

HARNESSING THE POWER OF RITUALS

Where marketing meets meaning



msq WARC | Advisory

HARNESSING THE POWER OF RITUALS

Where marketing meets meaning

About this report

This research, developed by WARC Advisory and MSQ, examines the role of rituals in our lives as consumers and the potential opportunities which brands can unlock to observe, facilitate and participate in those rituals.

We define rituals as a succession of behaviours which are intentionally performed in a fixed order and designed to induce an emotional transformation. As brands battle to connect more deeply with consumers, rituals not only provide opportunities to enrich our understanding of consumer behaviours but also access to meaningful moments within consumers' lives.

To research these opportunities, WARC Advisory surveyed 4,000 consumers across Germany, France, UK and the US to learn about the role of rituals, how people participate in them and why. This was bolstered by a series of in-depth interviews with marketers, culture experts, behavioural scientists and neuroscientists. Plus [Freemavens](#), an MSQ agency, applied their Texture tool to analyse over 688,000 social data sources and 200 million search data points to identify eight distinct ritual types, specific emotional outcomes and recurring behaviours within three specific categories – Personal Care, Alcoholic Beverages and Finances.

The resulting lessons are relevant and applicable for marketers in our researched categories and much further afield.

Contents

The view
from MSQ
4

Foreword
from WARC
5

Executive
Summary
8

CHAPTER 1
Rituals as an
affirmation of
the self
10

CHAPTER 2
Responding to a
volatile world
20

CHAPTER 3
Individual first,
brand second
30

CHAPTER 4
Translating
insights into action
56

Next steps for
marketers
64

Experts interviewed for this report



Dr. Marcus Collins
Professor at the Ross
School of Business,
University of Michigan,
Author of *For the Culture*



Sian Davies
Global Founder, The
Behavioural Architects



Leila Fataar
Founder, CEO & CSO,
Platform13



Samori Gambah
Global Brand Director,
Captain Morgan, Diageo



Matthew Graham
Chief Marketing Officer,
Global Food & Nutrition,
Mars



Ellesha Kirby
Global Executive in
Consumer Health and
Beauty; previously Global
Head, Skin Health & Beauty
and Design, Kenvue



Samrat Saran
Head of Client Solutions,
Neuro-Insight US &
Europe



John Starkey
President Family
Care North America,
Kimberly-Clark



Eli Velez
Managing Director,
Partner Agencies &
Superette, DoorDash



Jelina Wan
General Manager, Mars
Taiwan & Hong Kong



Natalie Wills
VP of Brand Marketing,
Booking.com

The view from MSQ



At MSQ, we recognise that while technology has driven incredible gains, it has also led to a stagnation in how brands connect on a deeper level with their audiences.

An obsession with efficiency can come with an attached cost: a loss of meaning, and ultimately, a lack of effectiveness. This white paper explores how rituals can help marketers rise above the endless optimisation conversation and reignite this crucial aspect of connecting brands and people. In a noisy world, we need new ways to cut through.

Tapping into the comprehensive research and insight capabilities within our Group we set out to find and validate a new approach. While thinking about the challenges facing one of our retail clients we came upon the concept of 'Rituals'. (Our feeling was that no-one needs another "Step into Autumn" or "Wrap up for Winter" campaign!).

Rituals are some of our species' oldest behaviours – and most fascinating. In partnership with WARC we led an extensive research initiative that included the use of a proprietary tool, Texture, from our Insight and Strategy Consultancy, Freemavens, stakeholder interviews with academic experts and senior marketers from some of

the world's biggest brands, and global ethnographic studies, supported by extensive unprompted consumer research.

Nine months later, the results reveal that rituals offer more than just a glimpse into consumer behaviour—they provide a roadmap to creating long-lasting brand relationships. By understanding the emotional transformations that rituals are designed to induce, brands can align their strategies to resonate more deeply with consumers' emotional needs.

This white paper serves as a guide for brands looking to tap into the power of rituals. It offers insights, strategies, and practical examples to help brands authentically engage with their consumers in ways that matter.

By harnessing the power of rituals, brands can reconnect with their consumers on a deeper level, transforming them from customers into advocates who see the brand as a meaningful part of their lives.

We invite you to understand the hidden patterns that are all around us; consider how rituals can enhance your brand strategy and join us in this exciting journey bringing brands closer to customers in a way that is both meaningful and enduring.



Kate Howe
Executive Director,
MSQ

Foreward from WARC

As media continues to fragment, trust in businesses fluctuates and brands battle for consumer attention, the struggle for marketers to find meaningful access into consumers' lives just keeps intensifying. But there might be a way to approach this entire issue differently, based on centuries old human behaviours. And those behaviours may reveal emotional access as well as a functional one. WARC Advisory and MSQ hypothesised that rituals could offer this access.

We sought to explore why consumers follow the rituals they do and what permission they give brands to participate with them, often frequently and over long periods of time. Combining data from a survey of 4,000 consumers, in-depth expert interviews and Freemavens' (an MSQ agency) extensive social media and Google Search insights analysis, we wanted to unlock the what, how and crucially, the why of rituals.

It quickly became clear that rituals provided fertile ground for brands. Not only was this a largely untapped area in marketing – at least with any intentionality – but also a vast window to understand customers better and gain better access into customers' lives. People tend to practise their rituals regularly – often daily – and once they start, those rituals become ingrained in our lives – many lasting for five years or more.

This compound effect isn't purely functional though. Although rituals rightly have to adapt to context – and consumer behaviours within that –

to retain their usefulness, the true hallmark of rituals are the emotional benefits and personal meaning they carry. Our data showed that people feel calm in the presence of a ritual but stressed in their absence and that emotional and physical well-being are core benefits.

There are possibilities too for brands to tap into and enhance experiences at both an individualised and collective level. Almost half of our survey respondents engage in rituals whilst at home by themselves and yet the biggest influence on developing personal rituals are family and friends. Freemavens unearthed eight ritual types and specific marketing opportunities which showed a range of individualised and collective behaviours.

The opportunities for brands are plentiful, but how do they gain permission to borrow this ritual access? Crucially, consumers must lead. Seventy two percent of consumers incorporate a specific brand into their rituals for reasons of familiarity, better experiences and convenience. Brands who actively observe customer behaviour, facilitate enhanced ritual experiences when customers allow and participate in those rituals as much or as little as the customer chooses, tend to win.

Brands grow in emotional value to consumers if they become part of their rituals. By growing a brand's emotional value, marketing meets meaning. That is how brands can effectively harness the power of rituals.



Imaad Ahmed
Head of Advisory,
EMEA & Americas



Uncovering the 'why' of human behaviour

At a fundamental level, rituals are a link to some of the most important motivations and drivers of human behaviour. Rituals have a remarkable power to shape our moods, identities and choices – including what we buy and the brands we choose.

Put simply, rituals are a succession of behaviours designed to induce an emotional transformation. The actions are intentionally performed in a fixed order whenever a particular situation occurs, and are driven more by personal meaning than practical benefits.

In marketing, rituals infuse emotion and meaning into a technology-driven culture that worships at the altar of automation and efficiency. The benefits of technology are undeniable. But they cannot substitute for a deeper understanding of consumers or more effective ways to engage – both essential at a time when brands often struggle to gain attention.

Rituals are by no means a cure for all that ails us or a solution to every marketing problem, but they are a critical piece of this two-sided puzzle.

Rituals are an investment in identity.

They reveal who we are as people, and offer marketers a window into our behaviour when we're not buying or thinking about a purchase. Whereas traditional marketing is focused on the what of consumer behaviour, and UX teams often investigate the how, rituals are able to uncover the why of human behaviour. The more marketers understand about these fundamental motivations and drivers of behaviour, the more emotion and meaning they can infuse into their brands.

Brands that truly understand rituals and their place in modern society have more opportunities to engage their customers and more access into their lives. Rituals allow brands to play in a broader range of moments, unleash deeper connections and generate longer relationships.

This is the challenge for today's marketers – to solve for the lack of meaning that stems from a lack of human understanding. Rituals are a vehicle to both understand people better and create more meaningful value for them. An opportunity for brands which demands a closer look.

Executive summary

1 Rituals are an affirmation of the self

Given the potentially rich unlock into human behaviour, psychologists and behavioural scientists are increasingly looking to add to what we already know about rituals from a cultural and historical perspective. Each perspective deepens the marketer's understanding of this fascinating window into human behaviour.

With insights from a range of experts and various sources of research, this chapter explores three principles of ritual behaviours to help marketers identify rituals and understand the role they play in the consumer's life.

Rituals:

- Are driven by personal meaning even when providing practical benefit
- Offer support for the individual in an atomised society
- Provide structure and control in a volatile environment
- Create meaning in a world obsessed with efficiency

2 Rituals do not occur in a vacuum

Rituals are constantly evolving in response to changes in our lives and the world around us.

One of the core functions of rituals is to provide a stabilising mechanism to counteract a variety of forces that contribute to an individual's sense of losing control. In fact, control, escape and structure are the top three benefits of rituals when we asked 4,000 consumers across Germany, France, UK and the US.

We explore the impact of four cultural forces on rituals:

- Declining faith in institutions
- The influence of social media on ritual discovery and sharing
- Shifting priorities in a post-pandemic economy
- Generational divides



3 The power of rituals lies in emotional transformation

Every ritual seeks an emotional shift – the purpose is to go from a less desirable emotional state to a more desirable one. This is what we mean by emotional transformation.

For brands, rituals offer a unique edge. As consumers explore rituals they resonate with, they generate vast amounts of search and social data. Analysing this data reveals the emotional drivers behind these rituals.

Freemavens (an MSQ agency) utilised their tool, Texture, to decode these facets and influences. **Texture analysed over 688,000 social data sources and 200 million search data points to identify eight distinct ritual types.** These ritual types revealed specific emotional outcomes and linked behaviours across categories, highlighting unique marketing opportunities.

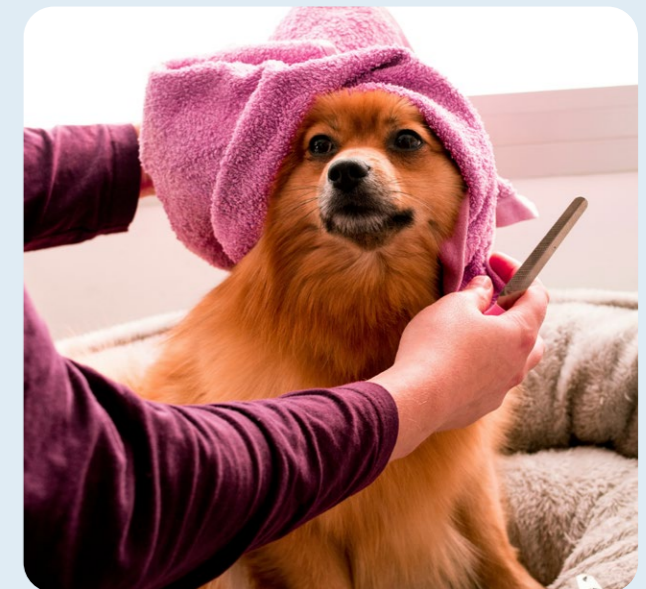
4 Any playbook must keep the consumer in charge

Consumers create their own rituals and decide whether and how to incorporate brands – not the other way around. A truly customer-centric approach is necessary to make the most out of this opportunity.

The advice? Observe, facilitate, participate.

This will enable marketers to approach rituals in a way that broadens the lens of the behaviour beyond the brand.

Brands are best advised not to try to force their way into rituals. A more holistic approach to customer understanding – the experiences they seek, what would support them, and if/when they may allow a brand into their rituals – are surer routes to taking the ritual opportunity.



