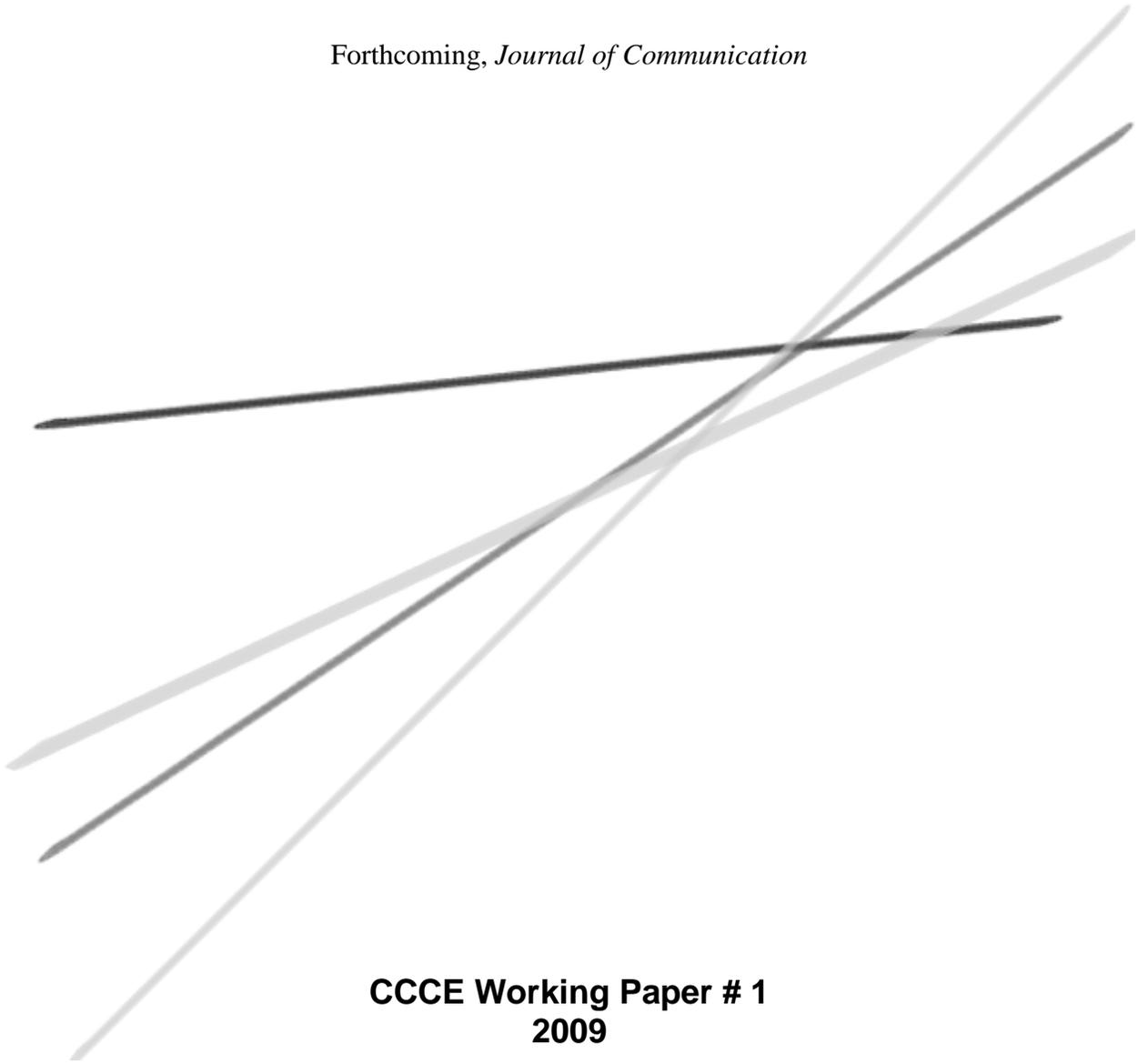


***Narratives and Network Organization:
A Comparison of Fair Trade Systems in Two Nations***

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Abstract:

The narratives that flow through networks can shed light on their organization. This analysis looks at the elaboration of fair trade networks in the United States and the United Kingdom, with a focus on the narrative control exercised by key gate-keeping organizations. Structural properties of the two networks reflect differences in centralization as measured through distance, closeness and betweenness in relations among organizations. The analysis suggests that once a dominant story or entrenched opposing stories become established in a network, structural dynamics involving narrative choices, conflicts, and strategies can lead comparable networks to diverge even as they espouse the same cause. These differences affect the capacities of networks to mobilize for various kinds of activities.

Key words: networks, narrative, collective action, fair trade, web analysis

Narratives and Network Organization: ***A Comparison of Fair Trade Systems in Two Nations***

Networks of organizations can have various tensions and bonds reflecting and defining relations among members (c.f. Contractor & Monge, 2003; Stohl & Stohl 2005). Conditions shaping those relations may include differences in resources, goals and values, communication infrastructure, geographical proximity, and historical relations. Such aspects of network life can affect degrees of interconnectedness, growth, stability, commonality of purpose, and effectiveness (Monge & Contractor, 2003; Shumate, Fulk & Monge, 2005).

Narratives also flow through many networks, revealing harmony or tension at different levels from individuals to organizations (Boje, et al., 1999). Stories can have both human and physical expression, often becoming linked to slogans, signs, logos, literature, and other “actants” that can have networking effects of their own (Latour, 2005; Shumate, et al., 2005). In our case, for example, different trademarks may appear on chocolate bars or bags of fair trade coffee, signaling different stories about how the product was produced, how standards were monitored, and the values defining relationships among producers, sellers and buyers. Similar to the branding process, a fair trade story connects consumers in socioeconomic networks as agents with particular relationships to products and to each other.

The essence of fair trade involves producers receiving a fair price for their goods, and buyers receiving certification that products have not been substituted with cheaper goods along the commodity chain to the consumer. This generic plot thickens as different story lines accentuating responsible personal consumerism or global economic justice travel over networks. Many organizations publicize stories about how ethical consumerism is practiced by individuals and communities. Other stories show how producer communities have improved their lives by

adopting fair trade systems. And some stories tell about the ravages of predatory corporations and the global trade system on those small producers. In addition to adopting various ways of narrating the story of fair trade, organizations play crucial roles in larger networks by mobilizing resources, certifying goods, and developing strategies to attract producers, consumers, and business outlets to the cause. Organizations that join fair trade networks include businesses, both large (Starbucks) and small (Just Coffee), social justice NGOs (Oxfam, Global Exchange), and national certification organizations (Transfair in the U.S., Fair Trade Foundation in the UK) that are licensed by the Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) to join a global standards system that monitors production and licenses businesses to sell products certified with FLO trademarks. Different organizations in these systems may confront strategic dilemmas about stories they are comfortable telling and having others tell about them. For example, in the U.S., both Starbucks and Just Coffee claim to support fair trade, but they tell very different stories about what this means. Their stories are so different that the organizations do not share the same certification system, reflecting tensions in the national network as revealed in our analysis below.

