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IS ETHICAL CONSUMERISM AN OXYMORON? INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF GRATITUDE IN ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AND HOW SERENDIPITOUS MOMENTS IN CONSUMER EXPERIENCES ARE PERCEIVED THROUGH STORYTELLING.

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01 INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumerism has emerged as a social pressure that companies must respond to (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001).

Consumers are becoming more aware of their role and potential effect of changing the products they buy (Gillani and Kutaula, 2018).

To explore how gratitude, serendipitous moments, and storytelling collectively shape the emotional and moral dimensions of ethical consumerism while assessing their alignment with ideals like sustainability, fairness, and social responsibility.

02 OBJECTIVES

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

03 LITERATURE REVIEW

- Ethical consumerism can be defined as 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).
- Cohen and Areni (1991) suggest emotions to be markers, which are stored in an individual's memory and subsequently recovered to inform a decision.
  - Basic
  - Self-Conscious
  - Consumer Decision-Making
  - Moral Obligation
- As the most ancient and influential vehicle for transmitting knowledge, wisdom, and beliefs from one generation to the next (Edensor, 2002; Hurlburt and Voas, 2011),
- Storytelling communicates with consumers on an unconscious or conscious level (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008).
- Kuai and Wei (2025) finding that serendipitous stories increased consumer interest in the focal product, as the serendipitous story would awaken their positive emotions.
- Gratitude promotes well-being and prompts prosocial behavior (Walker, Kumar and Gilovich, 2016).

04 METHODOLOGY

IMPORTANT!
Interested in learning more about yourself and want to take part?

Phase 1: Semi-Structured Interviews

- Interviews provides recorded data (Breen, 2006).
- Probe individual experiences, encouraging reflection and perceptions (Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, 2020).
- Interviews provide an initial understanding of participants' perceptions of ethical consumption, their emotional associations with gratitude, and their experiences of serendipity in consumer contexts.
- This phase establishes a narrative baseline and builds rapport.

Phase 2: Longitudinal Diary Method

- Capture interest in context and over time (Hyers, 2018).
- Acquires reliable first person descriptions of experiences (Bolger et al, 2013; Becker, 2018).
- Minimising retrospective bias (Radcliffe, 2013)
- Participants will then complete six diary entries over a six month period.
- Diary will capture unfolding experiences, emotional fluctuations and serendipitous moments.

Phase 3: Reflexive Platform

- Narrative based qualitative data collection (Rath, 2025).
- Foster community and collective meaning-making (Hazeldine, 2018; Phenwan, 2023).
- Participants have to complete entries to a group platform on Padlet.
- Anonymous sharing of thoughts, images, emotions to aid in discussion.

05 NEW & ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research examines how individuals develop their understanding (verstehen) of ethical consumption and explores the connection between this understanding and their perceptions of wellbeing. It also investigates how they conceptualize their own sense of wellbeing.

Through a longitudinal approach, the study explores how serendipitous moments allow individuals to reflect on their consumption behaviours and the associated impacts on wellbeing. Additionally, it considers how input from others contributes to their recognition of themselves as ethical consumers.

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