CHAPTER 1

RITUALS AS AN AFFIRMATION OF THE SELF

Developing a set of guiding principles of rituals



Principles of rituals

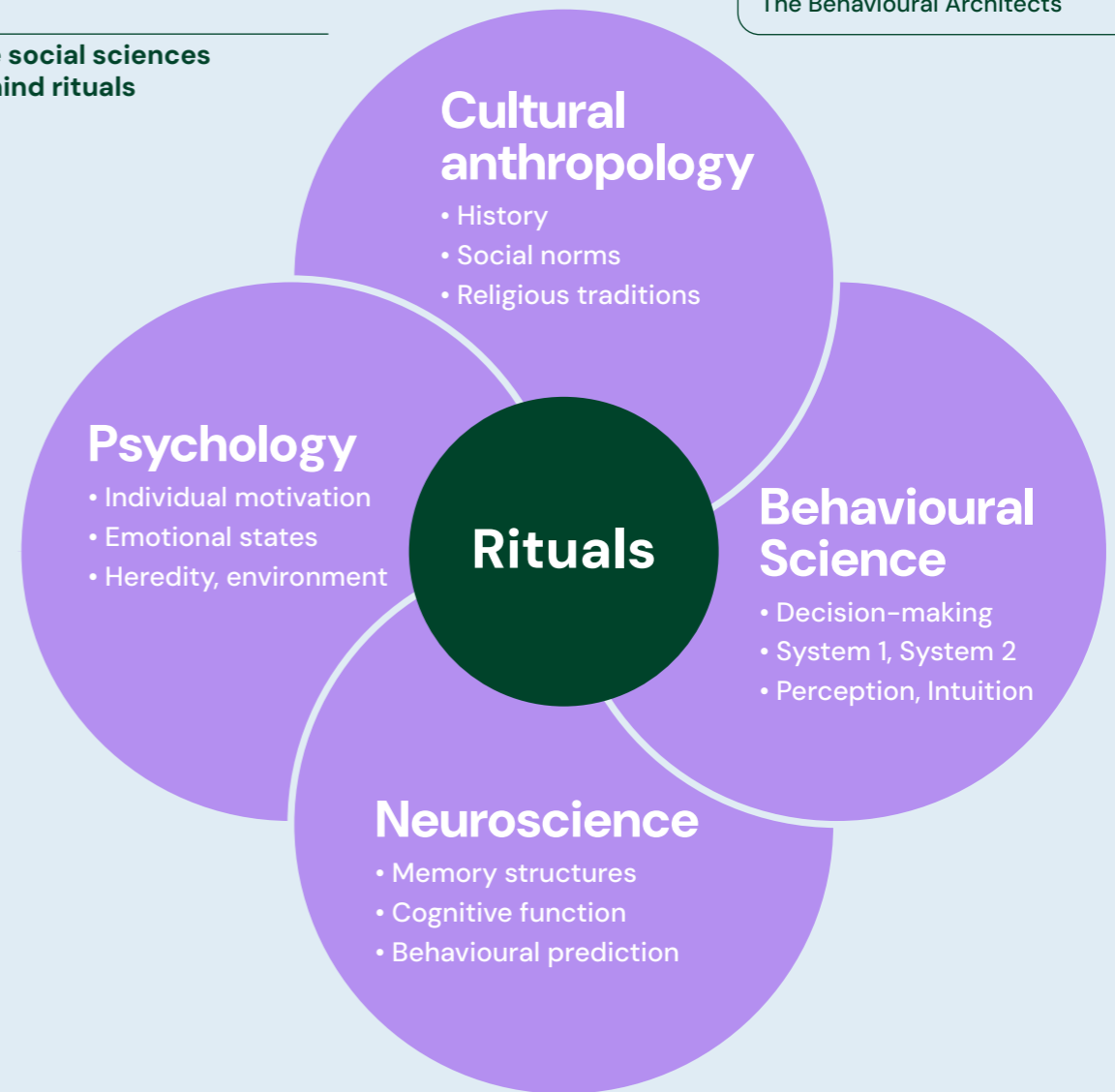
Cultural anthropologists have studied rituals and their impact on society for decades. More recently, psychologists and behavioural scientists have lent their interpretation of rituals from the point of view of individual behaviour. As rituals offer a window into consumer behaviours, understanding them unlocks opportunities for more meaningful brand building.

Based on commentary from our experts and data from WARC and MSQ's combined research, here are four principles to help marketers identify rituals and understand their role in the consumer's life:

1. Rituals are driven by personal meaning even when providing practical benefit
2. Rituals offer support for the individual in an atomised society
3. Rituals provide structure and control in a volatile environment
4. Rituals create meaning in a world obsessed with efficiency



The social sciences behind rituals



“Marketers must understand behavioural psychology and the outcomes that consumers are looking for. It’s important to make the distinction between whether the ritual regulates emotion, reduces anxiety or allows people to feel in control. Is it about enhancing their performance so they can pursue goals in life or are they seeking other psychological needs and outcomes?”

Sian Davies, Global Founder, The Behavioural Architects

PRINCIPLE #1

Rituals are driven by personal meaning even when providing practical benefit

“I wouldn’t be who I am without my rituals.” – Emma E, USA

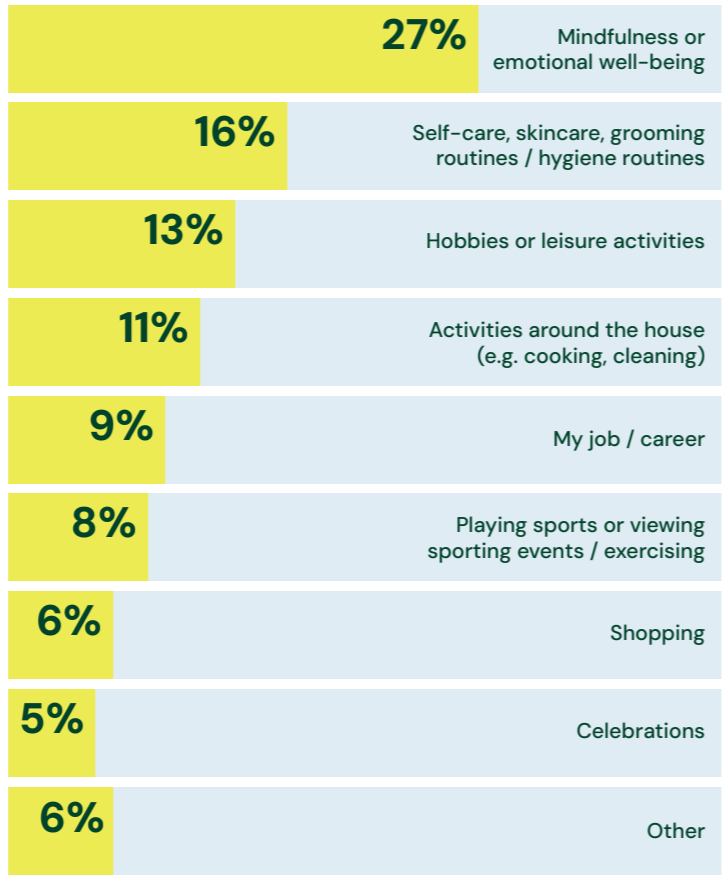
This sentiment captured in MSQ’s ethnography diaries speaks to a fundamental truth: Rituals are an affirmation of the self.

They are a core part of our identities as human beings. From our international survey, one in four people say that “creating the rules or beliefs for living my life” best describes the impact of their rituals, and nearly the same number agree that “rituals give my life purpose and meaning.” The meaning, intention and emotional outcomes associated with rituals distinguish them from habits and routines.

“Routines can be actions that we just need to do, like cleaning or making our bed. But rituals tend to have a greater sense of meaning and purpose to them. Habits look similar in some ways, in that they have repeated actions or repeated behaviours. But habits have little or no conscious thought and they are more automatic in the brain, whereas rituals will have a higher degree of intentional effort associated with them.”

Sian Davies, Global Founder, The Behavioural Architects

Rituals are most often connected to mindfulness and self-care



Q: Which activities is your most important ritual most closely associated with? Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

PRINCIPLE #2

Rituals offer support for the individual in an atomised society

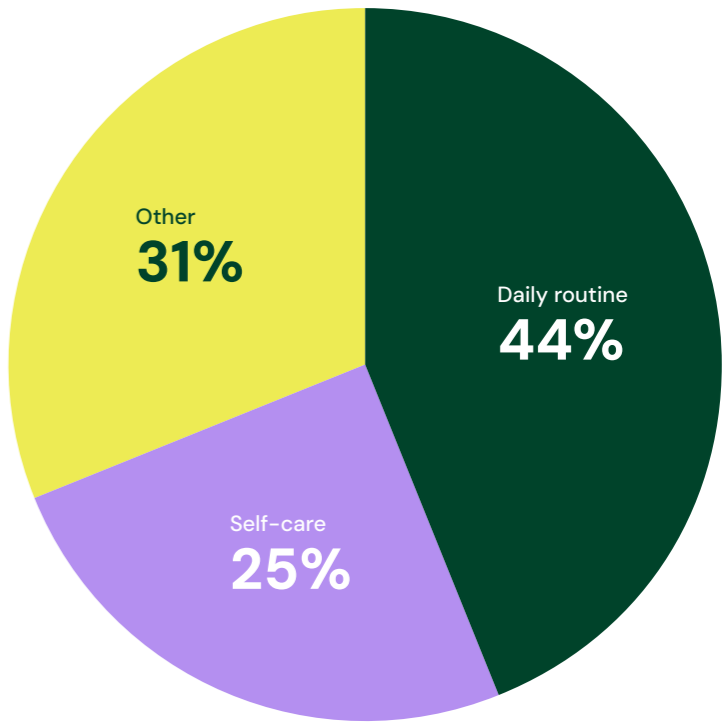
We normally think of rituals as something that individuals do to connect to others and create a sense of community, whether it’s through religion, culture, sports, or other shared experiences. While those rituals are just as important today, our data showed how often rituals are used to support the individual.

- 56% of rituals centre around personal care or deepening connections with others. Beyond being concentrated in our daily routines, these rituals are focused on nurturing ourselves and our relationships.
- We engage in rituals most often at home, and twice as often by ourselves than with friends or family. At the same time, 50% involve others in their rituals at least some of the time.
- Two thirds of consumers engage in their key rituals daily, and nearly half have had these rituals for more than five years.

Rituals’ constant presence and durability allow brands to play in a broader range of moments, unleash deeper connections and generate longer relationships.

Atomised society
Tendency for a society to be made up of a collection of self-interested and largely self-sufficient individuals, operating as separate “atoms”.

Rituals are concentrated in our daily routines and self-care



Q: What areas of your day-to-day life involve the most rituals? Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

PRINCIPLE #3

Rituals provide structure and control in a volatile environment

One of the core functions of rituals is to provide a stabilising mechanism to counteract the forces which may create an individual's sense of losing control. In fact, structure (33%), escape (32%) and control (31%) are the top three benefits of rituals.

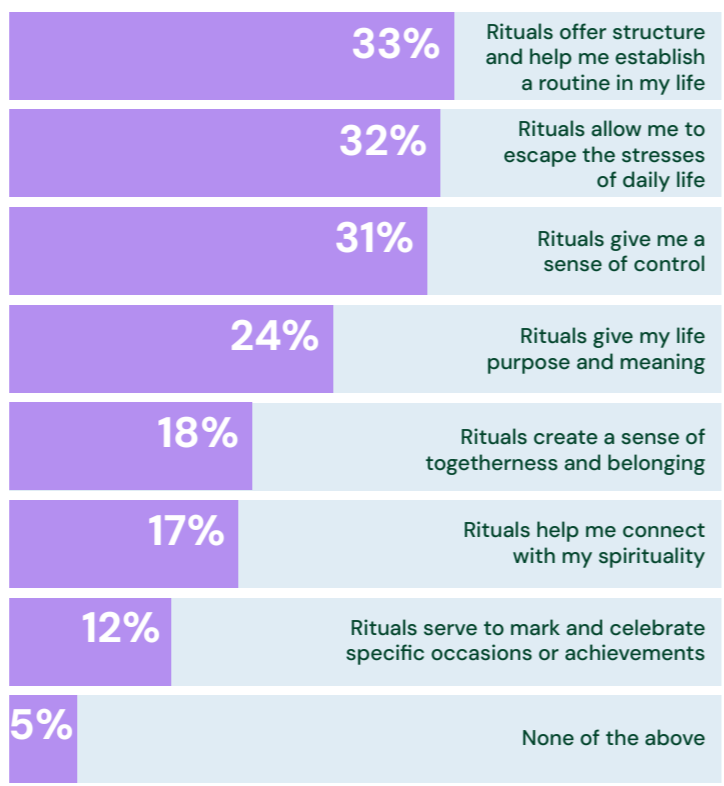
One way to understand the psychological and emotional benefits of rituals is to ask, "How would you feel without them?" From our survey of 4,000 consumers, it's striking to see the most popular feelings when consumers were asked about the absence of rituals:

- Stressed (14%)
- Anxious/frustrated (12%)
- Sad/unprepared (10%)
- Disconnected (9%)
- Alone (8%)

"So much of our lives is dictated by forces – economic, political, physiological, ecological – over which we have little control. Ritual, on the other hand, gives us all a powerful tool for helping to shape and reshape our lives."