Not surprisingly, Starbucks' fair trade story is carefully managed to avoid political messages that might jar its lifestyle brand image. Indeed, the company initially decided to make a modest commitment to join the FLO system in an agreement with Transfair in the U.S. after a logo campaign threatened to tarnish its brand (Klein, 1999). Yet it may be challenging to find a bag bearing the FLO fair trade label or a cup of brewed fair trade coffee at the local Starbucks. By contrast, every bag of Just Coffee proclaims its (self-certified) fair trade origins, sporting the slogan "Not just a market, but a movement" set off by a revolutionary red star logo. Just Coffee tells a very different economic justice story about fair trade than the low-key tale of corporate and consumer responsibility embraced by Starbucks and other Transfair certified organizations.

Conflicts over how to frame the fair trade story led Just Coffee and a number of smaller activist organizations to leave the FLO system after Starbucks came in, charging that Transfair sold out the economic justice movement by accommodating the brand sensitivities of big business.

Leaving the international standards system means that organizations cannot display the Transfair licensed FLO trademark, which adds noise to the signaling system in the network, which may affect how consumers identify with products and each other.

The fact that a powerful gatekeeper of the certification process (Transfair) does not recognize messages favored by other organizations may create what have been termed structural holes (Burt, 1992; Stohl & Stohl, 2005) that interrupt the flow of information and interaction in the network. By contrast, we will show that more radical themes of trade justice activism are closer to the center of the UK network. The Fair Trade Foundation that regulates FLO certification in the UK embraces both responsible consumer and economic justice stories, creating a denser network with a more egalitarian structure. Even though our two networks do not differ significantly in the numbers of structural holes, the nature of the gaps seem different. In particular, the work of trying to fill the holes falls disproportionately on a smaller number of organizations in the U.S. than in the UK

Such contrasting patterns in the “fitness” of nodes within networks (Monge, et al., 2008) may reveal strategic communication choices involving the selective telling of stories to different audiences (Eliasoph, 1998; Poletta, 1998, 2006). For example, at the time of this writing, the Starbucks home page (<http://www.starbucks.com/sharedplanet/index.aspx>) featured a prominent section called *Starbucks Shared Planet*, showcasing the company’s commitment to environmental and community stewardship, and “ethical sourcing.” Yet the term fair trade was downplayed in Starbucks’ consumer lifestyle brand story, appearing in the fine print as just one

of more than two-dozen elements in the Starbucks responsibility program. The label on Starbucks Shared Planet coffees was a “coffee bean rising” design and not a FLO trademark.

By contrast, Just Coffee promotes fair trade as the very definition of its business, as reflected in 8 pages of search results for the term on its site (<http://justcoffee.coop/>) at the time of this writing. However, as noted above, Just Coffee’s more radical framing of the fair trade story led to abandoning the common network trademark. These different strains are reflected in organizational fit patterns in web crawls that we analyze below. For example, Starbucks received and returned so few web links with other fair trade organizations that it did not even appear in the US network map in Figure 1. At the same time, a cluster of more radical organizations was only distantly connected to the authorized gatekeeper of the fair trade story (Transfair) through the efforts of a single brokering organization (Global Exchange) to fill the structural holes.

Narrative differences may create tensions or open conflicts that can undermine and sometimes even destroy a network (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1996). Extending the argument of Monge et al. (2008) concerning linkage fitness as the “propensity for a [network] relationship to sustain itself, that is, to survive or reproduce itself” (p. 462), we suggest that since network narratives have a linking function within networks, there should be a correspondence between the coherence of a network’s narratives and other properties of the network, such as path distances between nodes, unequal distribution of influence, and the nature of structural holes, including the ways in which those holes are filled (or not). In particular, we look at the role of gatekeepers as keys to how these various structural properties operate in our two fair trade networks.

Gatekeepers and network structure

The idea of regulating information flows and relationship status among various actors in a field (cf. Lewin, 1951) is rich in a broader literature but curiously underdeveloped in network analysis. Barzilai-Nahon (2009) found more than 400 social and information science articles between 1995-2007 using the concept, yet only a handful addressed networks, and those looked at news flows online, the influence of portals or search algorithms, and the role of government policy. In another article Barzilai-Nahon (2008) proposed a typology of gatekeeping dynamics in networks, ranging from censorship and control, to challenges against the gatekeeper's selection of content or recognition of other organizations.

Not all networks have gatekeepers, but many do. For example, the *New York Times* and a few other elite press organizations disproportionately set the daily news agenda in the US mainstream media. They also help police the boundaries of the mainstream press by recognizing or ignoring other reporting (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2007, p. 57). In our case, national fair trade certification organizations such as Transfair in the US and the Fair Trade Foundation in the UK regulate business certification and issue trademarks that provide signals to consumers about what they are buying and why it can be trusted. A breakdown of standardized labeling creates the potential for confusion among consumers and reluctance to adopt among businesses.

The control over standards exercised by the respective national labeling organizations gives them what Barzilai-Nahon (2008) calls gatekeeping power in networks. Our analysis shows that challenges to the power of the primary US gatekeeper have resulted in a network that is comparatively fragmented, with a disproportionate burden on a few organizations to fill the

structural holes. By contrast, the parallel UK gatekeeper presides over a less divided network in which influence and narrative themes are shared more equally with other organizations.

Narratives and frames: Analyzing network dynamics

Narratives have become a prominent theme in scholarship on organizing, networks, and social movements (c.f. Weick 1995; Czarniawska & Joerges 1996; Czarniawska 1998; Poletta 1998; Walker 2004; Bennett & Toft, 2009). The simplifying frames that organize complex sets of information, including stories, have been the focus of social movement scholars such as Poletta (1998, 2006) and Snow and Benford (1988). Social movement analysis generally concentrates on frame conflicts, frame bridging, issue brokerage, media uptake of frames, and resulting organizational relations (Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). In addition to these concerns, we build on work by scholars such as Pentland and Feldman (2007), Bearman and Stovel (2000), Mische (2003), and Shumate, Bryant, and Monge, (2005) to understand how deeper network properties (such as strength of organizational ties, legitimacy of dominant frames, and capacity to mobilize supporters) are constituted by narratives. For example, the idea of narrative exchange as an organizational network building process is developed by Pentland and Feldman (2007), who show that many networks are constituted more by narrative exchange than by other more conventional organizational properties such as formal roles, rules, material resources or authoritative traditions (although such properties may evolve to institutionalize narrative networks). They also argue that stories can become the common bonding agents among people who develop sub-organizations within formal organizations.

Frame analysis offers a useful analytical tool to measure what stories are dominant, and whether organizations share or do not share those narratives (Entman, 1991; Scheufele, 1999; Snow et al., 2007). In addition to simplifying more complex discourses, frame analysis also

enables us to pick up narrative fragments that may reside outside of fully formed stories. As noted earlier, narratives become important in constructing organization and action not just because people exchange them, but also because they often become simplified, sloganized, and cued by images that can reside outside of people (Taylor and van Every, 2000). The traces and fragments of stories may be left in public locations, such as email chains, online discussion forums, handbooks, manuals, mission statements, get involved pages on websites, organizational mottoes, logos, trademarks on food packages, and placards at demonstrations. When particular narratives become shared widely enough for people to leave traces of them in the world, it becomes important to recognize them as non-human agents in the formation of networks, akin to the non-human “actants” that Latour (2005) describes in actor network theory.

