

Management Response

Title of the evaluation report : analysis press approach Fairtrade Belgium

Date of the Management Response : 17/08/2024

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Final Person in Charge: Koen Van Troos



Evaluation area	Relevance. For the analysis regarding the relevance of the press approach, the intermediate evaluation analyzed the following elements: (i) the press releases, (ii) the interviews, (iii) the opinions, (iv) the press events, and (v) the reactive press actions.	
Conclusions of the evaluation	The analysis of the press releases from Fairtrade Belgium reveals that while they are newsworthy, they often lack "hard" news and societal impact relevant to the average Belgian. The press releases tend to focus too much on Fairtrade Belgium's interests and objectives, rather than considering the recipient's interests, including journalists and their readers. This can affect reader interest, especially for those without a strong opinion on Fair trade. Economic journalists, in particular, need a clear understanding of the economic aspects of Fairtrade's story. The <i>titles</i> of the press releases are often too complex and vague, failing to immediately capture the journalist's attention. Regarding interviews proposed to news outlets by the organization, they can generally be considered good practices, providing in-depth discussions on various topics. Exclusivity of these interviews is a key approach, with exclusive interviews given to specific newspapers. Concerning the organization's opinion pieces , they are well-structured, topical, and generally well-handled, though there is room for more streamlined and sharper opinions. Press events are proven to be less effective, with fewer events organized and challenges in attracting press attendance unless there is something significant to see or do. Finally, regarding reactive press actions , Fairtrade Belgium seems to be a good partner for journalists, and manages to maintain good relationships and contacts with relevant journalists.	
Recommendations	To sustain/ to build upon	To develop
	- Regarding press releases : best practices include using bullet points and lists for clarity, the good alignment between Dutch and French language	- Regarding press releases : Fairtrade Belgium often shares too much information in their press releases, making it difficult to distinguish between main and secondary points. Journalists

	<p>reporting, and the regional focus on press releases about Fairtrade municipalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong opinions: Fairtrade Belgium succeeds in writing substantively profound and interesting opinions. In this way, the organisations makes its' voice heard and contributes to the social debate. - Press trips are considered a better approach compared to organizing events where there is not really news value. 	<p>often receive an overload of information without direct answers to their questions, which diminishes the news value. A concrete focus in communication is crucial, starting with a clear and concise title. "Psychological writing" helps with this by placing the most important information at the top and less important details at the bottom. This makes the news clearer and helps journalists work more efficiently. It also allows Fairtrade to create different stories from a large amount of information for various communication moments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding reactive press: Fairtrade Belgium responds quickly to journalists' questions but does not sufficiently address current issues on which they have expertise proactively. <u>Proactively approaching journalists about relevant topics however, can help the organization to develop thought leadership and increase visibility of the topics on which the organization is focusing. A rotation system</u> within the communications team to monitor daily news can help respond quickly to news and current events. This makes Fairtrade Belgium more visible to journalists. A PR agency can support this by providing newsjacking opportunities. Consistent responses to relevant current events strengthen Fairtrade Belgium's thought leadership. - Regarding the municipalities: good anchorage in regional press but untapped potential for national press releases though this is also a possibility to make Fairtrade more mainstream with unaware consumers.
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Management Response	Fairtrade Belgium agrees with the recommendations as formulated by the consultants regarding the relevance of the press approach. Fairtrade Belgium believes the analysis concerning the relevance part of the pres approach was done according to the framework set out in the Terms Of Reference and specified in the inception report which was developed by the consultants.			
Key Action	Time Frame	Responsible	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Develop a template for press releases incorporating the different recommendations provided by the consultants	September-October 2024	Head PR and Advocacy		
Continue focusing on Op-Eds at given occasions	Throughout the year	Head PR and Advocacy		
Develop an internal press monitoring system, allowing to follow what is published on Belgian press on relevant topics	The system should be operational by October 2024	Management Team		
Increase visibility in national press actions for fair towns/municipalities campaign	Throughout the year	Head PR and Advocacy/Coordinator Fair Towns		

Evaluation area	Effectiveness. To measure the effectiveness of the organization's press approach, the evaluators spoke with various journalists who Fairtrade is in contact with. The conclusions about effectiveness are based on these conversations. To measure the effectiveness of the press approach, four aspects were analyzed: (i) awareness, (ii) attitude, (iii) news value, and (iv) collaboration.
Conclusions of the evaluation	Regarding awareness , the evaluators found that most journalists easily associate with Fairtrade, though there is a noticeable distinction between specialized and mainstream journalists. Mainstream journalists appear less interested in the organization's communication topics, believing these issues don't resonate strongly with the general public. Second, the consultants found out that overall, journalists have a positive attitude towards Fairtrade Belgium, viewing it as a reliable partner despite recognizing its partiality. The organization's positive image benefits its press approach. However, journalists feel that Fairtrade's press communications often reiterate the well-known Fairtrade narrative rather than focusing on the tangible impact in Belgium, making it seem distant to Belgian readers and consider Fairtrade's news newsworthy .