Bradd Shore, author of *The Hidden Powers of Ritual: The Journey of a Lifetime*

Rituals offer structure, escape, control



Q: What are the main benefits you experience from participating in rituals? Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

PRINCIPLE #4

Rituals create meaning in a world obsessed with efficiency

In life, we are surrounded by a technology-driven culture that is hyperfocused on efficiency. Our lives are more efficient than ever, but we often struggle to achieve a balance with our mental and physical health, and overall happiness. Rituals can help fill these gaps. They often serve to enhance experiences and create the rules for living our lives.

➔ **35%** of CMOs state they monitor campaign efficiency "constantly"

In marketing, efficiency is by no means a bad thing. However, meaning and emotion in our marketing messages and customer experience can often be lost in the quest for endless automation and efficiency.

Consider:

- Spending on marketing technology – often implemented for efficiency gains – is predicted to increase 31% over the next 5 years
- CMOs recognise AI's ability to drive greater cost and time efficiencies as the technology's "biggest areas of impact"
- And yet, according to a [Hubspot survey of 1,350 US business professionals](#), the biggest challenge in using AI in Customer Service is maintaining a more personalised and human experience

Rituals enhance experiences and help create rules / beliefs for our lives



Q: What best describes how rituals impact your life? Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

Expert Viewpoints

“ Consumers have their own rituals and unique life stories. If you can highlight where your brand is a part of their story, then you’re not trying to pound into someone’s head why they should care about it. You’re reflecting the customer’s rituals and showing exactly how your brand authentically fits into their life. You soon become a no-brainer.”

John Starkey, President Family Care North America, Kimberly-Clark

“ ‘Emotional value’ is a term being adopted a lot right now in Chinese marketing. Customers are increasingly using this to distinguish between products of similar quality, because they want to be good to themselves and find greater happiness.”

Jelina Wan, General Manager, Mars Taiwan & Hong Kong

“ It’s common to look at behaviour and try finding the ‘A-ha’ moment – but an insight is really the truth that we haven’t yet discovered. It’s a puzzle that somebody solves and feels like a button that somebody presses in your heart or brain. As marketers, we must realise that there are things that we have not yet discovered; we must go deeper.”

Eli Velez, Managing Director, Partner Agencies & Superette, DoorDash

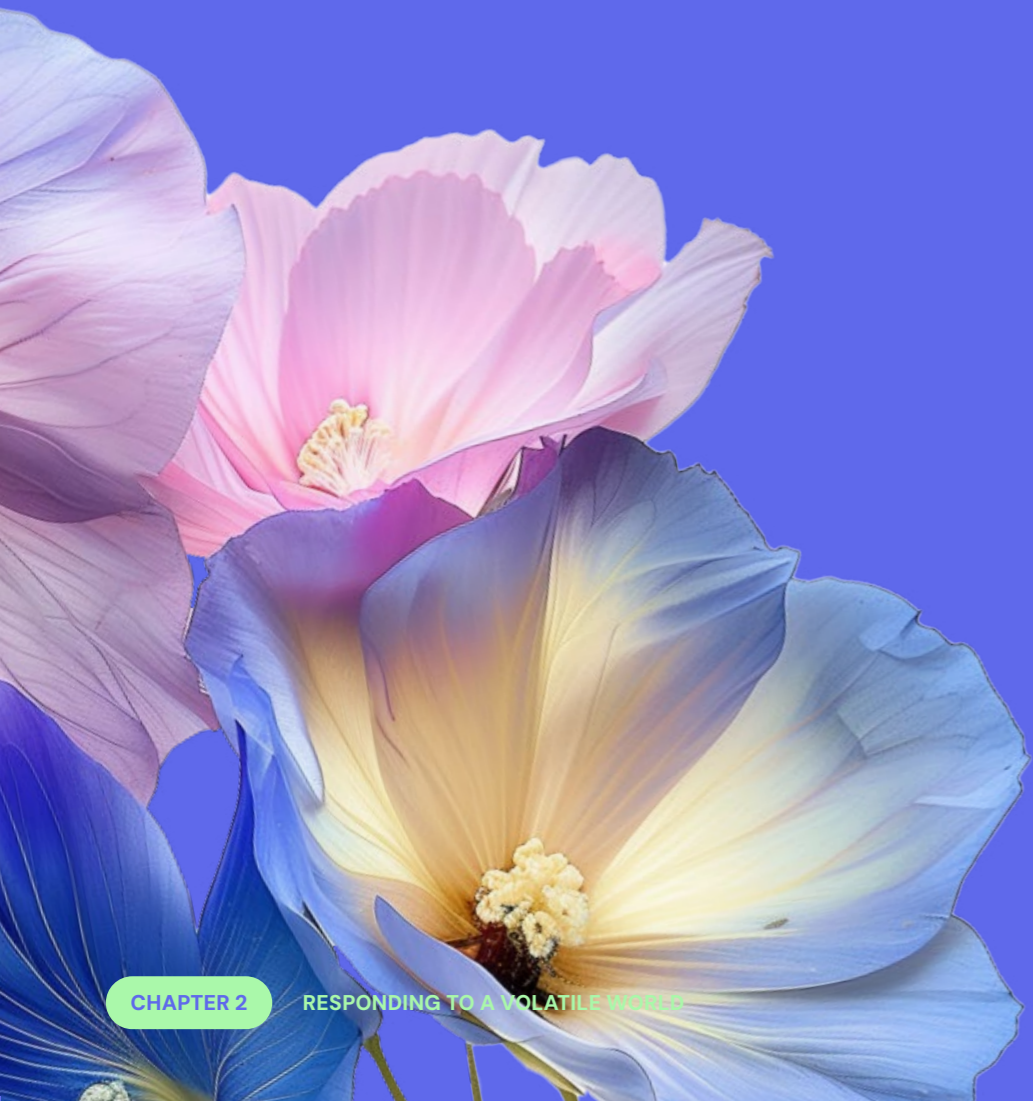




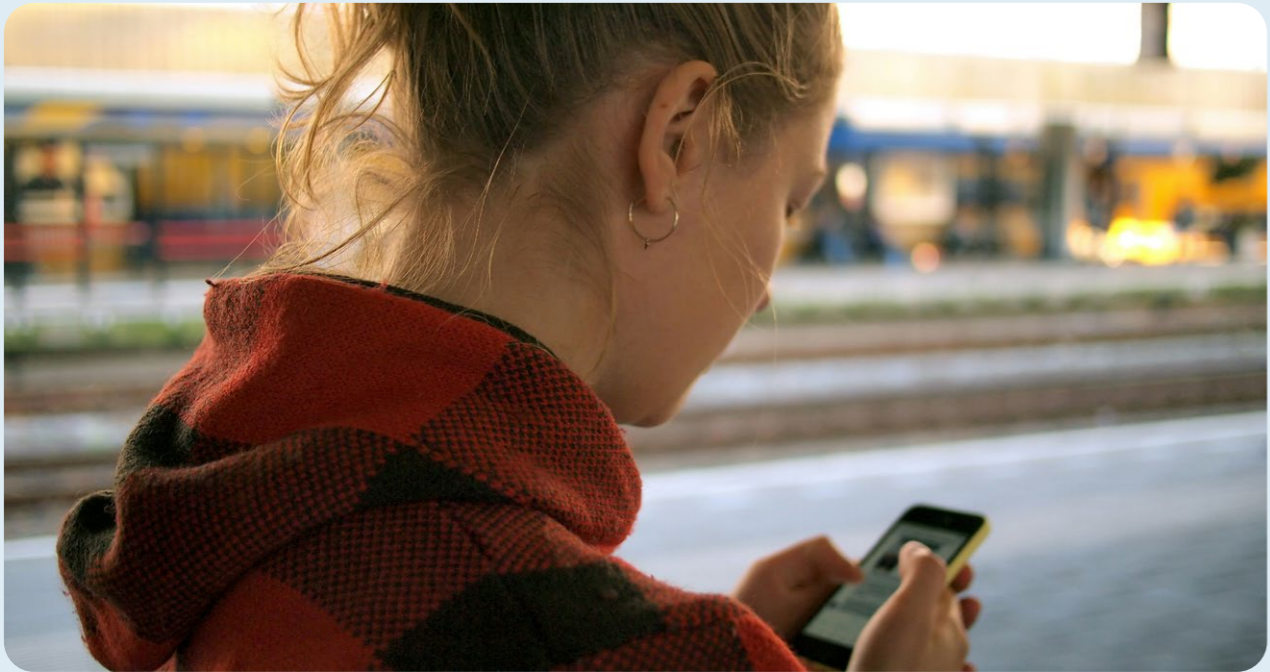
CHAPTER 2

RESPONDING TO A VOLATILE WORLD

Macro forces and trends
shaping our rituals



Macro forces and trends



Rituals do not occur in a vacuum. They constantly evolve in response to changing conditions within our lives and the world around us.

Today's world is increasingly chaotic and complex. We're living through wars, political turmoil, economic uncertainty, social unrest, and the lingering effects of a global pandemic. Using WARC's GEISTE framework, which delves into six major areas of influence shaping events across the globe, we see that each of these forces is having a significant impact on the development of rituals.

In this chapter we will examine the impact of four macro trends:

- Declining faith in institutions
- Influence of social media on ritual discovery
- Shifting priorities in the post-pandemic economy
- Generational divides

GEISTE'S six macro drivers

G overnment	Major geographical shift, government actions, policy decisions and regulation
E conomy	Macroeconomic trends affecting the global economy
I ndustry	New strategies, management philosophies and current thinking amongst businesses
S ociety	Evolving values, beliefs, creative ideas and behaviours reimagining society
T echnology	New technologies, innovations and creative implementations and usage
E nvironment	Environmental impact on business functions, investment and consumer lifestyles

Source: The GEISTE Report 2024: Discover the driving forces shaping the world (WARC).

TREND #1

Family and friends guide rituals as faith in institutions declines

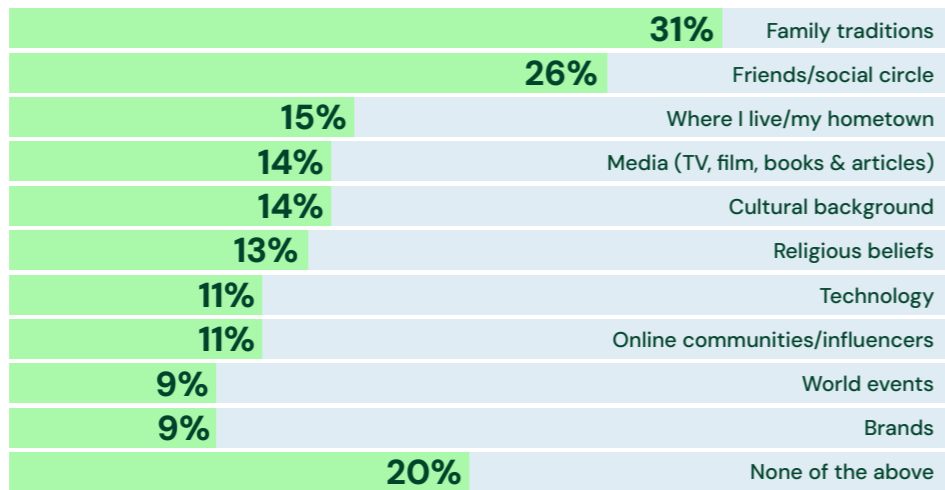
Historically, many of our belief systems and rules for living our lives stemmed from institutions like religion, government and news media. But as our faith in these institutions continues to decline, we increasingly look for other things (e.g. rituals) to provide direction, stability and control.

