Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Johnson, Emma (2025) Is Ethical Consumerism an Oxymoron? Investigating the role of Gratitude in Ethical Consumption and how Serendipitous Moments in Consumer Experiences are Perceived through Storytelling. In: YSJ Annual Postgraduate Research School Conference 2025, 8 October 2025, York St John University. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: https://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/id/eprint/14783/

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. Institutional Repository Policy Statement

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorksj.ac.uk

Is Ethical Consumerism an Oxymoron? Investigating the role of Gratitude in Ethical Consumption and how Serendipitous Moments in Consumer Experiences are Perceived through Storytelling

Emma Johnson SFHEA, MSc, BA (Hons)

York Business School, York St John University
Supervisors: Dr Dmytro Moisieiev and Dr Jack Denham

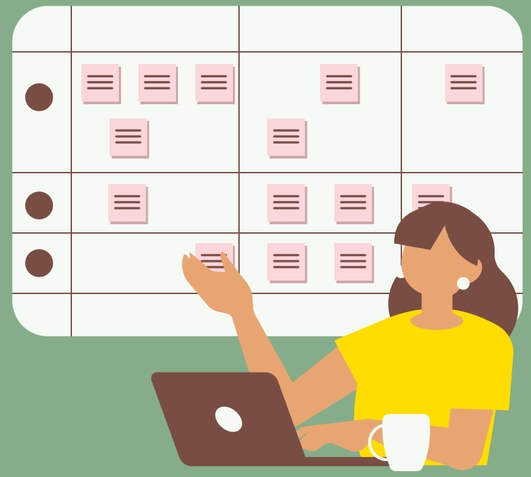
YSJ's Annual Postgraduate Research School Conference 2025

Est. 1841 YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Abstract
3. Question
4. Literature Review
5. Research Gap
6. Research Objectives
7. Methodology
8. Analysis
9. Conclusion
10. Questions
11. References

INTRODUCTION



Emma Johnson

Part-Time PhD Student - Expected June 2028

Full-Time Lecturer in Marketing within York Business School.

YBS Co-Lead Learning and Teaching.

ABSTRACT

The research will conduct interviews and diary method data collection. The diary method involves the study participants logging activities in chronological order during a certain period of time (Rieman, 1993). Diaries are predominately used in social sciences for gather ethnographic data (Koriat, Goldsmith and Pansky, 2000; Robinson-Riegler and Robinson-Riegler, 2009). The structure of the diary varies in structure, complexity and layout, which may influence the outcome of the study (Hylegard, 2006). The format of the diaries could be paper or electronic based (Wild et al., 2009).

The diaries will ask participants to describe and reflect on the activities related to ethical consumption, certain emotions included gratification and guilt, and storytelling. Participants can include visual aids of photos within their diaries to allow for creativity and explain its relevance. The diaries will be structure with fixed response categories to facilitate data analysis, include the steps towards decisions, motivations, reflections, conflicts and others.

Analysis of the diary data may be conducted based on the qualitative data analysis approach suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three phases (1) data reduction, (2) display data and (3) conclusion drawing and verification. Phase 1 involves searching for themes, summarising, coding, categorising and registering excepts from the diary data. Phase 2 includes interpreting the emerging meanings based on patterns and by identifying regularities and possible explanation. Phase 3 conclusions are verified by going through the diaries for a final time and searching for corresponding results in other literature in the field (Babapour, Rehammer and Rahe, 2012).

Would you consider yourself an ethical consumer?

Groceries

Fashion

Cosmetics

Green Home

Travel & Transport

Leisure & Hobbies

LITERATURE REVIEW - ETHICAL CONSUMERISM

A voluntary decision by a consumer to buy goods and services, aiming to positively affect certain social and/or environmental issues (Doane, 2001; Jones, 2017).

Toti and Moulins (2016, p.53), define ethical consumption behaviour “as a way to acquire and use products and brands as much as possible marrying consumers’ moral principles and values’.

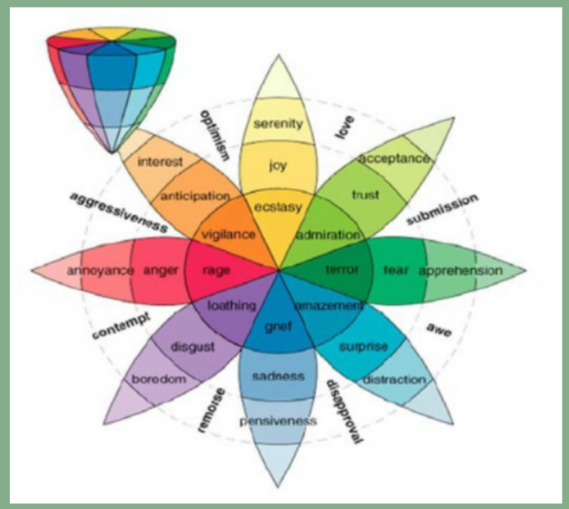
Ethical consumption can be perceived as a concept of mindful consumption, which is characterised as a sense of caring for community, self and for nature (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2010).

