

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

Johnson, Emma (2026) Investigating the role of gratitude in ethical consumption and how serendipitous moments in consumer experiences are perceived through storytelling. In: York Business School PGR Poster Showcase Event 2026, York St John University. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/14827/>

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@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:ray@yorks.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.

Author - Emma Johnson SFHEA, MSc, BA (Hons)

e.johnson@yorks.ac.uk

York Business School, York St John University.

Supervisors - Dr Dmytro Moisieiev & Dr Jack Denham



Poster Presentation

York Business School PGR Poster Showcase Event 2026.

Wednesday 27 May 2026.

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

## 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

- 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).
- 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

## 04 METHODOLOGY

### 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.

### IMPORTANT!

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

## 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.

## 06 REFERENCES

- Becker, L. (2018) Methodological proposals for the study of consumer experience, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 21 (4), pp. 465–490. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-01-2017-0036>
- Bolger, N., Davis, A., Rafaell, E. (2003) Diary methods: capturing life as it is lived, *Annu Rev Psychol*, 54 (1), pp. 579–616. DOI: [10.1146/annurevpsych.54.101601145030](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurevpsych.54.101601145030)
- Breen, R. L. (2006) 'A Practical Guide to Focus-Group Research', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 30(3), pp. 463–475.
- Busetto, L., Wick, W. and Gumbinger, C. (2020) How to use and access qualitative research methods, *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(14). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1155/142466-020-00059-z> [Accessed: 14 November 2023].
- Carrigan, M. and Attalla, A. (2001). The myth of the ethical consumer – Do ethics matter in purchase behaviour. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(7), 560–577.
- Cohen, J. and Areni, C.S. (1991). Affect and Consumer Behaviour. In A. Robertson and H. Kasarian (eds.) *Handbook of Consumer Behaviour*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 183–240.
- 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.
- Gillani, A. and Kutaula, S. (2018) 'An introduction to special issues: sustainability and ethical consumerism', *Management Decision*, 56(3), pp. 511–514.
- Hazeldine, L. (2018) Padlet: Collaborative learning and dissemination, *Canterbury Christ Church University*, 26 March, Available at: <https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/prism/padlet-collaborative-learning-and-dissemination/#:~:text=Padlet%20is%20an%20online%20tool,recent%20enhancements%20and%20increasing%20versatility.> [Accessed: 22 March 2026].
- Hurlburt, G.F. and Voas, J. (2011) 'Storytelling: from cave art to digital media', *IT Professional*, 13(5), pp. 4–7.
- Hyers, L.L. (2018) *Diary Methods: Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- 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.
- 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>
- Phenwan, T. (2023) Enhancing nursing students' reflections through Padlet: an action research, *MedEdPublish*, 23(204). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12688/mep.19771.2>
- Radcliffe, L. S. (2013) Qualitative diaries: uncovering the complexities of work-life decision-making, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 8 (2), pp. 163–180. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-04-2012-1058>
- Rath, A. (2025) Padlet: a tool for fostering collaborative learning and feedback literacy in dental education, *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11(1357068), pp.1–8. DOI: [10.3389/fmed.2024.1357068](https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2024.1357068)
- Walker, J., Kumar, A., and Golovich, T. (2016) Cultivating Gratitude and Giving Through Experiential Consumption, *American Psychological Association*, 16 (8), pp. 1126–1136.
- Woodside, A. G., Sood, S. and Miller, K.E. (2008) 'When consumers and brands talk: storytelling theory and research in psychology and marketing', *Psychology and Marketing*, 25(2), pp. 97–145.