- According to [Pew Research](#), 22% of Americans trust the federal government to do what is right “just about always” (2%) or “most of the time” (21%).”
- As of 2023, three in ten U.S. adults said they had had no religious affiliation whatsoever, [according to an AP-NORC Poll](#). And countries across the globe are reporting similar trends.

- Trust in news media is on the decline globally, but varies greatly by country. Only 7% of people in the U.S. have a great deal of trust in the press, and 38% have none at all, [per Gallup](#).

Our data shows less influence on rituals from cultural background and religious beliefs, and greater influence from trusted sources like family traditions (31%) and friends (26%). That is a note of opportunity for brands. The influence of brands (9%) on setting rituals is currently low but there is opportunity for brands to play a more active role. Note that 72% of consumers incorporate a specific brand product/service into their rituals, mainly to bring a sense of familiarity, enhance the overall experience or provide convenience.

Rituals support the individual but can also be shaped by family, friends and social networks



Q: Who or what has influenced the development of your personal rituals?
Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

TREND #2

Technology shapes our participation, documentation, and sharing of rituals

The internet of things and the billions of connected devices we all carry with us, has reshaped every aspect of our lives. From mundane routines and arduous tasks, to human connection and rites of passage, there is nothing technology has not augmented, enhanced or totally transformed.

The same is true for rituals. In fact, 40% of our survey respondents stated that technology makes it easier to participate in or keep track of their rituals.

This is not new. Think of how the printing press allowed for widespread participation in religious rituals. How the telephone transformed rituals around one-to-one communication. Or how radio, television and film created countless new personal, familial, and cultural rituals across the globe.

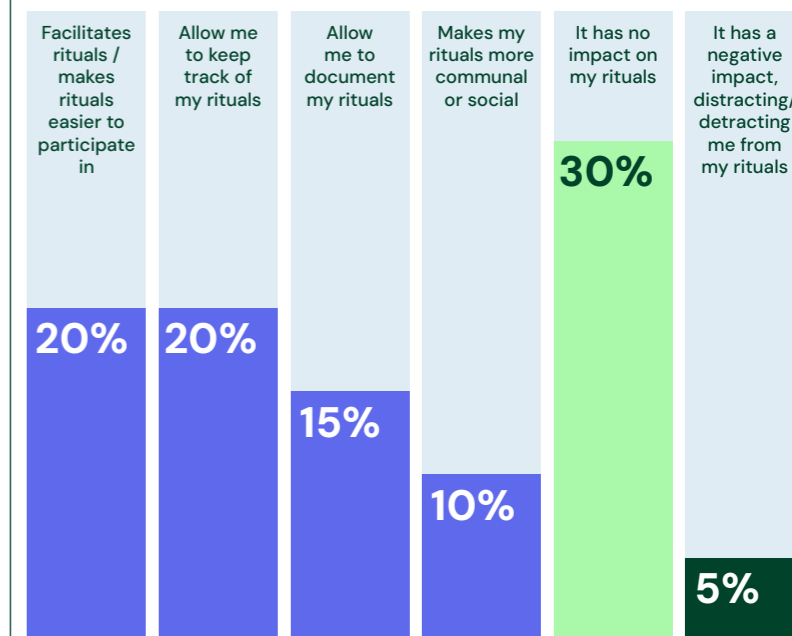
In a time when media captures the majority of our attention span, it is no surprise that the likes of Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are some of our main sources for sharing and discovery. And for many people, social media makes it easier to document their rituals (15%) or make them more social (10%).

When you couple this with how we use social media to discover brands and products, there is a powerful opportunity for marketers to create meaningful connections with people.

In a [global GWI study](#), when asked their reasons for using social media, 25% of Gen Zers cited finding products to purchase. This was consistent among Millennials (28%), Gen Xers (27%) and Boomers (25%) too.

This is, yet again, a good reminder that technology and media are not merely something we use or consume. They are the operating systems for our lives. And the more we understand how people incorporate them into daily life, the more likely we will be able to participate in the moments that really matter.

Technology powers and captures our rituals



Q: How does technology most impact how you practise the rituals in your life?
Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

TREND #3

Rituals respond to shifts in post-pandemic spending

Consumers continue to rebalance their priorities and spending habits in response to slowly dwindling inflation and higher cost of living in the post-pandemic economy.

In the U.S., major retailers are reporting more signs that shoppers are trading down in many CPG categories and increasing demand for private label products, while continuing to spend freely on select discretionary items.

McKinsey refers to this trend as “selective splurging,” noting in a report from earlier this year that consumer sentiment plateaued in early 2024, and that, “As has been the case for much of the past year, consumers are simultaneously looking for ways to

save and to splurge. Thirty-four percent of consumers said they intended to splurge, and among them, travel, dining out, and apparel were top of mind.”

This correlates to the category-specific trends we uncover in the next section, whereby we are seeing financial rituals that are about control, and reassurance, but also – occasionally – indulgence.

As spending patterns reflect the current economic reality, shopping rituals will adapt. Although saving may be one outcome, “selective splurging” is another. Brands who observe and respond to ritual behaviour around spending, will be able to identify where they can get permission to enhance people’s ritual experiences.

Expected spending over the next three months

- Intent to spend less
- Intent to spend the same
- Will spend more

Category	Intent to spend less	Intent to spend the same	Will spend more
Center-store/shelf-stable groceries	14%	68%	12%
Personal care products	14%	73%	14%
Household supplies	15%	71%	14%
Skin care and makeup	30%	57%	14%
Pet care services	21%	59%	19%
Alcoholic beverages	32%	55%	13%
Meal at a sit-down restaurant	35%	49%	16%
Apparel	37%	48%	15%
Food delivery from an app	41%	43%	16%
Hotel/resort stays	42%	40%	18%

Q: Over the next 3 months, do you expect that you will spend more, about the same, or less money on these categories than usual?
 Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding. McKinsey ConsumerWise Global Sentiment Survey, May 2024, n = 4,003.
 Source: McKinsey. An update on US consumer sentiment: Are consumers on the cusp of a shift? 2024.

TREND #4

New rituals form across generational lines

Every generation develops its own set of rituals. Millennial and Gen Z consumers have developed a whole new set of rituals around self-care, including journaling, meditation and new holistic approaches to skin care, health and fitness.

Trends like “work rebellion” and “treats culture” are often attributed to those younger generations. Of course, behaviours are influenced by specific priorities at particular life stages – for example, around health (see right), family, careers and so on. These, in turn, can spur people towards rituals.

But these trends may also reflect an entire population that continues to re-examine its priorities in the wake of the pandemic. Indeed, economists and culturists are debating whether a “YOLO is dead. Long live YOLO!” sentiment is growing, “YOLO” being the popular internet slang for “You only live once”.

In a culture defined by a “life’s too short” mentality, rituals are one way to grab moments of comfort or happiness whenever we can.

Top habits that people want to start in the next five years

Baby Boomers	
Limiting portion size	18%
Eating healthy	18%
Sleeping eight or more hours nightly	17%
Avoiding sugar	16%
Exercising regularly	16%

Generation X	
Eating healthy	23%
Sleeping eight or more hours nightly	23%
Limiting sugar	21%
Limiting portion size	20%
Going to the doctor annually	18%

Millennials	
Limiting sugar	21%
Sleeping eight or more hours nightly	21%
Eating sufficient fibre	20%
Meditating	20%
Going to the doctor annually	19%

Source: How Health Habits Change with Age (Lifeextension.com). Survey of 1,003 people.

Expert Viewpoints

“Rituals are a shared way of life among people who self-identify to a particular subscription because of who they are. They see the world a certain way, they have a certain language and shared ceremonies. The more temporal traditions stand the test of time because they are most fixed within our cultural subscription.”

Dr. Marcus Collins, Professor at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Author of *For the Culture*

“I don't think people realise the impact of politics and policies, nor of the adoption of technology and the media, which can add to ritualistic behaviour. Sports fandom is an example of this. These impact and influence behaviour and mindsets. People don't give this enough weight when it comes to marketing.”

Leila Fataar, Founder, CEO & CSO, Platform13

“We see new rituals spreading through social media rather than the top-down direction of authorities in our lives. Today, the creation of rituals is much more fluid and bottom-up in the way that they arise and take root in society and people's lives. They are more personal and individualised.”