Ethical consumption is used to describe consumers purchase and use of products that incorporate a salient ethical or moral dimension. The hedonic function and product usage can be subordinated by concerns about right and wrong and consequences of consumption acts (Starr, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW - EMOTIONS

- Lazarus's (1975) suggests that three attributes outline emotions – subjective affect, physiological changes, and action impulses.
- Emotions have a high intensity and short duration, and it implies the identification of an object as a direct source for its elicitation (Cohen and Areni, 1991).
- Cohen and Areni (1991) suggest emotions to be markers, which are stored in an individual's memory and subsequently recovered to inform a decision.
    - Primary emotions - Sadness, joy, fear, anger, disgust and surprise.
    - Secondary emotions - nostalgia, compassion, pride and remorse.
- Plutchik (1980) suggests that the eight emotions have adaptive significance in the struggle for survival.
- Emotions are drivers for change (Greenberg, 2012).

Figure 1: Plutchik Emotional Index (Swack, 2012)



LITERATURE REVIEW - STORYTELLING

- Storytelling is the most ancient and influential vehicle for transmitting knowledge, wisdom, and beliefs from one generation to the next (Edensor, 2002; Hurlburt and Voas, 2011),
- As social animal, humans crave narratives than can enhance their experiences, and with cognitive engagement it can build a unique connection by tapping into consumers' curiosity and intellect, thus creating a memorable engagement (Ahmed, Sharif, Ting and Sharif, 2024).
- Storytelling fosters emotional connections, engaging consumers in compelling narratives and cultivates an authentic brand identity, that leads to fostering deep connections and brand loyalty (Lund et al., 2018; Appel et al., 2021).
- Narrative transportation theory helps to comprehend how storytelling influences consumer attitudes and behaviours, with the idea of immersion and emotional connection (Green and Brock, 2002).

STORY OF MY LIFE

LITERATURE REVIEW - SERENDIPITY

Serendipity - “the fact of finding interesting or valuable things by chance” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025, p.1)

- Serendipity refers to finding something valuable by chance or experiencing positive outcomes in unexpected situations (Kim et al. 2021; Balzano, 2022).
- Emotional cues in stories can help consumers connect with a product, and strong emotional reactions often lead to more favourable impressions (Huang and Guo 2021; Ryu, Lehto, Gordon and Fu. 2019).
- Kuai and Wei (2025) finding that serendipitous stories increased consumer interest in the focal product, as the serendipitous story would awaken their positive emotions.
- The experience of gratitude leads to a variety of positive outcomes (Walker, Kumar and Golovich, 2016).

RESEARCH GAP

Humans are naturally better suited to understand stories than arguments (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus and Van Riel, 2013).

Gratitude promotes wellbeing and prompts prosocial behaviour (Walker, Kumar and Golovich, 2016).

The psychological literature on gratitude is clear that people would be better off if they were grateful. The experience of gratitude leads to a variety of positive outcomes (Walker, Kumar and Golovich, 2016).

Emotions are feelings that can evoke different expressions. When you are happy you behave differently, as compared to when you are sad. Emotions affect our judgment and play a significant role in our lives (Reeve, 2018).

Well-structured and organised storytelling has a prominent effect on consumers' memory (Burke & Srull 1988; Tulving & Psotka, 1971).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- How does the act of ethical consumption foster gratitude and contribute to individual wellbeing?
- What role do serendipitous moments play in shaping consumer narratives and perceptions of ethical consumption as a fulfilling experience?
- How can storytelling be used as a tool to explore and communicate the emotional and moral dimensions of ethical consumerism?

METHODOLOGY

- The diary method involves the study participants logging activities in chronological order during a certain period of time (Rieman, 1993).
- Diary Method - Participants logging experiences over 6 months.
- Electronic diaries to reflect on experiences.
- Diaries will ask participants to describe and reflect on activities related to ethical consumption, certain emotions included gratification and guilt, and storytelling

Question - If you were writing this diary, would you be happy to share with the other participants?

Question -What are your thoughts on a focus groups or interview beforehand?

ANALYSIS

- Qualitative data analysis approach suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three phases:
    a. Data reduction
    b. Display data
    c. Conclusion drawing and verification

CONCLUSION

Research Questions: (Broad statements that guide the overall direction of the research)

- How does ethical consumption influence gratitude and contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing?
- What is the impact of serendipitous moments on consumer narratives and their perception of ethical consumption as an enriching or meaningful journey?
- In what ways can storytelling be employed to uncover and communicate the emotional and moral dimensions of ethical consumerism?