	<p>Additionally, some journalists note that Fairtrade Belgium sometimes provides excessive information, making it difficult to distinguish key points. In terms of collaboration finally, the relationship with Fairtrade is considered as smooth and positive, marked by transparency and a willingness to self-critique. Journalists argued however, that the organization is often stronger in its reactive responses than proactive, sometimes failing to address individual journalists' questions proactively.</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>To sustain/ to build upon</p>	<p>To develop</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness/Fairtrade's notoriety. Fairtrade is a well-known brand with certain journalists. The organisation is considered as a positive cause resulting in a certain "goodwill of journalists who are specialized in topics Fairtrade is working on. Philippe as a CEO is also very visible. The organization has chosen to put Philippe forward as the face of the organization, a smart approach which could be further stressed in the future. - News value. Two best practices were identified regarding the news value in the external evaluation. The first one is regarding the annual numbers. These numbers are very valuable and can be considered proofpoints for stories to be told. The second best practice is the exclusivity approach, which has worked and continues to work really well for the organization. This is also of an added value and can increase interest of journalists in Fairtrade topics. - Collaboration with Fairtrade. Fairtrade knows well which journalists are interested in the topics the organization wants to showcase in the media. The organization is well connected to them. Contact with the head of PR & advocacy is also easy and reliable and there is a willingness to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase news value, Fairtrade Belgium needs to align its' press communications more with the interests of the average Belgian rather than just their own organizational perspective. Addressing how fair trade impacts individuals and their behavior can increase public engagement. Using the "news table" approach—covering facts, figures, expertise, and examples—can enhance the newsworthiness of their content. Additionally, presenting stories visually and addressing local interests – eg Fair Towns - can attract media attention and better connect with the Belgian audience.

	think together about possible angles, approaches, etc.			
Management Response	Fairtrade Belgium welcomes the recommendations of the intermediate evaluation regarding the effectiveness of its' press approach. The recommendations as formulated in the report and summarized in the above reflect the opinion of the organization. The analysis of the efficiency of the press approach as developed by the organization also answers well the research question 'Is Fairtrade Belgium effectively engaging with journalists to achieve its objectives?', as defined in the Terms of References of the external evaluation.			
Key Action	Time Frame	Responsible	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Update the journalist database of the organization and better identify entry points at mainstream media	September-December 2024	Head PR & Advocacy		
Integrate principles of the news table in the new to be developed template/check-list for Press releases	September 2024	Head PR & Advocacy		

Evaluation area	Efficiency. Efficiency was evaluated here based on four sub-aspects: (i) general, (ii) target audiences, (iii) focus, and (iv) network.
Conclusions of the evaluation	Fairtrade Belgium has a well-organized internal structure with clear points of contact for journalists and effective internal collaboration. However, their marketing and PR efforts are often closely aligned, which can sometimes undermine the news value of their PR communications. It may be more effective for Fairtrade Belgium to develop a distinct PR strategy in parallel with their marketing activities. Regarding target audiences, Fairtrade Belgium currently targets a broad B2C and B2B audience. There is some internal confusion about whether the primary focus should be on B2C or B2B, as each requires different communication approaches and media strategies. Regarding the B2C audience, mostly middle-class and older individuals. In the B2B sphere, the organization aims to reach business leaders but faces constraints due to its revenue from corporate partners, limiting its ability to criticize them openly. Striking a balance between offering critical commentary and supporting media communications is essential. In terms of focus,