Sian Davies, Global Founder, The Behavioural Architects

CHAPTER 3

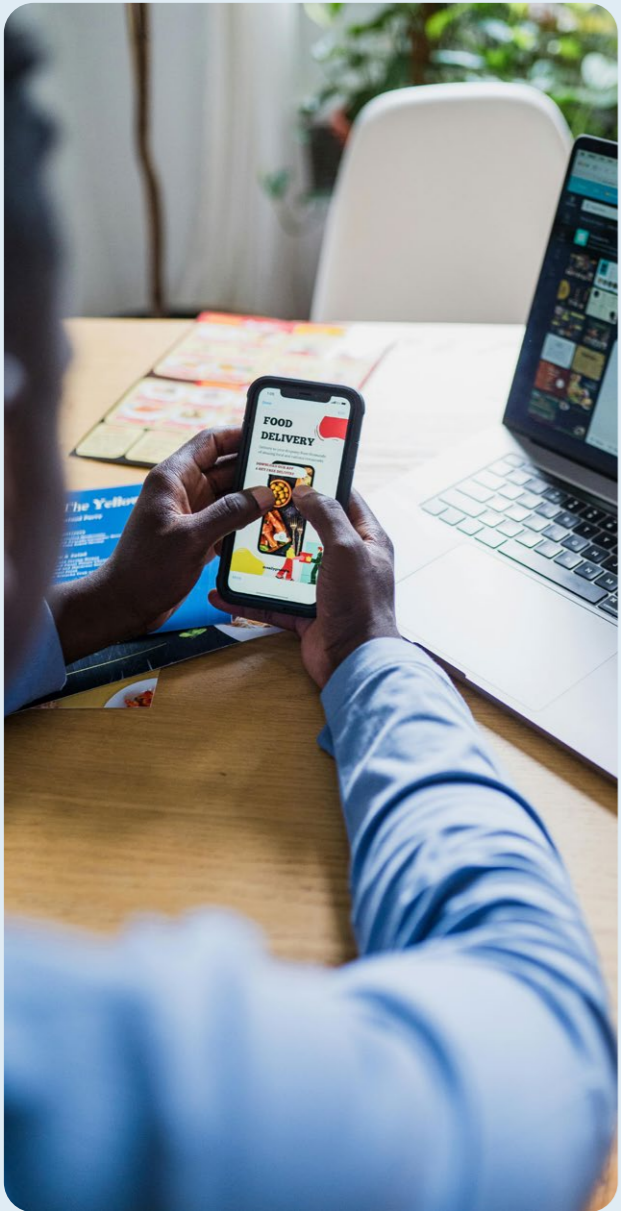
INDIVIDUAL FIRST, BRAND SECOND

31

Observe, Facilitate, Participate



The consumer is in charge



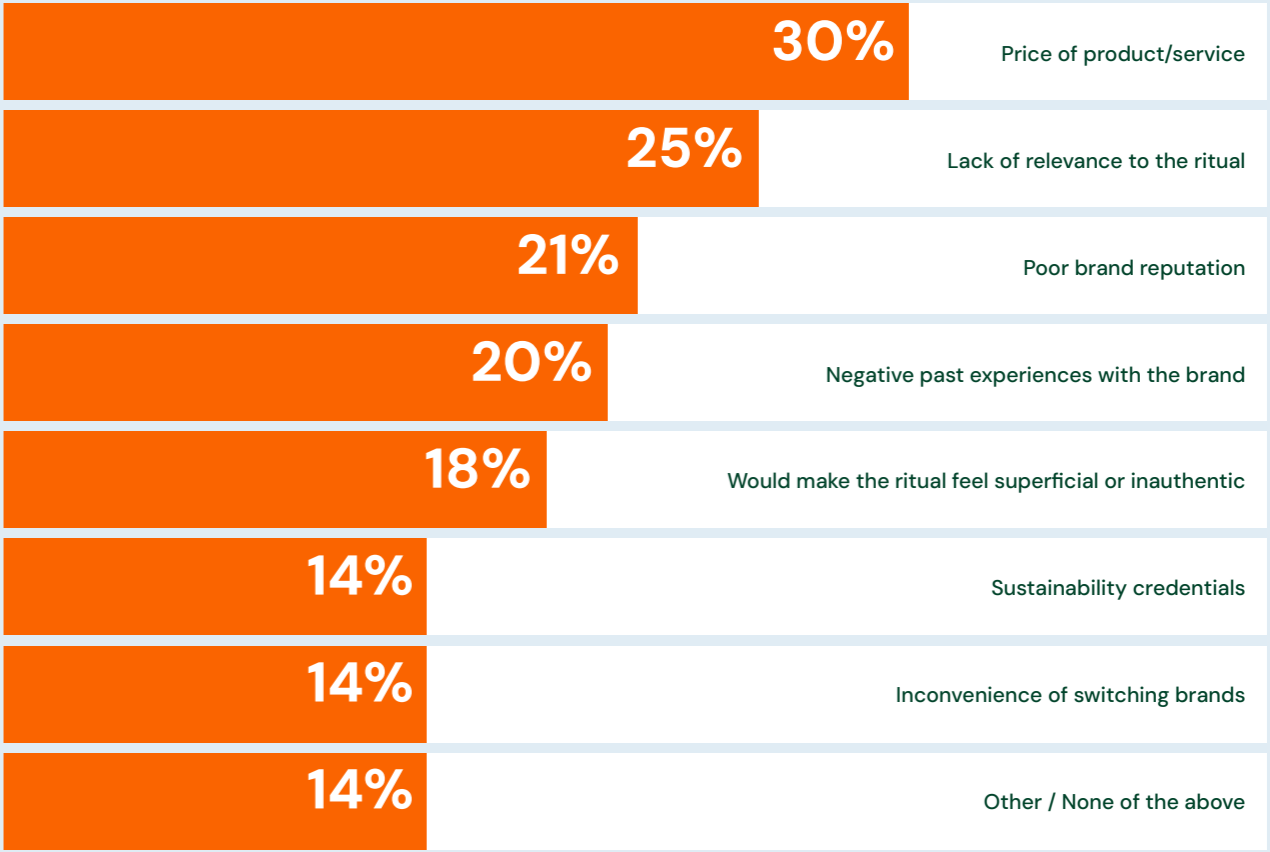
Bearing in mind the macro forces at play, whereas traditional marketing approaches consumer behaviour from the standpoint of the brand, rituals flip this script on its head. The consumer is in charge of creating their own personal rituals and deciding whether and how to incorporate brands – not the other way around.

When thinking about how to approach rituals, it is critical for marketers to remember: It's not about you. Brands that try to force rituals on consumers or create rituals where they don't naturally exist risk being seen as an uninvited guest. Fortunately, according to our survey, 70% of consumers are "somewhat" or "very" open to adopting new rituals into their lives.

“Ninety-nine percent of the time when brands try to create rituals, they feel out of place because they're trying to force something on a community that isn't interested in what they're trying to force. The biggest risk is what I call the 'Tourist in New York' syndrome. No matter how well you dress or if you try to hide it, you can always spot a tourist in New York. They have a different walk, a different rhythm. They seem out of place.”

Samrat Saran, Head of Client Solutions, Neuro-Insight US & Europe

Lack of relevance is a major barrier, second only to price



Q: What would stop you from incorporating a new brand into your ritual?
Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

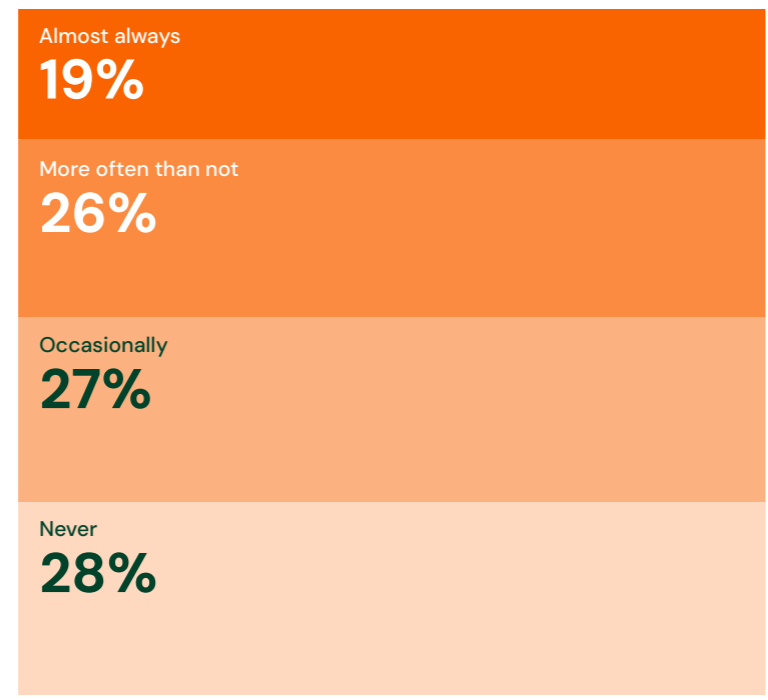
Consider the whole experience

Brands can use a three-tiered strategy to identify rituals and determine whether and how to support consumers' ritual experiences:

- 1. Observe:** Marketing has cracked the code on observing what we do – what we click on, watch, like, etc. But looking at all behaviour through the lens of “buying” confirms our biases toward transactions and fails to look deeper into why and how people make decisions throughout their lives. By observing behaviour through a broader lens, marketers will uncover the (sometimes hidden) patterns of the consumers they serve: What rituals do your customers already engage in? What are their true motivations? Which rituals could the brand support?
- 2. Facilitate:** The overarching goal should be to improve the customer's experience. That requires understanding what customers are looking for when they incorporate brands into their rituals, and then finding ways to add value in those areas. To maintain relevance and authenticity, the principles of customer-centricity are key.

- 3. Participate:** Brand participation in consumer rituals can take many different forms, as illustrated in the examples in chapter 4. There are also various creative ways to extend the life of a ritual involving brands through advertising and promotion. Permission to participate can only come from the consumer. And it can only come after the brand has observed and facilitated people's rituals.

72% of consumers incorporate brands into rituals at least some of the time



Q: How often do you intentionally incorporate a specific company's product or service into your rituals?
Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

Rituals unlock customer understanding and positive brand sentiment

Harnessing the power of rituals requires marketers to embrace a true customer-centric strategy. Customer-centricity is about meeting the emotions underpinning decision making, and stems from focusing on the consumer's time and life.

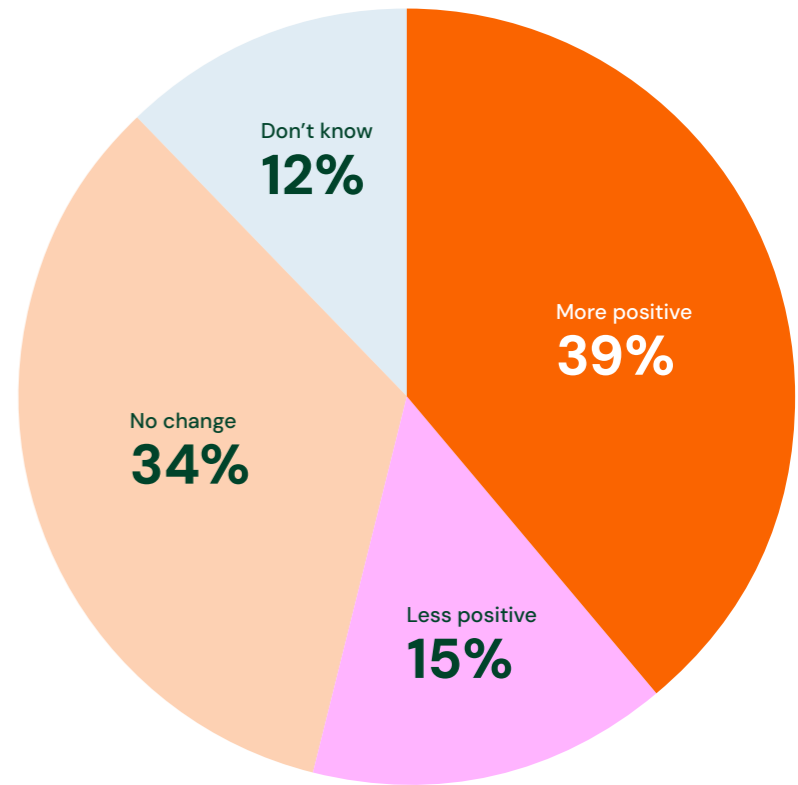
Rituals provide an opening for brands to become more relevant in the consumer's life when approached in this way. The ideal role of brands is as facilitator, not dictator of rituals.

For brands who facilitate rituals, opportunities arise to build positive sentiment. But this emanates from research and a rich understanding of consumer emotions, motivations and behaviours throughout the consumer journey.

“I wonder for Mars, what's the commercial way of talking about rituals, so that it isn't simply marketing fluff? If we can commercialise it then we can activate it throughout the consumer journey, and that will be the art of it. I'm very interested in the potential of rituals, but how to operationalise it is key.”

Matthew Graham, Chief Marketing Officer, Global Food & Nutrition, Mars

39% feel more positively toward brands that become a part of rituals



Q: How does a brand becoming a part of your ritual impact your feelings toward the brand?
Source: WARC x MSQ 2024 survey.

Connecting rituals to emotional outcomes

The main purpose of engaging in a ritual is to get from a less desirable emotional state to a more desirable one.

This process of emotional transformation is at the heart of why rituals are so powerful but also lays open a range of ritual types which marketers can tap into.

Leveraging emotional relevance in marketing is one of the most powerful ways to create lasting memories for consumers. Because rituals evoke strong emotions, understanding their inner workings presents a valuable opportunity for brands to create more empathetic and authentic marketing.

Although Freemavens' consumer research via their Texture tool was grounded in three specific categories (Personal Care, Finances and Alcoholic Beverages), their findings suggest opportunities for marketers in similar and adjacent categories. There are a variety of rituals which marketers can search out and cater for in pursuit of a more meaningful customer relationship.

How different ritual types transform our emotional states

Security Helping us feel safe	Anxious	Safe / Assured
Maintenance Ensuring our health and prosperity	Susceptible to change	Resilient
Celebration Making special occasions	Mundane	Exciting
Identity Helping us define who we are	Uncertain	Confident
Commencement Helping us start something, from a new day to new phase of life	End	Beginning
Connection Helping us feel connected to our social group	Isolation	Belonging
Enhancement Taking us from our normal self to our best self	Normal	Better / Best
Calming Helping us transition from public to private persona	High energy	Low energy

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Investigating curiosity and talkability around rituals

While some categories naturally lend themselves to ritualistic behaviour more than others, every product or service has unique aspects of consumer behaviour that can be associated with or evolve into rituals.

To explore this idea, three categories were selected – Personal Care, Alcoholic Beverages, and Finances – each representing a spectrum of emotional interest and engagement. The goal was to investigate the presence and role of rituals within each category. The deep understanding of

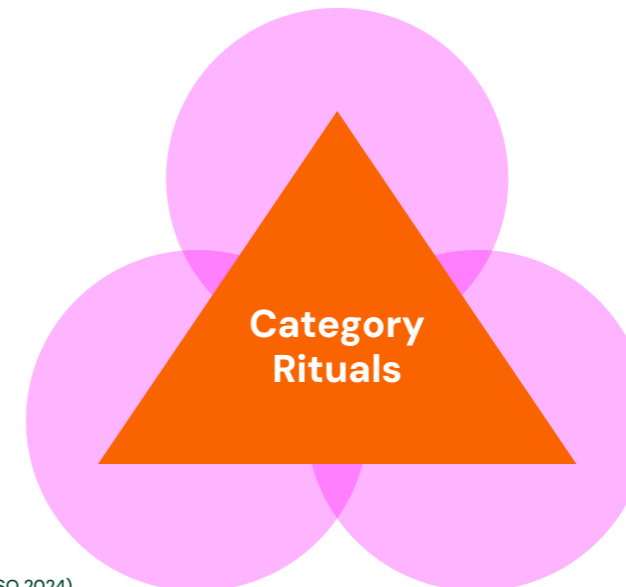
human behaviour delivered through Freemavens' Texture tool provided valuable context for this exploration.