In many networks, strategic narrative choices are inscribed in one of the most public faces of organizations -- on their websites (Bennett 2003). Such visible narrative signals can make or break network connections by constituting guidelines for identification and action: Who are we? What do we do? Who do we do it with? How do we act? Why does it matter? Such identifying story elements can be found in websites under familiar tabs such as About Us, Get Involved, What You Can Do, Mission Statement, and so on. While the US and UK fair trade networks nominally share the same mission, it is clear from the analyses of websites (supplemented with background documentation and conversations with activists) that each case reflects the establishment of a different dominant story.

Research question and plan of analysis

The research question that follows from these broad observations is: Do properties such as network level centralization (as expressed in terms of distance, closeness and betweenness) in relations among organizations in our two networks reflect differences in the dominant narratives

and their distributions across the respective networks? Our general method of investigation involved examining linking patterns in web networks against a contextual analysis of narrative conflict and agreement in those networks. Our analysis suggests that once a dominant story or entrenched opposing stories become established in a network, structural dynamics involving narrative choices, conflicts, and strategies can lead networks in very different directions—even as they espouse the same common cause.

The analysis proceeded in four general steps:

1. *Background immersion.* This involved reading literature, activist materials, and having conversations with experts and activists about the fair trade movement and its characteristics in the two nations. After we formed broad impressions of similarities and differences of fair trade issues and practices in the US and the UK, we drew samples of more than 30 websites from each nation based on both expert recommendations and Google searches on key terms such as “fair trade US” and “fair trade UK,” and more specific searches such as “fair trade campaign Starbucks” (in the US) and “trade justice campaign” (in the UK). The authors and research assistants reviewed statements about fair trade on these sites, with close analysis of the two gatekeeper sites, looking at how they defined and illustrated the fair trade story. We then formalized these thick descriptions into a set of testable hypotheses about structural properties of the respective networks.

2. *Predicted network and organizational properties.* We anticipate more centralization and less evenly distributed influence in the US network as a result of greater dependence on go-between or brokered relationships among key organizations due to the narrative tensions that make it difficult to reconcile differences. We also predict that each network would display corresponding differences in the ways that organizations typically addressed their publics, with

the dominant US signals aimed more at individual consumers and UK organizations more often inviting consumers to join economic justice causes.

3. *Network crawl and site sample for each nation.* A more systematic sample of the two networks was then drawn from an automated network crawl using the Issue Crawler as described below. This enabled assessing link patterns and relationships among nodes in the networks, while identifying sites for detailed content analysis of key narrative properties.

4. *Analyses of network hyperlink structures and site content.* Standard network metrics enabled comparisons of centralization in path distances, betweenness, and closeness among organizations at the network level, which enabled assessment of predictions about overall network structures. Content analyzing a subsample of sites enabled testing hypotheses about broad organizational level differences inviting publics to participate in sharing and constructing key narratives. Details about each of these steps are reported in the following four sections.

Background immersion: Fair trade in the US and the UK

As noted earlier, fair trade is aimed at promoting sustainable economic development by providing farmers with a guaranteed and fair price for their crops, increasing producers' access to world markets, and improving life in local communities to support long-term, sustainable growth. Achieving these goals involves educating consumers to make more informed product choices, while convincing businesses that there is demand for fair trade products. Some activists attempt to mobilize public pressure on governments to change trading policies and on businesses to raise social responsibility. (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007b; Jaffee, 2007; T. Rogers, 2004; Transfair, 2007) Various branches of this global movement are distinguished by the messages and strategies that organizations employ. Important differences in mobilization strategies became

evident in our background research on the United States and the United Kingdom, two of the fastest growing fair trade markets (Krier, 2005; Linton, et al., 2004).

To make two long stories short, the formation in 1992 of the FLO-licensed certifying organization in the UK (Fair Trade Foundation - FTF) can be traced to the legacy of justice-oriented human relief NGOs beginning with Oxfam in 1942, which is a founding member in the consortium of NGOs that guide the FTF. The idea of fair trade is also relatively old in the US, dating to Mennonite efforts in 1946 to create outlets for handicrafts produced in poor countries. Yet the path from there winds through various independent import businesses to movement organizations such as Global Exchange, until TransFair USA (TF), the US national certification agency sanctioned by FLO, was established in 1998, not by a consortium of NGOs, but by an individual named Paul Rice. A more extended history of fair trade at the international level and in the cases of the US and the UK is available in Bennett, et al. (2007).

The contrast between the two network gatekeepers is stark. In the UK, the FTF is at the core of a social justice movement in which most organizations share a narrative about social and economic justice that encourages British citizens to take actions beyond just consuming products. For example, the FTF website at the time of this writing directed visitors to join the Trade Justice Movement, of which FTF is a founding member. The Trade Justice homepage ran the headline: "Stop Europe's Unfair Trade Deals." Visitors were urged to "Use your voice in Europe: Email Chancellor Angela Merkel" (then EU President), and to email the UK Secretary of State for Trade to stop free trade deals with former colonies (Trade Justice Movement, 2007). By contrast, visitors to the TransFair USA site were urged to "vote" with their dollars to buy certified products, and ask stores to carry them. (TransFair USA, 2007).

In contrast to the circle of social justice NGOs on the board of the FTF in the UK, TransFair (TF) in the US has a board predominantly comprised of representatives from the business and consulting world. TF has adopted a business-friendly approach with relatively little focus on social justice messages that might offend coveted brands such as Starbucks. The strategic network surrounding TF seems more carefully cultivated, with a link page leading to just 13 outside organizations at the time of this study, in contrast to a hundreds of links emanating from the FTF site.

Narrative differences in the two networks

In the UK, starting with FTF, the two dominant (responsible consumer and economic justice) narratives are most often inclusive, with the “entry level” consumer story being embedded in the higher-level justice story. By contrast, the dominant tendency among US organizations closely linked with TF is for the consumer story to stop short of social and economic justice frames. Consuming fair trade products is often portrayed as a business-friendly personal lifestyle activity. In both cases, individuals appear frequently on the sites to tell stories about how they have promoted one version or another of the cause. These broad impressions of different narrative patterns in the two networks are grounded in a systematic examination of the websites of TransFair USAⁱ and the Fairtrade Foundation,ⁱⁱ and from close readings of dozens of other sites in each country. In the cases of the two gatekeepers, equivalent sections of each website -- About; Resources; Support Fair Trade/Get Involved -- were examined to see: 1) how the organization defined fair trade; 2) the way government and business are perceived in relation to fair trade; 3) how fair trade helps producers in the global South; 4) how consumers in the global

North can support fair trade; and 5) how the organization defines its relationships with external partners (i.e. business, government, activists, NGOs, etc.).

