a 'residual' percentage of respondents have solid information about the principles behind the FT movement. The differences in knowledge between coffees labelled eco/organic and FT are caused, as observed by Hira and Ferrie (2006), by lack of visibility. Unlike eco and organic coffees, which are visible on the shelf, FT, apart from a logo label on the packaging, is not clearly distinguishable from competing products. The direct consequence is a very low level of awareness and limited impact on coffee drinkers, and indifference is the word that best describes consumers' relationship with coffee sold under the FT umbrella.

From the above conclusion it follows that there is a greater degree of indecision about switching from generic to FT coffee. The result is due not so much to the higher price, but more to the lack of knowledge of the FT process and principles, and can be summed up in the response of one participant in this study: 'I don't know what the concept means, [so] I'm abstaining!'. In other words, better information for the consumer public, better marking of FT's areas, shelves, areas of products would improve awareness and, consequently, increase sales. The suggestion is supported by respondents' willingness to pay more for FT coffee and the narrowing of the undecided category as we show in the willingness to adopt section. Totodată, observațiile noastre rețin și existența unui grup mic inflexibil de consumatori care nu ar accepta schimbarea indiferent de argumente, acesta fiind guvernat de principii precum: conservatorism, obișnuință, autosuficineță, preț și necunoaștere.

Despite the fact that very little is currently known about FT products in Romania, on the whole, consumers show altruism and are willing to help people affected by poverty by buying FT coffee. This means that the internal market is flexible and, with the exception of the conservative and inflexible group of ±10%, which Usslepp *et al*. (2021) had also identified in the case of the US, there is a quite generous space of influence in order to increase awareness and adopt in domestic consumption FT coffee. This goal requires certain conditions to be met, such as those identified by Davies (2009) for the UK, which involve, among other things, devising information campaigns with the movement's guiding principles and labelling criteria, focusing disparate interests to set up a national organisation to affiliate with Fairtrade International, and increasing the visibility of products in trading establishments.

Our study is limited in its results because it does not investigate the level of price consumers are willing to pay for a pack of FT coffee, but only their stated willingness to pay more. As such, future research should focus on how much consumers are willing to pay extra for FT coffee. Also, a second limitation is the research of a single country and not the whole region to which it belongs in order to make the results more generalizable. Even though we identify some structural similarities in this study, new approaches that investigate integrated awareness and willingness to adopt FT coffee at the mass level in Eastern Europe would be needed as the countries here share a similar background. Finally, the third limitation of our study is the reliance on frequency analysis and descriptive statistics, which provide only a snapshot of the data. While these statistics are useful for understanding the central tendency and dispersion of variables, they do not allow causal inferences or generalizations about the population. To address this limitation, future research could use inferential statistical analyses, such as t-tests, ANOVAs, or correlation analyses, to test specific hypotheses and draw more robust conclusions.

Declarations

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Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

There is no conflict of interest/Competing interests

Availability of data and material

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available within the article.

Code Availability

The computer program results are shared through the tables in the manuscript.

Authors' Contributions

Viorel Mionel: conceptualization, writing (original draft), writing (review & editing), methodology, data curation. **Oana Mionel:** writing (original draft), writing (review & editing), supervision, data curation.

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