Although Texture typically probes a wide range of unprompted digital data sets, this analysis specifically focused on social media and Google Search data. By examining these sources, Freemavens aimed to capture both the talkability and curiosity related to rituals, offering a deeper understanding of how rituals manifest and evolve in different consumer contexts.

Texture: here brands can weave seamlessly into consumer lives

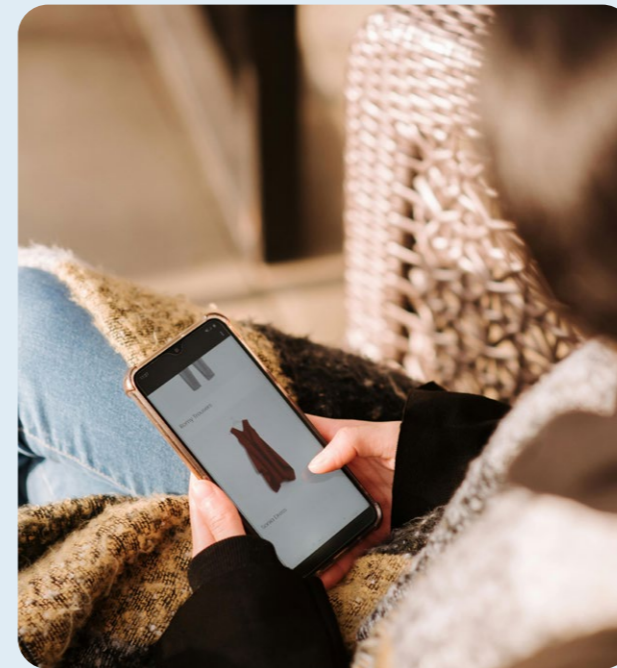
Conversation
 Aspects of culture driving attention and talkability

Connections
 Where moments of consumption/engagement intersect with category solutions



Curiosity
 Novelties piquing interest and driving people to Search

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).



Personal Care

This sector has an abundance of consumer rituals. We use personal care to prepare us for different stages of the day or week and for different situations we may encounter, meaning that ritualised behaviour is a natural fit. Cleansing rituals are also an important element of many cultures, and this is reflected in how easily we can ritualise personal care behaviours.

Nearly all personal care rituals are personal or private – something that one does as an individual to manage individual transitions and needs. While these rituals are increasingly shared on social media (a trend that accelerated during COVID lockdowns) their personal/private nature is an important justification for assessing consumer curiosity via Google Search data.

Alcoholic Beverages

Beverages play a key role in the facilitation of socialising, connection and belonging. As such, this is a category steeped in rituals. However, the role of alcohol in society is fast moving. Defining these new roles is critical to ensuring a brand's place in socialising behaviour.

Elaborate rules around toasting and gifting have developed in some cultures as a way of formalising social bonding, and while our analysis focused on consumers globally, who use the English language, we observe this cultural diversity in our data.

Finances

Finances tend to have fewer ritualised behaviours associated with them, as thinking around finances tends to be based on reason. As the transition to cashless societies has accelerated worldwide, we're presented with an interesting dichotomy, since money is simultaneously becoming a more abstract and intangible construct and a gateway to experiences and goods that retain deep emotional meaning to consumers.

Rituals attached to finances clearly carry a different level of emotional interest for consumers. They also tend to take place over longer timeframes, usually around quelling financial concerns through planning and monitoring. They can though also occasionally occur when allowing oneself to break free of everyday financial constraints.

Despite the ritualistic differences observed across the three selected categories, one resounding imperative unifies all three – to warrant a role in these rituals, brands need to understand the contrast between curiosity in search and conversation online to better assess the life stage or importance of rituals, and where there is permission to play.



CATEGORY TRENDS

Personal Care

Personal Care rituals help consumers to manage daily challenges and changes. These rituals are usually private and personal, but they are often shared publicly to create a sense of connection.

While some of these rituals are intuitively relatable, and not 'new news', what is interesting among most rituals displaying growth is the timescale across which they take place. As with many 'investment-based' acts, most rituals experiencing growth in Personal Care relate to small but frequent daily or weekly acts that compound into results in the long term. In contrast, the rituals that are more established or in decline are more aligned with less frequent or even 'one-off' acts such as 'New Year, New You' and 'Glow up'.

Of particular interest, are:

- Pamper Time**
 This "me-time" celebration ritual is gaining popularity worldwide, driven by consumers' need for self-assurance. This ritual will likely define the landscape of Personal Care for the next few years.
- New Year, New You**
 An established enhancement ritual that is trending in social conversation. Consumers are increasingly using New Year celebrations as a reset point in the year, following trends of self-actualisation on social media.

Rituals: Social Growth vs Search Growth



Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Personal Care

Marketing opportunity Commencement

Ritual Sunday Reset

This weekly ritual manifests during the weekend, especially on Sundays. The audience is heavily female, and their behaviours are private, enjoying some me-time away from the kids and family. While this ritual is linked to relaxation, it is mainly grounded on readiness and efficacy – two hours on a Sunday will save time over the week.

Brands can position their products or services as essential tools that enhance this Sunday ritual, offering solutions that streamline weekly planning, organisation, or self-care.

Marketing campaigns could emphasise how these products help women maximise their weekend downtime while preparing for the week ahead, blending the concepts of relaxation and productivity. By aligning with this ritual, brands can tap into the audience's need for both efficiency and personal rejuvenation, creating a strong emotional connection and reinforcing brand loyalty.

Behaviours

- 📍 Hair masks (-257% / +26%)
- 📍 Body oils (-38 / +23%)
- 📍 Use serums (+30% / +23%)
- 📍 Have a bath (+5% / +2%)
- 📍 Facemasks (+13% / -17%)

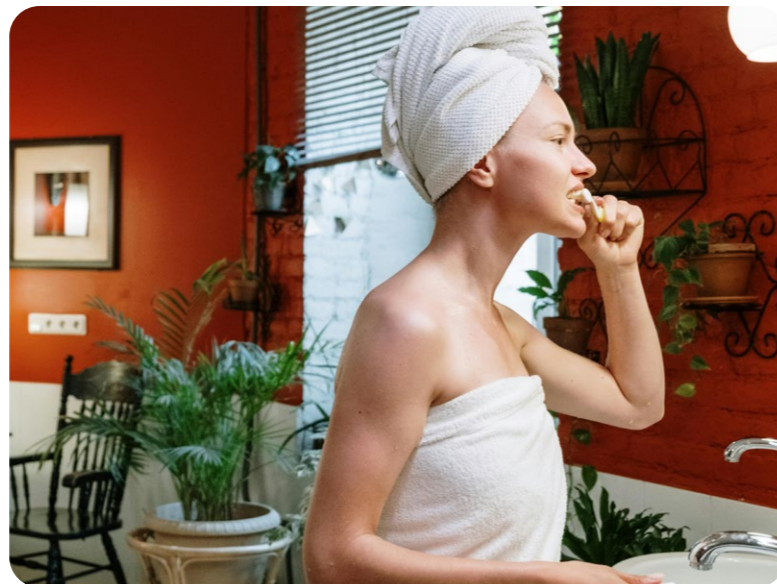
Social growth

+7%

Search growth

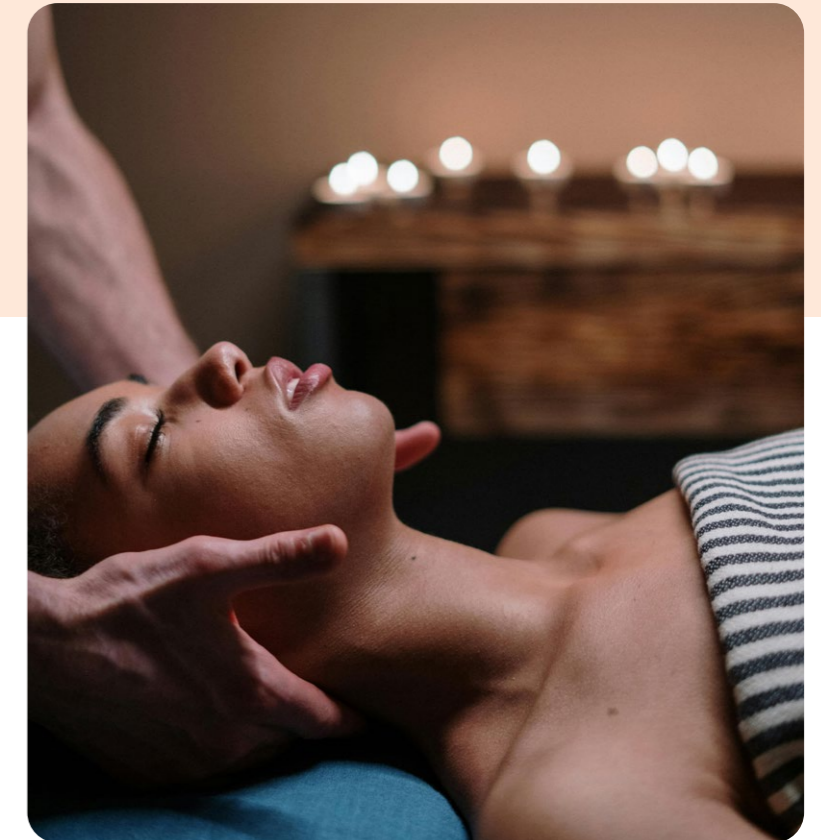
+12%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).



Marketing opportunity Celebration

Ritual Pamper Time



Behaviours

- 📍 Have a body treatment (+56% / +3%)
- 📍 Exfoliate your body (+38 / +7%)
- 📍 Mani-Pedi (-3% / +48%)
- 📍 Get a massage (-12% / +37%)
- 📍 Facial treatments (-32% / +12%)

Social growth

+5%

Search growth

+31%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Pamper Time may have many objectives in the mind of consumers, from boosting their self-esteem to giving themselves a treat or celebrating themselves. It's a time of indulgence that usually happens in the private sphere or with a few close friends, and it's mainly focused on physical appearance – going from their normal self to their special self.

This creates opportunities to craft products and campaigns that celebrate the transformative nature of pampering. Brands can emphasise the use of premium or trending ingredients that resonate with consumers in the pamper space, enhancing the appeal of their products as essential tools for these indulgent moments.

Additionally, offering limited-edition or luxury versions of products specifically designed for Pamper Time can attract consumers looking to elevate their self-care rituals. By creating content that taps into the emotional aspects of self-celebration and personal transformation, brands can further strengthen their connection with consumers during these moments.