Visitors to the US TransFair site were asked to support fair trade because it is good for the farmer and good for them as consumers - a message that is politically cautious and focuses on what consumption can accomplish: *“Fair Trade certification enables consumers to vote for a better world with their dollars, simply by looking for the Fair Trade Certified™ label on the products they buy”*ⁱⁱⁱ and *“The Fair Trade Certified™ label is a one-stop shop for consumers who want to do good by the planet and by the people who call her home”*.^{iv}

In the UK, the Fairtrade Foundation’s narrative of fair trade also emphasizes how people are doing good through consumption. However, these stories are placed side-by-side with economic justice accounts of unfair trade policies, discrimination, and underdevelopment: *“...Fairtrade sees part of its role as the mobilisation of consumers in the campaign for trade justice and the honouring of the pledge for the current round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations to be the “development round.”*^v This message does not let business off the hook: *“The multinational coffee companies...are happy to pay rock-bottom market prices for the bulk of their coffee requirements...”*^{vi}

Comparable readings of dozens of other sites made it clear that the two strains of consumer and economic justice narratives were less likely to be found nested within each other in the US network, where many organizations tended to favor one over another. As noted above, some organizations in the US network have embraced the economic justice framing so fully that they have publicly rejected the circumscribed consumerist and business scenario promoted by TF. For example, in 2003, Larry’s Beans, Dean’s Beans, Café Campesino, and Just Coffee broke from TF’s certification process, citing frustration with its corporate-friendly practices,

supposed lack of transparency, and emphasis on marketing rather than education. Matt Early, cofounder of Just Coffee in Madison, Wisconsin was quoted as saying, “without people outside the increasingly corporate-friendly TransFair system pushing for the original vision of a better model, [the movement] will be watered down into nothingness” (T. Rodgers, 2004). Additional tension brewed between Dean Cycon of Dean’s Beans and TransFair USA when Cycon actively pressed Newman’s Own Organics to support fair trade. “TransFair USA sent him a warning letter, reminding him that his fair trade contract prohibits him from badmouthing his fellow fair traders” (Varnon, 2003). A scholarly analysis of the US system posed this question: “how can the fair-trade movement manage growing tensions over its practices and strategy between movement-oriented and profit-oriented participants in the fair-trade system – between its increasingly distinct activist and business poles?” (Jaffee, 2007, 4). By contrast, the authors of a book on the UK system indicated that its narrative poles were inherently compatible: “Fair Trade must...be seen as a development project for transferring wealth from consumers to the developing world through market-based mechanisms” (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, 47).

These differences over framing the cause suggest that TF may lie outside or on the periphery of substantial segments of the US fair trade movement – an odd role for a gatekeeping organization to play. This scenario opens up the possibility that other US organizations are more central to the network than the gatekeeper is. We initially began to suspect this configuration when nearly every search on fair trade in the US pulled up Global Exchange, which was later confirmed empirically as the organization that linked out to the most other sites in the core network. (Global Exchange linked to 56 percent of the other sites in the network, compared to TransFair’s much more strategic outlinkages to just 13 percent of the network.) Global Exchange appears to act as a broker to the justice wing without rejecting the soft-sell, consumer-

oriented, business-friendly strategies favored by Transfair. Indeed Global Exchange has in the past played bad cop to TF's good cop when pressuring companies to market certified products. For example, Global Exchange spearheaded long-running fair trade campaigns against Starbucks and Proctor & Gamble, providing educational information, online petitions, and activist toolkits to audiences interested in moving beyond individual consumerism.

Predicted differences in the two networks

Following this thick description of the two fair trade systems, we felt comfortable developing two sets of predictions about the networks in each case. One set addresses the *structural properties* of each network as a whole – through group-level indices of centralization – reflecting the differences in narrative coherence. The second set of predictions involves overall network differences in *enabling different forms of participation* in the fair trade process, ranging from simple consumerism to more movement-oriented activism.

Predictions: Structural properties

Overall, we anticipate that network structure in the US will reflect the greater need for management and brokerage of relationships created by the narrative tension between the ethical consumer and economic justice frames. In structural terms, we expect this to show up in greater centralization of the network, caused by a more lopsided reliance on key organizations to negotiate potential narrative conflict through their linking behavior and other communications. In other words, we expect the US network to be marked by disparities between two kinds of actors: the small group of sites engaged in narrative management, and the larger group of remaining sites or nodes whose positions must be managed in order to preserve the functionality or fitness of the network. Thus, our predictions regarding structural differences between the two networks

are focused on various indicators of network-level centralization, which correspond to the variability, dispersion, or spread of node-level properties within a network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Structural Prediction 1: The networks will differ in the extent to which influence is distributed evenly among actors, where influence is understood as lines of communication from one node in the network out to other nodes (Hanneman 2007). The US network should display greater levels of centralization of influence, reflecting the strategic tension involved in a few organizations having to strategically manage or broker a narrative that is not as widely supported across the network that consequently develops structural holes.

Structural Prediction 2: The two networks will differ in the extent to which closeness is distributed evenly among actors, where closeness is measured as the path distance or number of jumps required to get from one node to another. Since narrative frames are more evenly spread across the network in the UK, there should be relatively less variation in the path distances between any given pair of nodes than in the US, where various portions of the network must be insulated from one another.

Structural Prediction 3: The two networks will differ in the degree to which betweenness (or the extent to which any given node serves as a connection between other pairs of nodes) is distributed evenly among actors. Again, reflecting the more polarized narrative properties of the US network, different wings of the network require more go-between organizations for connections. We therefore expect greater centralization of betweenness in the US network.

Predictions: Enabling different forms of participation

Based on the above thick description, we anticipate that a more systematic quantitative coding of the broader UK network will reveal organizations offering more opportunities to get involved in political activism and policy activities. By contrast, we anticipate that the US network will offer its publics more opportunities to buy fair trade goods, and fewer invitations to become involved in promoting an activist or policy agenda. In particular, we make several specific predictions.

Participation Prediction 1: If the two strains of the fair trade narrative are more fully integrated in the UK network, we anticipate that member organizations are more likely to encourage their publics to get involved in contacting and making appeals to governments to change trade policies. Since national and international governments set trade policies, we expect that opportunities to contact these levels of governments will be highest in the UK.

Participation Prediction 2: If there is less conflict about what the fair trade story is in the UK, and the emphasis is more on social justice activism, there should be a higher prevalence of coproductive interactivity (Xenos and Foot, 2008), that is, a greater tendency to invite public participation in the production of the content of websites within the UK network through site features such as forums, chats, and interactive calendars that enable site visitors to participate in the sharing and construction of narratives themselves. The idea being that if organizing narratives are less contested, it is strategically more attractive to invite people to interact on sites to co-produce and share their versions.

Participation Prediction 3: Along with fewer chances to co-construct the network narratives through coproduction of site content, sites in the US network should also offer more information about where to find fair trade products than in the UK network. In other words, the dominant emphasis in the core US network sites should be on buying products.

Network crawl and site sample

The obvious first question is how do we render the networks in the two nations, given thousands of possible nodes, large and small, that we might include? Since the national certifying organizations exert a gatekeeping role in the recognition (certification) and distribution of narrative frames, we adopted a procedure to construct the web networks that link to and from the labeling organizations and their closest partner organizations. Our aim was not to determine the entirety of fair trade networks in the US and the UK, which would be a daunting task, and somewhat beside the point of this analysis. Rather, we sought to determine if the most central and visible players in the two nations have relationships that are constituted in some part by the harmonies and tensions among themselves and with the gatekeepers of the core national stories.

