

Fairtrade or Fair Trade; does a philosophy need branding?



A Coffee Farmer holds up freshly picked coffee; Fairtrade coffee sales in the UK alone reached over 135 million pounds in 2008

Jurang Fair Trade
Quarterly Report
June 2010

In the world of ethical trading, there is arguably two main terms: Fair Trade and Fairtrade, the first being the indicator of an idea, the second being an actual brand and registered Trademark. Although both have been subject to raving praise as well as fierce criticism, it is predominantly the single word brand which attracts major criticism (1). Nevertheless, in the 'wwworld' of today where the internet now tells us more about trends than ever, Google's search trend information tells us that in the UK alone, 'Fair Trade' is searched for over twice as much as 'Fairtrade' (2). Combining these facts leave us with an interesting question: In a time where branding is presumably THE factor to get right, is the ethical market place not primarily about branding but about a philosophy and the principles it adheres to?

Here at Jurang we like to think so for a number of reasons. First of all the issue of fair trade is huge and Trade Justice in nutshell does not exist. Rather we believe that any understanding of Trade Justice which is to lead to sufficient intervention, needs to be informed by the pivotal notion that issues such as these find themselves in an interwoven web of historical, economical and sociological factors which are intricately linked. Such issues cannot be understood through a mere brand nor through western marketing ideas, but instead need a level of engagement which is appropriately informed by grounded knowledge of economics and political ideas. Secondly as the principles that underlie the Trade Justice movement are so instrumental to what we do, we cannot accept a single brand to advocate that what we do or for that matter limit our activities to the single ethos of that brand. In a very practical way that's why we choose to be known as Jurang Fair Trade and not Jurang Fairtrade.

Nevertheless Google's trend information did come as a surprise to us too. Part of our community engagement in campaign and action groups as well as our involvement in schools means we see a lot of people who have a sincere heart for the issue of fairer trading, but are all too blinkered to see past the Fairtrade brand. There is of course nothing wrong with buying Fairtrade branded products and in no way should this report be regarded as a way of persuading people to stop buying those products. The Fairtrade mark is an important guarantee that workers are paid a fair price for their goods and labour and that additionally their communities benefit from a social premium. However, it will come as no surprise to many other trade justice thinkers that for many people trade justice begins and ends with Fairtrade and as such our expectation was to see this reflected in Google search trends.

That said, the trend seen in Google is not new to us personally and fortunately a growing number of others. Organisations like Traidcraft have been pioneers of Fairtrade, however, it is clear from the fact that the majority of their products are not actually certified to Fairtrade standards, that Traidcraft is pioneering past Fairtrade to embrace the larger philosophy and goal of fair trade through a well defined corporate responsibility statement for the sourcing of their products, complimented by their own system of inspection and setting of standards. Similarly Jurang too is

exploring ways of empowering overseas communities through developing direct fair trade relationships. Such activities are crucial to growing fair trade as a voice against greedy globalised free trade where profit is the only bottom line. Furthermore it removes the focus from a minimum requirement represented by a brand to a larger engagement of trading companies to be responsible and letting an ethos shape their operations from the central principle of equality and a respect for the earth and *all* of its citizens.

So how should we move forward as campaigners and members of the fair trade and trade justice community? We believe it is important to use the figures from Google as a way of helping us push the issue of fair trade further and allow this trend to gain further momentum. Harnessing the success of the Fairtrade brand as a way to bring attention to these issues, whereby at the same time stressing the importance of moving past that brand and paying attention to the wider issues in order to appropriately address the issue of Trade Justice. Our recommendation is that activists and campaigners provide continued support to Fairtrade through the buying of those products and the encouragement of others to do likewise. However, we would also recommend a commitment to an informed engagement in critical debates within the fair trade community as well as beyond that.

As free market thinkers continue to push their economical and political agendas, the fair trade community needs to provide a continued response to rivals such thinking in a academically, socially, politically and economically viable way.

(1) - Singleton, A: "The poverty of fair trade.", Adam Smith Institute, 2005

- Examples in the Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/janetdaley/3555412/Forget-Fairtrade---only-free-trade-can-help-poor.html> & http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/alexsingleton/4019311/The_poverty_of_Fairtrade_coffee/

- and elsewhere on BBC:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6426417.stm>

(2) Comparison of Google's Adwords Keyword Research Tool results for both 'fairtrade' and 'fair trade' shows that in December 2009 only 165,000 people searched for 'fairtrade' whereas 'fair trade' attracted 368,000 searches in the same period. As the general trend over 2009 follows a similar pattern for both search terms, it can be assumed this difference in volumes was a year-wide phenomenon in 2009.