CATEGORY TRENDS

Alcoholic Beverages

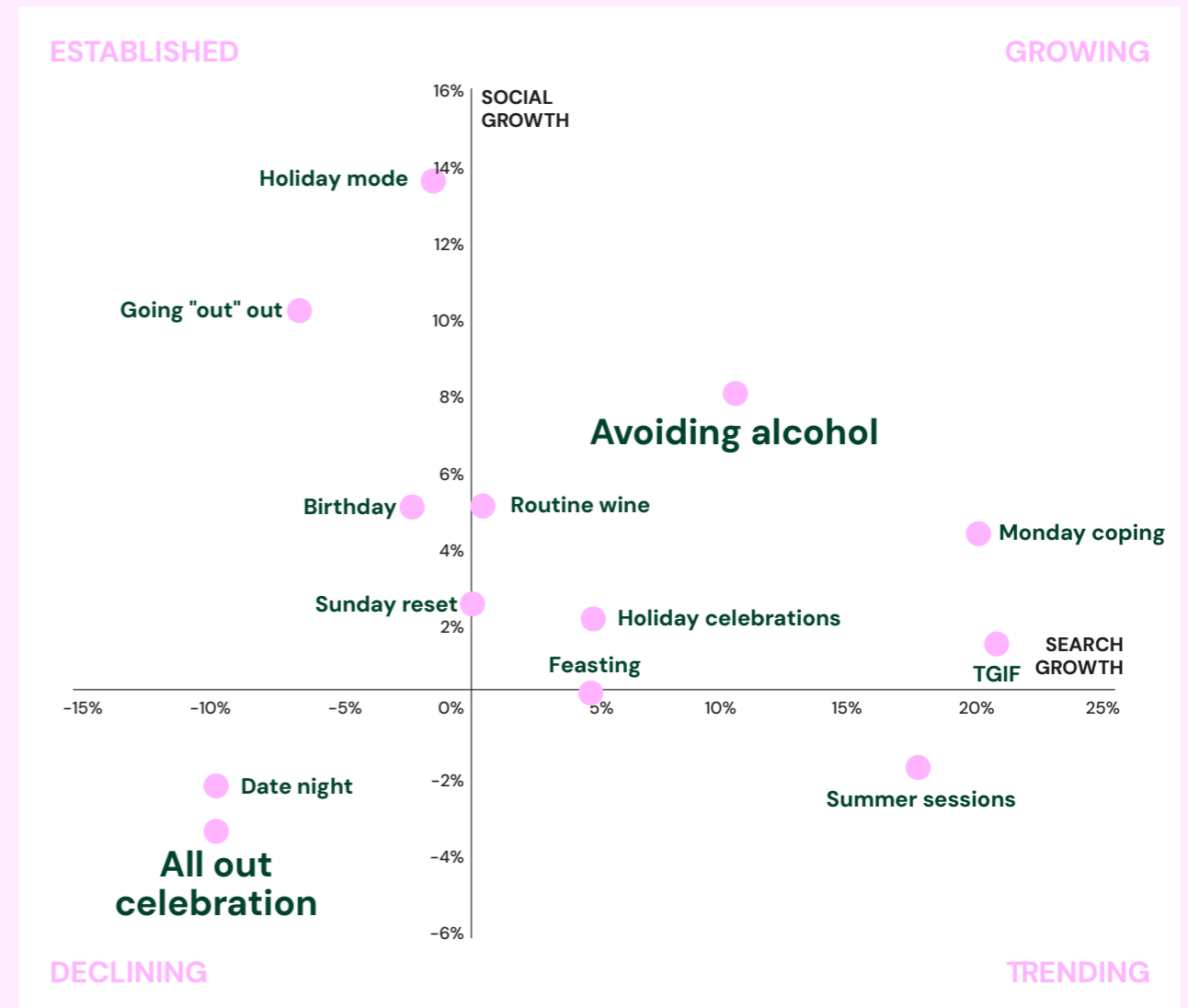
Alcohol rituals most often relate to an element of connection, even when indulging alone. These rituals often involve friends, family or partners, acting as a social bridge. Individual rituals offer connection to oneself either as part of a reward or as an act of mindfulness.

Our data also confirms the now well-established shift in mindset among younger generations, particularly Gen Z, who are consuming less alcohol on fewer occasions.

They tend to be more selective about when they choose to indulge, such as:

- Avoiding alcohol**
 A growing ritual – particularly driven by Gen Z – denoted by a surge in popularity of “Dry January” but also an increase in a continuous avoidance of alcohol.
- All-out celebrations**
 Occasions of revelry, which could happen quite frequently, are falling out of fashion. The growth in non-alcohol and low-alcohol beverages speaks to the desire for finding joy in moderation and celebrating rituals and occasions that are slower-paced.

Rituals: Social Growth vs Search Growth



Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Alcoholic Beverages

Marketing opportunity
Calming

Ritual
Monday Coping



- Behaviours**
- 📍 Drink after work (+6% / +20%)
 - 📍 Managing anxiety (+38% / -1%)
 - 📍 Night cap (+4% / -0%)
 - 📍 Lonely indulgence (-9% / NA)

More holistically among those who still consume alcohol, there's a noticeable post-COVID behaviour: they are increasingly opting for a drink after work, especially on days they commute to the office. The start of the work week often brings added tension and stress, which many address by unwinding with a drink, typically accompanied by other forms of relaxation like watching a TV show, reading a book, or taking a bath. The growing discussion around managing anxiety suggests that this post-COVID return to the office is driving an increased need for relaxation early in the week.

This opens up possibilities for brands to present their products as the ideal companions for these after-work rituals, whether through promoting relaxing beverages, pairing drinks with stress-relief activities, or even introducing low-alcohol or wellness-enhancing options that cater to the need for relaxation without overindulgence. Brands can also tap into the narrative of self-care and mental wellness, offering solutions that help consumers transition smoothly into the work-week.

Social growth
+4%

Search growth
+19%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Marketing opportunity
Calming

Ritual
Holiday Mode

As holidays and tourism rebound after the pandemic years, consumers are sharing how they celebrate the start of their relaxation time, such as enjoying a beer at the airport or a margarita at the beach. While they are more inclined to indulge when transitioning from work mode to holiday mode, they tend to reduce their alcohol consumption as the holiday progresses, often opting for lower-alcohol or non-alcoholic alternatives.

Brands can position mood-enhancing, alcohol-free beverages as ideal choices for consumers looking to maintain their well-being while still enjoying their vacation. Brands can emphasise the benefits of these alternatives, from relaxation and stress relief to boosting cognitive performance, appealing to health-conscious travellers who want to savour their holiday without overindulgence. Additionally, marketing campaigns can focus on the evolving nature of holiday indulgence, offering products that align with consumers' desire for balance and well-being throughout their vacation.

- Behaviours**
- 📍 Holiday Vacation Mood (+8% / -1%)
 - 📍 Outdoor drinking (-3% / -7%)
 - 📍 Date night (-9% / -12%)
 - 📍 Daytime drinking (+11% / NA)

Social growth
+2%

Search growth
-6%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).





CATEGORY TRENDS

Finances

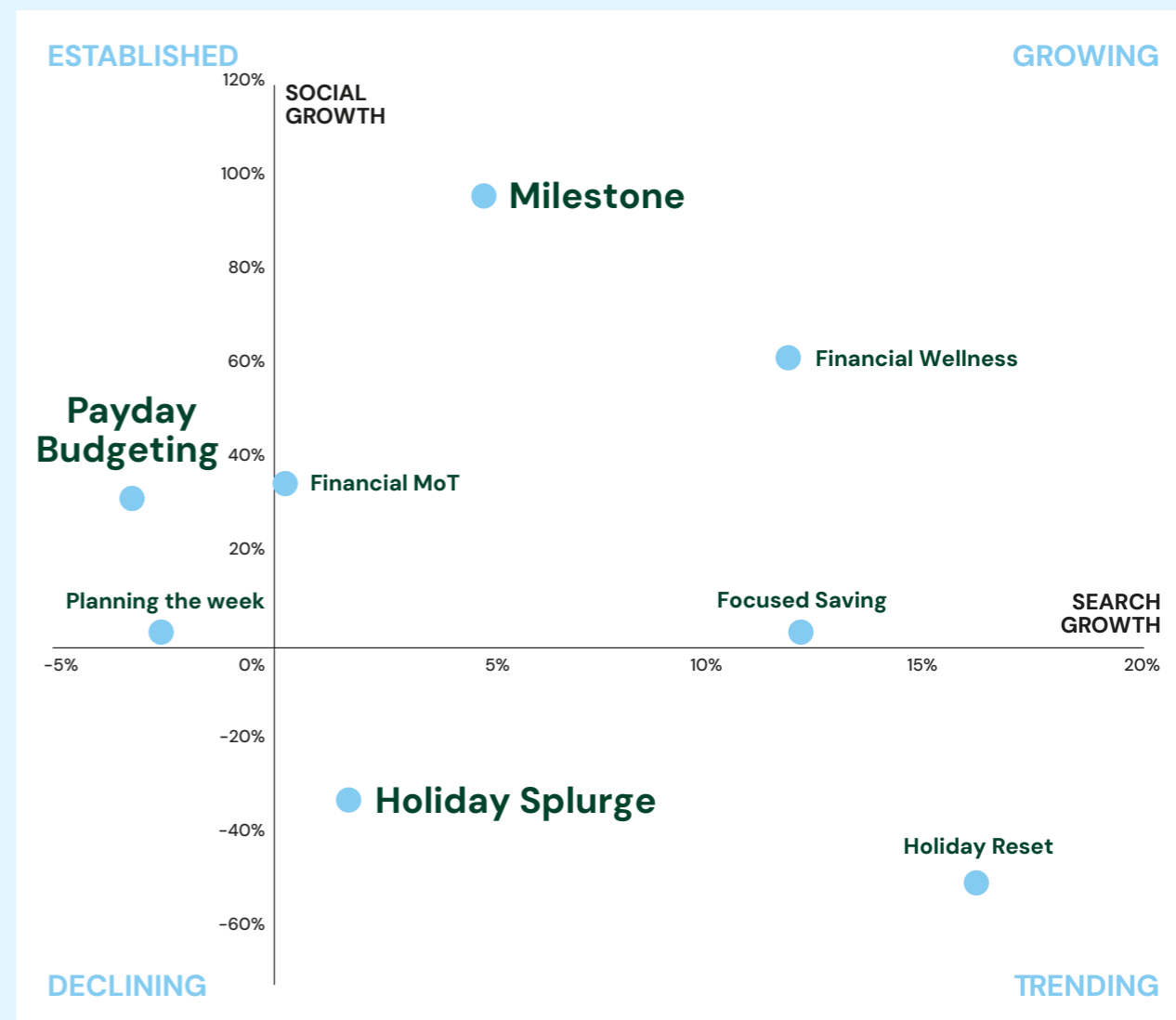
Financial rituals are about control, reassurance and – occasionally – indulgence. In the sphere of finances and in today's context of fiscal stress, rituals are often about long-term rational planning to reduce anxiety about potential future events; except when they are not.

Some rituals are all about deciding to be deliberately oblivious to the long-term, live in the moment and deal with the consequences later. Consumers are displaying both conscientiousness and abandon in equal extremes and in equal amounts.

Some rituals that show this:

- **Payday budgeting**
An increasingly normalised ritual, which provides peace of mind and a sense of control to the average consumer.
- **Holiday Splurge**
A trending expression of release, where consumers prioritise immediate satisfaction at the expense of... their expenses.

Rituals: Social Growth vs Search Growth



Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Finances

Marketing opportunity
Commencement

Ritual Holiday Reset

This ritual is reflected in behaviours of control, such as reassessing credit and spending, and establishing new budgets, particularly when the holiday season ends in September and January. These actions give consumers a sense of preparedness, providing reassurance and a feeling of control as they transition back to their regular routines.

This shift presents valuable avenues for brands to align their products and services with these consumer behaviours. By offering tools and resources that aid in financial planning, budgeting, and organisation, brands can position themselves as essential partners in helping consumers regain control and confidence as they transition back to their regular routines. Moreover, brands can develop campaigns that focus on themes of renewal and fresh beginnings, appealing to consumers eager to restore balance and order after the holiday season.

Behaviours

- 📌 Track Your Expenses (+29% / 0%)
- 📌 Set Money Away For Traveling (-2% / -14%)
- 📌 Debt Tracking (-99% / +7%)
- 📌 Track Your Spending (-99% / 0%)

Social growth

-51%

Search growth

+16%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).



Marketing opportunity
Maintenance

Ritual Milestone



The “Milestone” ritual involves consumers transitioning from everyday financial habits to saving and preparing for significant life events, such as buying a house or getting married. These milestones represent moments where people prioritise their long-term health and prosperity, making focused financial decisions with a view toward a secure and prosperous future.

This recurring behaviour, where consumers shift from immediate spending to intentional saving for major life events, is a crucial part of their financial journey. These life moments are seen as opportunities to invest in their future, often giving them a sense of accomplishment and security.

Brands can craft their products and services as essential tools for these milestone moments, helping consumers feel supported in their pursuit of long-term goals. Highlighting the satisfaction and peace of mind that comes from making smart decisions for the future can align with the positive emotions associated with achieving these milestones. Additionally, brands can create messaging that celebrates the idea of planning for the future, aligning with the sense of security and achievement that comes from reaching a significant milestone. This approach can strengthen brand loyalty by associating the brand with consumers’ long-term financial health and prosperity.

Behaviours

- 📌 Budgeting for a wedding (+301% / -15%)
- 📌 Plan for Retirement (+46% / -5%)
- 📌 Buy a house (+14% / -22%)
- 📌 College loans (+1% / -38%)

Social growth

+96%

Search growth

+5%

Source: Freemavens – Texture tool (MSQ 2024).