We thus identified sites in the two networks by crawling the web starting with key URLs that Transfair in the US (TF) and the Fair Trade Foundation in the UK (FTF) each identified as primary partners on their resource link web pages as we found them on November 15, 2006 (the network sample was gathered in a crawl of these links on November 17, 2006). As noted, the entire TransFair link list contained a fairly small number (13) of sites that the organization pointed out to its visitors as supporters of its cause.^{vii} The Fairtrade Foundation site contained hundreds of links to stores, fair trade towns, and core members.^{viii} We started our crawl from the FTF core member list, which we judged to be roughly equivalent in size (14) and significance to the TF link list, and introduced those URLs into the crawler on the same date.^{ix}

The two respective sets of URLs were placed as starting points, or as a “seed list” into Issue Crawler, a tool made available by Richard Rogers at the University of Amsterdam (for a detailed account of various uses of this tool, see http://www.govcom.org/scenarios_use.html and Rogers 2004). The Issue Crawler identifies networks of URLs based on linkages to, from,

and among an original list of URLs on the basis of co-link analysis. We followed Rogers (2004) recommended procedure for deriving an issue network (i.e., focused mainly on fair trade) by setting the reach of the crawl to one iteration (crawls using two iterations produced a vast social solidarity network including human rights, environment, and labor organizations). We also set the crawler to drill two pages deep into the crawled sites, with the intent of capturing the most prominent linkages.

Inclusion in the network was determined by co-linking. A co-link is simply a URL that receives links from at least two of the starting points for that iteration. Thus, suppose we begin with Site A, Site B, and Site C, and crawls of the out links for each turned up site D, which has links from sites A and C. Site D would be included in the network as co-linking with two of the starting points. Suppose that site D also links to site E, which also receives a link from Site B. Under this method, site E would not be included in the first iteration. The crawler visited more than two thousand URLs in each crawl, and rendered a map and a co-link matrix (including directionality of links) consisting of the top (98 US and 93 UK) sites sharing co-links in each network. The maps of the two networks are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The size of nodes corresponds to the relative numbers of inlinks and outlinks the site received from, and sent to other organizations in the network.^x A visual inspection of Figure 1 reveals that the US network is more scattered, and that the gatekeeper Transfair (up and to the left of center) is not among the most highly linked organizations in a network that has only a few large nodes. By contrast, Figure 2 shows Fair Trade Foundation (down and to the left of center) as one of a number of large nodes in a more densely linked UK network. We turn now to more formal assessments of our hypotheses about network structures.

<Insert Figures 1 and 2 Here>

Assessing the predictions: Methods and findings

The results of the Issue Crawler co-link analyses, in the form of sociograms mapping the connections between websites or nodes in the networks, were then imported into the UCINET statistical package for social network analysis (Version 6.0, Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2004). We also fitted a series of exponential random graph (EGRM) models to the data from each network (Robins et al., 2007). These models (also known as p-star models) were designed to test for the relative likelihood of structural holes in each network, and were performed with the PNet statistical package (Version 1.0, Wang, Robins, & Pattison, 2004-2005). To test the second set of predictions about public participation frames, we selected a content analysis subsample of 50 (US) and 47 (UK) sites based on the strength fair trade focus and other considerations explained below. The results of these two tests of predictions are reported below.

Analyzing the network structures

Examining the Issue Crawler matrices in UCINET enabled us to examine the social network structure of the websites in each network. We did this by calculating basic network or group level analyses of centralization tendencies in each network. Given the nature of our network data, which involve unrelated networks of different sizes, these analyses do not enable us to perform standard tests of statistical significance such as those provided through Quadratic Assignment Procedures (see for example, Krackhardt & Porter, 1986). However, the centralization measures we provide are scaled such that they enable one to directly compare completely different networks that vary in size and contain different actors, in order to assess simple differences in the tendencies we are interested in.

To see if there is support for our picture of a less strategically distanced UK network that is more egalitarian in influence sharing among nodes, we calculated network or group level

centralization with respect to degree, path-distance closeness, and betweenness (Freeman, 1979). These indices of centralization are included in the standard output returned by UCINET when one performs node-level analysis of degree, closeness, and betweenness. Following Freeman's (1979) approach to network or group centralization, in each case, the first step is to identify the node in the network with the highest value of a given property (influence, closeness, betweenness), and then sum the differences between this node and all others. The resulting quantity is then divided by the theoretical maximum of this sum of differences that would result from a network in which one actor possesses all of a given property, and the remaining actors have none. Thus for each of these centralization indicators, the point of reference is always the hypothetical "star" network, in which all relationships are the most unequal. In the archetypical "star" network, one node stands at the center, and all linkages lead either to or from this central actor. For each type of centralization, indices are normalized such that the closer they are to 1.0, the more they resemble a "star" network of the same size, meaning that scores closer to zero indicate network paths that are more distributed and involve fewer nodes that must be traversed to get to other nodes in the network (Wasserman and Faust 1994, p. 177).

Although these methods were originally developed to describe human social relationships, we believe they possess great value for describing critical characteristics of web networks, where linking patterns not only express relationships between social or political actors (Wasserman and Faust, 1994), but also reveal the ways organizational actors intentionally arrange themselves within their issue spaces. Indeed, the analytic approach taken here is similar to that advocated by a number of researchers who have argued for the usefulness of social network analysis techniques as tools for making sense of hyperlink data (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997; Jackson, 1997; Park & Thelwall, 2003).

Structural Prediction 1: Recall that our first prediction involved the extent to which influence in the two networks is evenly distributed, with the U.S. network expected to have greater concentrations of influence in a few strategic network brokers. This reflects our assessment that the U.S. displays greater levels of conflict over the shared story about fair trade, and the resulting need for more outreach on the part of a few organizations to bridge structural holes in attempts to hold different branches of the network together (and/or keep others apart). To test this prediction, we calculated the Freeman Degree Centralization for each network, with special attention to the outlink patterns, which relate to variations in influence among members of each network. The results of this analysis reveal a U.S. out centralization score of .52, while the UK out centralization score was much lower, at .29. In other words, on a 0–1 continuum between total egalitarianism and total inequality in influence, the U.S. network is over halfway toward full inequality, whereas the UK network lies much closer to a uniform distribution of influence.

To put this in perspective, the U.S. network contained only 4 organizations that linked to 20 percent or more of the rest of the network. As noted earlier, Global Exchange takes on a disproportionate load of this outreach with links to 56 percent of the other organizations in the network. The U.S. gatekeeping organization TransFair is clearly strategic in limiting the public display of its outreach, linking to only 13 percent of the network. By contrast, the UK network has 10 organizations that each reach over 20 percent of the network, and the highest outreach by any organization is 36 percent. The gatekeeping organization Fairtrade Foundation shares in the relatively balanced outreach activity with links to 33 percent of the network. The plots of network reach proportions in Figure 3 illustrate these imbalances in influence between the two networks. Additional analyses (log-log plots and associated regression) reveal that both networks

are consistent with powerlaw distributions, as one would expect in such cases. However, the plots presented in Figure 3 suggest notable differences in terms of how far down each ranked list of actors one must go before encountering the long tail of lower influence nodes. In other words, the group of high influence actors is smaller in the TF network.