THANK YOU

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S., Sharif, T., Ting, D.H. and Sharif, S.J. (2024) 'Crafting emotional engagement and immersive experiences: Comprehensive scale development for and validation of hospitality marketing storytelling involvement', Psychology &Amp; Marketing, 41(7). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21994 .

Appel, M., Lugrin, B., Kühle, M. and Heindl, C. (2021) 'The emotional robotic storyteller: On the influence of affect congruency on narrative transportation, robot perception, and persuasion', Computers in Human Behavior, 120, pp. 106749. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106749 .

Balzano, M. (2022) Serendipity in management studies: a literature review and future research directions, Management Decisions, 60 (13), pp. 130-152, https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-02-2022-0245.

Burke, R. and Srull, T. (1988) Competitive Interference and Consumer Memory for Advertising, Journal of Consumer Research, 15 (1), pp. 55-68.

Cambridge Dictionary (2025) Definition of Serendipity. Available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/serendipity [Accessed: 10 March 2025].

Cohen, J. and Areni, C.S. (1991). Affect and Consumer Behavior. In A. Robertson and H.

Doane, D. (2001). Taking flight: The rapid growth of ethical consumerism: The ethical purchasing index 2001. New Economics Foundation.

Edensor, T. (2002) National identity, popular culture and everyday life. Oxford: Berg.

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2002). In the mind's eye: Transportation-imagery model of narrative persuasion. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations (pp. 315–341). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Greenberg, L.S. (2012) Emotions, the great captains of our lives: their role in the process of change in psychotherapy, The American Psychologist, 67(8), pp. 697-707, Available at: DOI: 10.1037/a0029858 (Accessed: 20 may 2023).

Huang, C., and R. Guo. 2021."The Effect of a Green Brand Story on Perceived Brand Authenticity and Brand Trust: The Role of Narrative Rhetoric." Journal of Brand Management 28: 60–76. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00213-7.

Hurlburt, G.F. and Voas, J. (2011),"Storytelling: from cave art to digital media", IT Professional,Vol. 13 No. 5, pp. 4-7.

Jones, E. (2017). Bridging the gap between ethical consumers and corporate social responsibility: An international comparison of consumer- oriented CSR rating systems. The Journal of Corporate Citizenship Issue, 65 (3), pp. 30–55.

Kim, A., F. M. Affonso, J. Laran, and K. M. Durante. (2021) Serendipity: Chance Encounters in the Marketplace Enhance Consumer Satisfaction, Journal of Marketing, 85(4), pp. 141–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429211000344.

Kuai, L. and Wei, H (2025) The Role of Serendipity in Narratives: How Serendipitous Story Promotes Product Interest, Psychology & Marketing, 42 (5), PP. 1356-1360, https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22181

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Emotion and adaptation. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lund, N.F., Cohen, S.A. and Scarles, C. (2018) 'The power of social media storytelling in destination branding', Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 8, pp. 271–280. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.05.003 .

Lundqvist, A., Liljander,V., Gummerus, J., and Van Riel, A. (2013) The impact of storytelling on the consumer brand experience: The case of a firm-originated story, Journal of Brand Management, 20 (4), pp. 283-297.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). An Expanded Sourcebook: Qualitative Data Analysis. London: Sage.

Plutchik, R. (1980) Emotion: A Psychoevolutionary Synthesis. New York: Harper and Row.

Reeve, J. (2018) Understanding Motivation and Emotion, 7th edn. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons

Rieman, J. (1993). The diary study: a workplace-oriented research tool to guide laboratory efforts. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the INTERACT '93 and CHI '93 conference on Human factors in computing systems, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Ryu, K., Lehto, X.Y., Gordon, S.E. and Fu, X. (2019) Effect of a brand story structure on narrative transportation and perceived brand image of luxury hotels, Tourism Management, 71, pp. 348-363. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.021

Sheth, J. N., Sethia, N. K., & Srinivas, S. (2010). 'Mindful consumption: a customer-centric approach to sustainability', Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 39(1), pp. 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-010-0216-3

Starr, M.A. (2009). 'The social economics of ethical consumption: Theoretical considerations and empirical evidence', The Journal of Socio-Economics, 38, pp. 916 – 925.

Swack, D. (2012) 'FEELTRACE and the Emotions (after Charles Darwin)', ResearchGate, Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225308738_FEELTRACE_and_the_Emotions_after_Charles_Darwin [Accessed: 22 May 2024].

Toti, J. F., & Moulins, J. L. (2016). 'How to measure ethical consumption behaviors?', RIMHE: Revue Interdisciplinaire Management, Homme & Entreprise, 24(5), 45. https://doi.org/10.3917/rimhe.024.0045

Walker, J., Kumar, A., and Golovich, T. (2016) Cultivating Gratitude and Giving Through Experiential Consumption, American Psychological Association, 16 (8), pp. 1126-1136.