Freemavens: Closing perspective

Rituals are how people find meaning in the world. They're not just habits – they're deeply emotional touch points. They present a powerful opportunity to become an embedded part of your customers' lives.

In our ever-evolving world, shifting needs are constantly reshaping the rituals that define how people live, shape and connect. So how can your brand tap into this transformative power?

Start by identifying the key moments where your brand can bring deeper emotional value. Which rituals exist within your category? What behaviours, routines, or experiences are tied to your brand?

Here's where the real magic happens: understanding your brand's role in turning everyday moments into meaningful rituals. How can your product elevate a simple action into a transformative experience?

This is where genuine loyalty is built – at the intersection of emotional resonance and daily life.

Failing to embed your brand into these rituals leaves space for your competitors. The time is now to unlock the untapped potential of consumer rituals, or risk being left behind in a marketplace where emotional connection is the ultimate currency.



Expert Viewpoints

“As for the ritual of booking the trip, we want to play a more important part with our partners – the hotel, apartments, villas, and so forth. They deliver the actual experience. We want to be a big part of the booking ritual, right from the point that you start dreaming about the trip to the point that you want to book a hotel or even change your accommodation or location mid-way. We want to be the bookers that handle the booking and the trip to make sure it is a life-changing and positive experience for the traveller.”

Natalie Wills, VP, Brand, Booking.com

“Budgets are challenging, and growth is harder to achieve, but as a marketer, you can never trump the power of insights. If you don't know what problem you're solving (and why that's important to someone) then you might as well not bother. Marketing's job is to remind, and not to convince. Insight to me is really where the magic lies.”

Ellesha Kirby, Global Executive in Consumer Health and Beauty; previously Global Head, Skin Health & Beauty and Design, Kenvue

“When I think about joy it comes back to our purpose as a brand, which is to inspire everyone to add their own flavour of fun. We call this our 'spice' – a sort of attitude that promotes everyone being their true self when they're with their crew. In rituals and socialising, one way that this manifests is through the choice of moderation, and we're really proud of the work that we've done. We've delivered a series of campaigns over the last few years from our 'Enjoy Slow' campaign with the artist Bree Runway to the launch of Captain Morgan O.O.”

Samori Gambrah, Global Brand Director, Captain Morgan, Diageo



CHAPTER 4

TRANSLATING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

How brands can break
the mould with rituals



Breaking new ground

Campaigns built entirely around rituals are few and far between. The opportunity therefore to optimise a brand's marketing impact around ritual behaviour is largely untapped.

Nevertheless, some brands have incorporated certain aspects of rituals, either directly or indirectly, into their campaign strategy or messaging.

What can we learn from the past? And how can it inspire more brands to break the mould on rituals?



Are you #ReindeerReady?



Healthy Results

➊ Reindeer Ready resulted in a 4% increase in brand love and 2.2% sales growth.

➋ All told, McDonald's gave away 560,000 carrot sticks – impressive for a product that made up only 0.01% of total system sales.

What was the marketing problem?

McDonald's began by reframing the marketing problem from "how can we sell more products" to "how can our brand be more relevant at a time that matters to the business (i.e. Christmas)." Searching for ways the brand could play a more emotional role during the holiday, the fast-food chain conducted a "festive audit" of its menu and discovered that one of its unsung items – carrot sticks – already played such a role.

How to optimise ritual behaviour

Tapping into the tradition in some parts of the globe of children leaving out carrots as snacks for Santa's reindeer on Christmas Eve, McDonald's embarked on a five-year, multichannel campaign to embed this ritual into the culture and brand ethos, to great effect. The moral of the story? Widen the behavioural lens beyond the brand. Look for ways to tap into existing rituals in the culture, as well as evidence of any primary or secondary connections of those rituals to the product / brand.

Read the full case study here: [McDonald's Are you #ReindeerReady?](#)



Breaking new ground

There are times when brands have to look deep within their own DNA for evidence of hidden rituals – previously unexplored ways people interact with the product on a primal level.

Two good examples of this are campaigns from The Guardian and KFC.

Paper Tiger

Print subscriptions jumped 11% and annual revenue increased 4%.

THE GUARDIAN

Joy of Print

What was the marketing problem?

The Guardian was suffering big losses caused by the decline of print sales and advertising revenue. A traditional campaign message was not enough to stem the tide. It needed to unearth a more powerful, emotional theme.

Could a modern-day ritual exist beneath the surface of something seemingly passé as a print newspaper in the digital world?

The answer was a resounding yes.

How to optimise ritual behaviour

The Guardian's readers consistently talked about the newspaper's role as not merely part of their routines but an emotional, ritualistic experience of absorbing news in a way that cannot be replicated by staring at a screen.

The Guardian elevated the tactile nature of newspapers and the morning rituals that this enhances in the "Joy of Print" campaign which took playful jabs at the digital world.



Read the full case study here: [The Guardian: Joy of Print](#)

KFC

That's Finger Lickin' Good



What was the marketing problem?

Although Colonel Sanders reigned over KFC's US advertising for years, he wasn't resonating with the customer base that frequents fast-food restaurants the most: millennials.

KFC discovered that millennials enjoyed the brand's fried chicken so much that they would typically lick their fingers and talk to their food, demonstrating a level of unbridled enthusiasm that could elevate an ordinary meal into a ritual experience.

How to optimise ritual behaviour

KFC didn't explicitly namecheck this behaviour as a ritual, but to any loyal fans of the brand, many would be able to relate to these private moments of hedonistic and ritualistic consumption.

Now, all the brand had to do was make licking fingers and talking to food socially acceptable in a memorable campaign.

Brands, take note: Sometimes, a ritual is hiding right under your nose (or fingers). A picture is worth a thousand words.

Read the full case study here: [KFC: That's Finger Lickin' Good](#)

Licking the competition

Millennial visits to KFC increased by 6 percentage points, resulting in a \$212.9m forecasted sales swing.

Origins of famous brand rituals

Marketers who seek to create rituals, take note: The fact that so few rituals have become inexorably tied to brands reflects how difficult it is to embed these behaviours into the culture.

A select few brands had rituals built into their customer experience from the start. They include:

- **Starbucks**, which invented a new lexicon for coffee and requires customers to go through a naming ritual each time they order.
- **SoulCycle**, which helped create a new fitness category built around entertainment and turned a stationary bike workout into a communal ritual experience.

Others, like **Oreo**, **Guinness**, **Corona** and **Jeep**, have made rituals involving their brands famous in advertising and promotion through the years, although the rituals themselves often fell into their laps due to some combination of luck, timing, observation and hard work.



Oreo "Twist, Lick & Dunk"

Nabisco reflected the natural instincts of Oreo consumers to twist (initially, then later lick, and dunk) the distinctive cookie for nearly a century. "Twist" headlines and images appeared in ads dating back to the 1920s, while "lick" arrived 30 years later. In the 1990s, the "dunk" behaviour was immortalised in ads and later extended into a commercial gaming enterprise in the 2010s.



Corona lime wedge

Popular myths include the idea that lime was initially used to keep flies from crawling in the mouth of the bottle. But the more likely explanation, according to Samrat Saran, ex-AB InBev, was that the acidity of the lime was used to counteract the "skunky" odour of the clear glass bottle when exposed to UV light. It turned out to also add refreshing flavour and became popularised in the culture as a way to enhance the overall drinking experience.



Guinness pour

The unique Guinness "two-part pour" dates back to the 1930s, when Guinness hired mathematician Michael Ash to solve the convoluted process in which the beer was poured from two different types of casks. Guinness celebrated the new pouring method during the launch of its Nitro stout beer in 1959 and has since featured the ritual in campaigns with slogans such as "There's no time like Guinness time" and "Good things come to those who wait."



Jeep Wave

Chrysler has made the most of this tradition, which began during World War II, among Jeep owners who acknowledge each other on the road with a friendly nod or wave. The Jeep Wave is now featured in official licensed merchandised as part of the automaker's loyalty program to award discounts and other perks to participating Jeep owners.

Next steps for marketers



1. Frame the opportunity

Rituals play an important role in our everyday lives – and the ones that count most last for a long time.

Nearly two-thirds of all consumers engage in their key rituals daily, and half have had these rituals for more than five years.

This directly translates into an opportunity for marketers by creating more mental availability in an attention scarce landscape; opening up more access and entry points into a wider range of moments in consumers' lives; and by generating more opportunities to build value over the long term.

Next step: Understand ritual behaviours – from both prompted and unprompted data sources – to frame the business opportunity powerfully and get buy-in for ritual exploration and activation across the organisation.

2. Identify individual and collective possibilities

Rituals are a tool that we use to support our own individual needs and to connect with others.

We frequently associate rituals with communal activities, such as a religious service or sporting event. Yet rituals are just as commonly used to support the individual.

We engage in rituals most often at home, and twice as often by ourselves than with friends or family. At the same time, 50% involve others in their rituals at least some of the time. Rituals operate both inwardly and outwardly. The full scope of ritual opportunity is broad.

Next step: Explore the range of possibilities for your brand(s). Think about whether they would be best suited to supporting an individualised ritual or enhancing a collective experience.

3. Understand the macro influence on human motivations

Economic and cultural forces, social media influence and generational attitude shifts all impact ritual behaviours.

As faith in institutions has declined, family traditions (31%) and social circle (26%) have a far greater impact on the development of rituals than other factors, including brands (9%). And while rituals are a more natural behaviour for some brands than others, every category has some aspect of consumer behaviour that may become associated with a ritual. These human motivations though are shaped by the macro context.

That is where the data and insight generating power of rituals can come to the fore. Understanding nuances in consumer behaviour more clearly – and in many cases, category agnostically – is where the opportunity lies for brands.

Next step: Consider how macro forces are affecting attitudes and behaviours across your customer journey, and what customers are doing in response. Explore emergent ritual behaviours that you could enhance and own.

4. Observe, facilitate, participate

There are many ways to tap into rituals.

The golden rule is that consumers create their own rituals and decide when and how to incorporate brands, not the other way around. But here's the good news:

- 70% of consumers are very or somewhat open to adopting new rituals
- 72% incorporate brands into rituals at least some of the time
- 39% feel more positively toward brands that become part of their rituals

Next step: Study and understand what ritual behaviours might exist currently amongst your customers and how your brand(s) could facilitate and support them. There may be opportunities to create a ritual but proceed with caution: always make it relevant and authentic, never forced.



Who we are



MSQ is a next generation creative, technology and media company, helping brands get closer to customers. It's one of the world's fastest-growing marketing groups, offering flexibility, choice and transparency to clients. Clients include Unilever, Vodafone, The AA, Vitality, Coca-Cola and Zalando.

MSQ's agencies incorporate Brave Spark (creative production studio), Elmwood (branding & design), Freemavens (research & insights), MMT (web & digital product development), Miri Growth (mobile marketing), Smarts (PR and content), Stein IAS (B2B marketing), The Gate (creative and CRM), Walk-In Media (full-service media), 26 (full-service digital), MSQ S+E (sports and entertainment), MSQ Sustain (sustainability creative and consultancy) and M3 Labs (end-to-end production services). Clients can work with an MSQ agency individually, or with a joined-up team designed specifically around their needs.

Over 1,200 people work at MSQ across 13 global offices. Unique to an international group of its scale and reach, almost 100 senior employees are shareholders in the group. In 2023 MSQ became a certified B Corp, meaning the group meets a number of social and environmental standards covering five key impact areas of governance, environment, workers, community and customers.

For more information contact:

Tamsin James

Chief Marketing Officer, MSQ

tamsin.james@msqpartners.com

msqpartners.com

WARC | Advisory

At WARC, our purpose is to save the world from ineffective marketing by putting evidence at the heart of every marketing decision.

We believe that effective marketing is based on facts and not opinions.

Since 1985, we've brought confidence to marketing decisions through the most trusted research, case studies, best practice, data and inspiration.

Today, we help 75,000+ marketers across 100+ countries. Our clients include the world's leading brands, advertising and media agencies, media owners, research companies and universities – including the top-five largest agency groups and top-five largest advertisers in the world.

Learn more about **WARC Advisory** [here](#).

For more information on bespoke advisory projects, please contact imaad.ahmed@warc.com.





msq WARC | Advisory