<Insert Figure 3 Here>

Structural Prediction 2: Another structural indicator of the greater narrative tension in the US network emerges from analyses of the spread of closeness in each network. Recall our prediction here that we expected to find greater disparities in the path distances between organizations in the U.S. network than in the UK. We examined the distribution of path distance, or the number of jumps required to get from any one given node to each other node in the network. The network-wide closeness index for the UK was .34, while the U.S. network registered .47, indicating a much more unequal distribution of closeness among the U.S. sites and more evenly distributed distances connecting various points in the UK network.

Structural Prediction 3: Recall that we also expected the US network to have more go-between sites that other sites (and visitors navigating the network) must go through to get to each other. The measure we selected to determine this is betweenness, which refers to how many pairs of nodes in a network are connected by a path that goes through a particular node. As mentioned earlier, our analysis focuses on the dispersion of this property throughout each network. Thus, the network level calculations of the distribution of betweenness are based on a comparison to the archetypically unequal “star” network, where the central node in this case has a monopoly on betweenness, serving as the go-between for all possible pairings of other nodes in the network (betweenness centralization = 1.0). Examining network wide betweenness or brokering in this

way, we arrive at a network betweenness score of .12 for the UK network and a considerably larger .23 for the U.S. network.

Additional analysis: In order to further explore structural differences between the two networks we also fitted a series of exponential random graph or p-star models to the data from each network. In line with the notion that the narrative tensions present in the TF network may create more structural holes in relations among actors, we created a series of models that test for the presence of network formations associated with structural holes (specifically, we modeled the occurrence of 2-star, 3-star, and k-star formations).

The results of these analyses did not reveal significant differences between parameter estimates for the two networks. Indeed, the best fitting models of both networks indicated a greater-than-chance occurrence of 2-star formations in both networks, and relatively small, negative and significant parameter estimates for 3-star formations. In other words, structural holes were not appreciably more likely in the TF network. In part we believe these results were driven by the nature of data drawn from the Issue Crawler. As explained in a previous section, the Issue Crawler is fundamentally based on co-link analysis; as a result, the networks it renders have a number of structural features virtually built-in to them. Most notably, networks generated from the Issue Crawler are created on the basis of co-links, which are essentially nodes in 2-star formation, which in turn may artificially dampen some patterns related what Robins, Pattison, and Woolcock refer to as “local processes” among actors in a network (2005).

Although the numbers of structural holes may be similar, the work of filling them may differ in terms of which actors are involved, and whether particular actors may be involved in disproportionate brokerage relations. In the case of the networks examined here, this may take the form of a notably smaller group of actors playing pivotal roles in creating and resolving those

structural holes that do exist in the TF network, as opposed to a more broadly distributed set of actors implicated in structural holes found within the FTF network. Figure 3 suggests that these differences are clearly important in understanding our two networks. In this sense, the findings from the supplemental p-star analyses serve to provide an important point of clarification to help interpret the differing patterns of network centralization reported earlier.

Analyzing participation opportunities

Even though we set the parameters on our link crawl to identify the core fair trade networks in each nation, there were naturally other sites harvested in the sample that were clearly providing more solidarity or informational functions in the network rather than avenues for participation. In order to assess how these networks involved their audiences in the fair trade process, we screened the original crawl samples from the U.S. (N=98) and UK (N=93) shown in Figures 1 and 2 to select a subset of sites for content analysis based on the greatest direct relevance to fair trade engagement. The criteria used to produce the subset of sites for the coding sample were these: First, if the organization did not mention fair trade in an easily observable location within the website, then it was disqualified (in the US network, the US House of Representatives, Witness for Peace, and Greenpeace were excluded, among others; in the UK, this excluded the World Bank, the Baptist Union, and AIDS Portal, among others). Second, organizations such as news sites and magazines were removed if their primary focus was not fair trade. Third, we excluded a handful of non-English language sites that were clearly not part of mobilization efforts in national networks. This produced a subsample of 50 organizations in the U.S. network and 47 in the UK that we coded for the participation opportunities they presented to site visitors. Included in both samples were the sites of eight international umbrella organizations that were co-present in both networks. We left them in the coding samples on grounds that this is a

transnational movement with some common players. This decision clearly dampens the measurable differences between the networks.^{xi} The result is a more conservative test of our hypotheses, but one that reflects the realities that web networks often transcend national boundaries, particularly in cases such as ours that involve transnational issues and relationships.

We tested our predictions regarding differences in participation opportunities between the two networks through systematic content analysis of these subsamples of the U.S. and UK fair trade sites, employing a set of coding measures developed to test our hypotheses. To test our first prediction (regarding greater likelihood of UK sites to encourage visitors to target policy making institutions, and U.S. sites to direct attention at businesses and social adoption of fair trade), we assessed whether sites encouraged or enabled site visitors to make public statements directed toward government entities at the local, national, or international levels, or toward businesses (all coding measures employed in this study are listed in Table 1). We also included a measure assessing whether sites encouraged or enabled visitors to express their support for fair trade in their school, church, workplace, or neighborhood, or through any of these means: letters to newspaper editors, endorsement statements that could be publicly displayed on- or offline, or by signing a petition that would be publicly displayed but not necessarily sent to an entity.

<Insert Table 1 here>

Our second prediction (involving the likelihood of more opportunities for participation in online content generation in the UK) was tested by operationalizing the concept of coproductive interactivity as an index of two measures: 1) access to a message board, interactive blog, forum, chat or other type of communication space to which visitors can contribute comments; and 2) invitation to contribute any kind of content to the site other than comments in a

forum/communication space, such as photos, entries to a calendar, information about FT events, testimonials, or endorsements.

Our third prediction (regarding the likelihood that invitations to buy fair trade products would be more prevalent in the US) was assessed by measuring the presence on sites of information about where to buy fair trade products, or opportunities to purchase fair trade products online.

Each site was examined systematically by two independent coders. Coders were instructed to code for the measures described above by documenting the presence or absence of eight types of site features or texts that comprised these measures. For example, the coding for national government advocacy involved each coder recording a yes or no to the query:

Site encourages or enables a site visitor to make a public statement supporting fair trade to a national government official or national government entity, such as a UK MP or prime minister, or US senator, representative, or president), or a national government entity (e.g. a federal government agency, the US White House or Congress, or the UK Parliament or a UK government agency).

A similar coding procedure was used for business advocacy:

Site encourages or enables a site visitor to make a public statement supporting fair trade to a business or corporate entity or business executive, or to boycott or demonstrate against a business such as a supermarket, café, or consumer goods company on behalf of fair trade

The coding for whether site visitors could participate in adding content to the site was:

Site offers access to a message board, interactive blog, forum, chat or other type of communication space to which visitors can contribute comments

Inter-coder reliability was assessed according to the percent of agreement among coders. Percent agreement was chosen over other reliability measures based on two important

characteristics of the data. First, the sole concern of the coding process was with the presence or absence of certain types of features and information; continuous variables were not employed. Neuendorf (2002) notes that percent agreement is particularly appropriate in instances “wherein each pair of coded measures is either a hit or a miss” (149). Second, the distribution of our measures is somewhat skewed. About half the sites coded offered less than half of our measures. Such distribution forces lower reliability calculations of agreement beyond chance even when coding is reasonably reliable (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein 1999).