	<p>communication efforts for Fair Trade Towns are strong at the regional level but fail to translate effectively into national media. Additionally, there is competition both internally and with other organizations in the thought leadership arena, creating tension between addressing societal issues and marketing aspects. Finally, in terms of network, Fairtrade Belgium has established a good network of specialized journalists but lacks connections with mainstream media and insights into editorial decision-makers. Moreover, there are times when urgent news is not readily available from Fairtrade.</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>To sustain/ to build upon</p>	<p>To develop</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus: Strong emphasis on regional news through the Fair Towns campaign. Fairtrade Belgium makes smart use of regional press efforts to bring stories to attention, especially when it comes to "Fair Trade Municipalities." These stories lead to many different articles, relevant to local residents, spread out over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General: Distinguish between marketing and PR: Instead of deriving the PR story from the marketing narrative, it may be more interesting to develop a parallel PR trajectory in terms of news creation. This can result in a difference in focus between marketing and PR, but it will better address the objectives of both communication forms. - Target audiences and focus: Fairtrade Belgium wants to reach everybody through its' press communication. But that's a huge challenge. Dare to define which target groups and themes are a priority, can help to narrow down the PR strategy. Hence, Fairtrade Belgium needs to <i>clarify its focus</i> in press communications by defining key target audiences and prioritizing themes. They should <i>distinguish themes per audience and differentiate between PR and marketing focuses</i>. Within these distinctions, they can further tailor their approach to various stakeholders, helping to establish the right tone of voice. Fairtrade Belgium should <i>identify three clear themes for press profiling</i> to assert thought thought - leadership. They should carefully delineate topics for press communication and select information that aligns with the desired

		<p>narrative. By leveraging annual figures, they can create and distribute multiple stories over time, in line with these figures, a strategy known as "salami slicing."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Networking. Fairtrade Belgium can strengthen thought leadership by building relationships with academics and other experts relevant to their themes. These experts can support Fairtrade Belgium's messages and increase their credibility. Collaborating with these third parties can also help counter criticism of their vision. Additionally, it is important to approach both specialized and general journalists and build good relationships. Maintaining personal contacts between CEO Philippe Weiler and journalists can further increase the visibility of Fairtrade Belgium and reinforce their position as a thought leader. 					
<p>Management Response</p>	<p>Recommendations on efficiency of the press approach are in line with the TOR and the inception report that was developed by the consultants. The answers that were formulated are very much in line with what was required, in particular the recommendation related to reconsidering the 100% alignment of PR and marketing objectives and develop a more differentiated approach. Also in terms of focus, the analysis proposes to focus on three themes (for instance commodities such as cocoa, coffee and bananas) to increase visibility.</p>						
<p>Key Action</p>	<p>Time Frame</p>	<p>Responsible</p>	<p>Tracking</p>				
<p>Develop a PR plan for 2025, distinguishing better between marketing and PR efforts allowing for a better focus and distinguishment between target groups.</p>	<p>November 2024</p>	<p>Head PR & Advocacy, with input from Head Comms and CEO</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Status</th> <th>Comments</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Status	Comments		
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Evaluation area	Gender and environment			
Conclusions of the evaluation	Gender and equality are themes that are not necessarily linked to Fairtrade in the minds of journalists. Fairtrade does address these issues periodically, as do some Fairtrade companies. In the past, there have been reports, opinion pieces, and events on these topics, for example, in connection with International Women's Day. Regarding the environment, it is easier to make a connection between Fairtrade's themes and the environment. There appears to be a more "natural" link between the theme of "environment" and Fairtrade Belgium. Conversations with journalists confirm this, as they also more readily associate the topic of "environment" with the stories Fairtrade Belgium focuses on. At least in terms of perception, the messages that Fairtrade Belgium emphasizes seem to go hand in hand with the theme of "environment."			
Recommendations	To sustain/ to build upon		To develop	
	- Sustain linkages between Fairtrade and the environment in media.		- Build a more focused approach in media in which gender and the environment can be integrated, but can never be dominant since both are themes on which Fairtrade Belgium cannot claim thought leadership (effectiveness and efficiency).	
Management Response	Fairtrade Belgium welcomes the recommendations related to these transversal themes of gender and environment and confirms that it is not possible for the organization to claim thought leadership on the themes of gender and environment in media. Focusing exclusively and explicitly on these themes in the media would therefore reduce effectiveness and efficiency of the press approach. However, Fairtrade Belgium is committed to include gender and environment as transversal themes in the PR plan that will be developed by November 2024 related to three focus areas for press communications in 2024.			
Key Action	Time Frame	Responsible	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Integrate Gender and Environment as transversal themes in the PR plan for 2025	November 2024	Head PR & Advocacy, Head of Communications and CEO of Fairtrade Belgium		