After the initial round of coding, inter-coder reliability was assessed on the dual codes for all of the sites in the UK and US coding subsamples. The level of agreement between the two coders was above eighty percent on most measures, and between sixty to eighty percent on a few others. A debriefing conversation with the coders indicated that a few sites had been partially nonfunctional during the coding period, and that some other instances of disagreement were attributable to one coder simply not finding the page on which a particular feature was offered due to the large size and complexity of some of the sites. Having dual codes for all sites in both networks enabled assessment and reconciliation of the disagreements, and thus verification of the data. After excluding the instances of disagreement due to a site having been nonfunctional at the time one coder visited it, or one coder not having located a particular page of a site on which a feature clearly existed, percent agreement was re-calculated. There was at least eighty-five percent agreement across all measures in the US network, and at least eighty-eight percent agreement across all measures in the UK network. For example, inter coder agreement on the national political advocacy measure above was 95 percent. Agreement on the business advocacy measure above was 89 percent. Agreement on the content production measure was 96 percent. The few instances of conflicting codes were then reconciled through re-examination of the sites

by a third coder with substantive knowledge of the project. The data were then used to test our predictions about how the different networks would organize participation opportunities for citizen-consumers.

Participation Prediction 1: As we predicted, organizations in the UK network were more likely than those in the US network to encourage site visitors to advocate for change in trade policies as indicated in Table 1. More specifically, calls for contacting and making appeals to national and international government entities were more prevalent on UK network sites, and the differences between the two networks in regard to these advocacy targets were statistically significant. In the UK, the most common targets of fair trade advocacy were national government bodies. In the U.S., businesses were most likely to be targeted for fair trade advocacy. Although the differences between the networks for other types of advocacy targets were not statistically significant, organizations in the U.S. were more likely to encourage public statements supporting fair trade in other arenas, such as letters to editors, and petitions in schools, workplaces, and churches, than toward government entities.

<Insert Table 1 here>

Participation Prediction 2: We expected to see a higher prevalence of coproductive interactivity in the production of the content of websites within the UK network than in the US, and this expectation proved generally accurate, with 40.4% of UK sites featuring some form of coproductive interactivity as compared to only 24.5% of US sites ($z=1.41$, 92% confidence for a 1-tailed test --an effect that is dampened by the presence of the 8 duplicate sites in our small coding samples). In other words, visitors to the UK network were more likely to encounter opportunities to create content on the sites, whether through forums, calendars, or other interactive media.

Participation Prediction 3: Since the general aims of the businesses and umbrella organizations (e.g., trade federations that provide support and coordination among businesses) involve promotion of fair trade, it is not surprising that all of these types of organizations in both networks provided site visitors with information about where to find fair trade products or enabled online purchases of fair trade products. However, the underlying composition of the two networks involved very different mixes of organization types, with the proportion of umbrella (support and federation) and business organizations constituting 56% of the US sample versus 31.9% of the core UK network, which was more densely populated by NGOs. Not surprisingly, the US sites were more actively pursuing consumer relations with their visitors, with 87.8% of US sites including “buy” features, which were found on just 53.2% of sites from the UK core network. This difference in proportions is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level ($z=3.58$). As found in our tests of predictions 1 and 2, the UK sites were more focused on engaging visitors in political activism.

Conclusion

Sometimes stories are widely shared and interactively constructed across large numbers of networked organizations and individuals who engage with them, and sometimes organizations come into conflict around divergent accounts of the “who, what, when, where, or how” of common goals. When narrative conflict in networks occurs, some accounts may become more dominant than others due to strategic advantages that some organizations possess within the network. The distribution of position, resources and power in a network enables some greater or lesser number of its organizations to have a say in creating and promoting the narratives that identify the network in its environment. When narrative strains occur, less well-positioned organizations may be forced to adopt the dominant line in order to continue to support a common

cause. Alternately, such strains can lead to exit from or strains in networks, and loss of capacity for coordinated collective action.

The US network is defined by structural features that reflect the tensions between the business and consumer framing of fair trade and the economic justice wing of the movement. Although structural holes may not be more likely in the U.S. network, our results suggest that a relatively small number of organizations has emerged to fill these holes, making this network an interesting case for extending Burt's (1992) theory about holes inside of organization networks, to analyzing holes in complex networks of organizations. Stohl and Stohl (2005) show convincingly that international regimes such as human rights networks often involve holes between nation states that are filled productively by NGOs. The result seems to involve strengthening the regime without notably weakening either states or NGOs. However, it is clear in our case that the holes in the US network (reflecting the polarized narrative strategies) are only tenuously filled by the outreach and networking efforts of a few organizations such as Global Exchange. Stohl and Stohl (2005) note that organizations filling the holes in the international regimes that they examined go beyond mere brokering of information and control, to transforming regimes in terms of "...diversity, relational support, representational participation, legitimacy, and institutionalization within a network." (p. 444) While Global Exchange and a couple of umbrella support organizations (e.g., see Fair Trade Federation and Coop America from Figure 1) may keep fragmenting clusters of the network in some communication reach, there are few if any signs of the stability, legitimacy or deeper institutionalization of a shared value and policy framework that Stohl and Stohl observe in the global human rights regime. Thus, we observe organizations filling structural holes without transforming or notably

enhancing the legitimacy or organizational capacity of the network. Whereas the UK may resemble a coherent narrative and normative regime, the U.S. does not.

These differences in what might be termed network capacity in our two cases are also notable in ways that organizations attempt to engage individuals. Nodes in the U.S. network offer fewer opportunities for interactive coproduction of the fair trade narratives, and far more emphasis on buying products than the UK network. The higher incidence of appeals within the UK network for site visitors to contact national and international governments further evidences the policy-orientation of this network, contrasted with the U.S. network's greater emphasis on advocating fair trade among businesses and within personal spheres of influence

As we noted earlier, the two nations came to fair trade via different paths, but there were also choices made by organizations as those paths developed – choices that affected how organizations mutually define the fair trade project and how they wish to communicate those understandings to publics, businesses, and governments. Our analysis suggests that once narratives have become inscribed in public spaces by key gatekeeping organizations in networks, other organizations must contend with and adjust to those salient public narrative elements. Since the UK environment contains a more inclusive narrative set with nested consumer and social justice themes, the levels of network harmony and public mobilization capacity are both greater (for example, the UK boasts more than 200 fair trade towns, compared to just one in the U.S.).

A future direction for this research is to examine how narratives not only shed light on network structures, but also on propensities for change. Because this study design relied largely on network data collected during a relatively short period, a fine-grained assessment of change over time in the two networks was not possible. This would be a promising direction for future research, as it is clear that the characteristics of many networks change over their life cycles

(Monge and Contractor, 2003). That said, the findings from this study suggest that the tensions evident in the U.S. network may have already led to greater fragmentation – including efforts by some actors to form competing networks -- resulting in the proliferation of less consistent narrative elements throughout the public spaces in which potential supporters shop, eat, and protest.

Finer-grained developmental analyses of narratives and organizational relationships would be useful for understanding how networks become more or less cohesive and effective. Monge et al.'s (2008) evolutionary approach to communication networks in organizational communities and Monge and Poole's (2008) ideas about ecologies organizational discourse provide promising models in this regard. We believe that such developmental analyses will extend the key finding of this study: narratives matter not just as frames for action and alliances, but they become structuring and constraining mechanisms in the environments where networks form, helping to define the strategic relationships among organizations and individuals.

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Figure 3: Distributions of influence relations in U.S. and UK fair trade networks showing the percentages of other nodes that can be reached in one click from each website

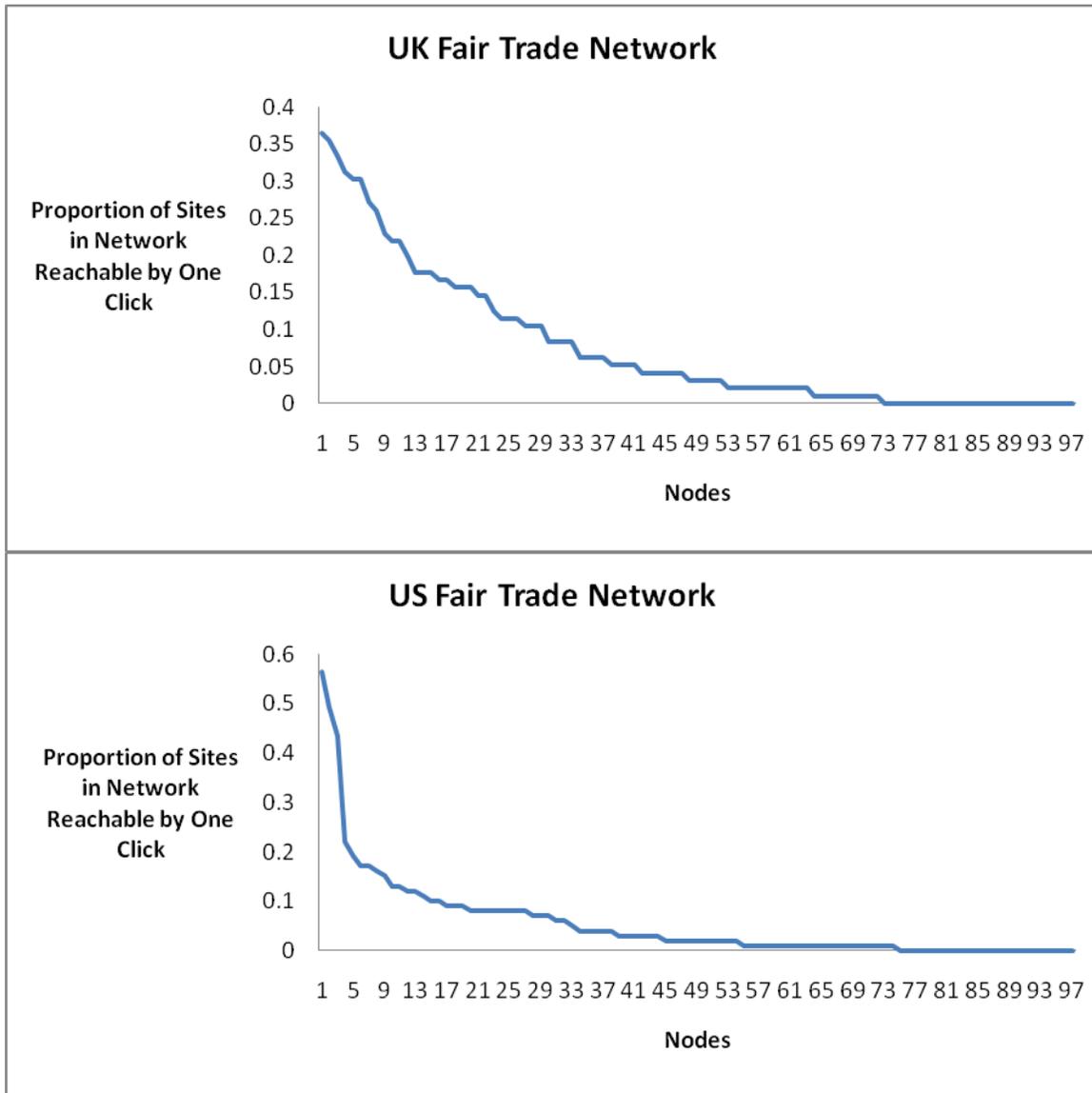


Table 1. Frequency and targets of advocacy contacts by network

	US	UK
Frequency of calls for advocacy (All targets)	38.8%	48.9%
Local targets	12.2%	8.5%
National targets *	14.3%	36.2%
Int'l targets **	8.2%	31.9%
Business targets	32.7%	21.3%
Other targets	22.4%	17.0 %
<i>N</i>	49	47

Cell entries are percentages of sites in each network with each advocacy target.

* = difference in proportions is significant (*z*-test) at 95% confidence.

** = difference in proportions is significant (*z*-test) at 99% confidence.

ⁱ <http://www.transfairusa.org/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.transfairusa.org/content/resources/faq.php#cert>, accessed May 9, 2007.

^{iv} <http://www.transfairusa.org/content/resources/faq-advanced.php#walmart>, accessed May 9, 2007.

^v http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/downloads/pdf/Fairtrade_and_oversupply.pdf, p. 2, accessed May 9, 2007.

^{vi} http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/downloads/pdf/Fairtrade_and_oversupply.pdf, accessed May 9, 2007.

^{vii} These were the 13 URLs listed on <http://transfairusa.org/content/resources/links.php> on 11/15/06 and used as starting points for a link crawl on 11/17/06: <http://www.coopamerica.org>, <http://www.crsfairtrade.org/index.cfm>, <http://www.ecologicfinance.org>, <http://www.fairtrade.net>, <http://www.fairtradefederation.org>, <http://www.fairtraderesource.org>, <http://www.fairtraderesource.org/cc/cc.html>, <http://www.globalexchange.org>, <http://www.ifat.org>, <http://www.lwr.org/fairtrade/index.asp>, <http://www.organicconsumers.org>, <http://www.oxfamamerica.org>, <http://www.usft.org/>.

^{viii} http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources_links.htm, accessed May 9, 2007.

^{ix} These 14 starting points were: <http://peopleandplanet.org/>, http://www.bananalink.org.uk/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1, http://www.cafod.org.uk/about_cafod/links, <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/campaign/index.htm>, http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources_links.htm, <http://www.mrdf.org.uk/pages/links.php>, <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/partners/index.htm>, http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/fairtrade/ft_links.htm?searchterm=links, http://www.sciaf.org.uk/about_us/useful_links, <http://www.shared-interest.com/links.htm>, <http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/template2.asp?pageID=1652&fromID=1275>, http://www.urc.org.uk/links/links_index.htm, <http://www.wdm.org.uk/resources/links/index.htm>, <http://www.womens-institute.org.uk/members/index.shtml>.

^x Maps generated in the Issue Crawler provide a visualization of each network based on the relative positioning of each node to other nodes within the network. The colors of different nodes correspond to different domains (e.g. .gov, .com, .org).

^{xi} Sites co-present in both networks included the FLO, the International Fair Trade Association, the Network of European Worldshops, the European Fair Trade Association, Oxfam International.