Consumption rituals relating to food and drink: A review and research agenda

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Abstract

Rituals are common in relation to consumption of food and drink, and are related to psychosocial benefits such as social bonding, affective change, and enhanced consumer perceptions. However, theoretical understanding of food and drink consumption rituals, and empirical examination of their effects and mechanisms of action, is limited. In this literature review we show a need for greater theoretical understanding of these rituals, and especially mechanisms linking ritual performance to outcomes. Such understanding would be greatly enhanced by a holistic model of consumption ritual and the development of an instrument that can be used to study different aspects of such rituals, both of which are currently lacking. We also highlight specific research questions regarding the cognitive, social, and affective outcomes of ritual consumption of food and drink, and the affective and cognitive-behavioural mechanisms that might precede them. We provide suggestions regarding the research paradigms and methods that might suit such questions, and encourage research along these lines of inquiry.

Keywords: rituals; food; drinks; consumer, perceptions; behaviours, literature review; research agenda
1. Introduction

From the small-scale and personal, such as preparing tea or coffee in the morning, to wider, collective actions, such as annual festive meals, rituals are present in many consumption experiences of eating and drinking (Askegaard & Madsen, 1998; Douglas, 1972; Jones, 2007; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). These behaviours occur across time periods, cultures, and sectors of society. Some rituals might be seen as relatively mundane, such as drinking tea or coffee, while others are usually acknowledged to have more elevated meanings or associations, such as meals at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Indeed, rituals are traditionally studied from the perspective of religion, mythology, and/or the sacred (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry Jr., 1989; Bell, 1992; Matthews, 2017).

Intersections between food and ritual, including food as a sacred or symbolic good, are addressed by authors in several disciplines (e.g., Fox, 2003; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007), with food being identified as not only a source of physiological sustenance but as a vehicle for personal, social, and spiritual meanings (Harris, 1998; Lupton, 1994; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2002). Fischler (1980, p. 937) comments that “man feeds not only on proteins, fats, carbohydrates, but also on symbols, myths, fantasies.” The different foods on a Thanksgiving or Christmas table are ritually procured, prepared, and eaten (e.g., Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), and so too are birthday cakes (Fox, 2003; Rossano, 2012); business meetings are often conducted over lunch (Fox, 2003); and drinking alcohol is often conducted as a ritualistic behaviour with peers (Treise, Wolburg, & Otnes, 1999). In each of these scenarios, the consumption of food and drink is conducted for more than a functional purpose; it conveys symbolic meaning regarding individuals and/or social groups. As such, consumption rituals are
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important not only for their relevance to everyday life, but also for the insights they afford regarding the role of meaning in understanding of rituals per se.

Links between beverage consumption and ritual are made explicit in the form of the Japanese tea ceremony (Anderson, 1987) and Turkish coffee culture and traditions, the latter highlighted by UNESCO as an ‘intangible cultural heritage’. The preparation of Turkish coffee involves “several and elaborated steps and skills” (UNESCO, 2013, p. 4), is performed in a specific way using specialised equipment, and is a significant aspect of social interaction in Turkish culture, thereby exhibiting similarities to rituals drawn from other domains (Belk et al., 1989). Consumption of coffee by connoisseurs is described by Quintão et al. (2017, p. 484) as “ritualistic pursuit of leisure”, and indeed these authors highlight how such consumption is related not only to outcomes of social connection but also social distinction in the form of specialist interest or taste (see also Samoggia & Riedel, 2018).

In their experimental paper, Vohs et al. (2013) indicated the positive effects that ritual behaviours can have on perceptions of food and drink consumption. Beyond this, rituals around food and drink have received rather little attention from psychological and experimental perspectives. This review therefore draws on wider literature regarding rituals in order to identify opportunities for theoretical and empirically testable psychological research on rituals relating to food and drink. Such study is valuable for enhanced understanding of consumption experiences and consumer behaviour relating to food (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Marshall, 2005; Moisio, Arnould, & Price, 2004; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), which remains understudied (Meiselman, 2013).

This literature review focuses on consumption rituals, with a view to better understanding what types of rituals might enhance consumption experiences of food and drink, how, and to
what end. In so doing, we first examine definitions of rituals. We then move on to consider frameworks of consumption rituals, including typologies, components, and the role of agency in such rituals. We discuss the cognitive, social, and affective outcomes generated by rituals; and the affective, cognitive, and behavioural mechanisms through which these outcomes might occur. Finally, we discuss potential ways forward in order to integrate these areas of research and to address unanswered research questions, including the need for a ritual framework that clarifies the constituent components of consumption ritual in a concise and accessible way. In each section we consider rituals in general, narrowing down to consumption rituals and highlighting gaps in knowledge regarding rituals around food and drink.

Given the relative lack of experimental and theoretical research on ritual within the food and drink consumption domain, we draw here on literature from other fields where necessary in order to illustrate relevant consumption concepts; as such, this is not a comprehensive literature review of rituals per se (see Hobson et al., 2018, for a review on that topic from a psychological perspective), or of cultural and sociological practices around food and drink, but rather an illustrative review of how extant literature can benefit research on consumption rituals relating to food and drink specifically, and where further empirical research and theoretical modelling is required.

2. **Definition of rituals**

The academic literature provides multiple definitions of ritual, with a number of researchers each contributing different properties judged to be necessary for a ritual behaviour. One explanation for this may be, as noted above, the long history of study of ritual from a religious perspective (Belk et al., 1989; Hobson et al., 2018). When considered as distinct from such contexts, the constituent parts of ritual, and thus a generally agreed-upon definition, become
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clearer: a fixed sequence of actions that convey symbolic, rather than functional, meaning, and are formal and repetitive in nature (Belk et al., 1989; Fox, 2003; Rook, 1985; Rossano, 2012; Visser, 1991). In this section we discuss literature from authors who focus on defining ritual through various necessary qualities, often in opposition to other, non-ritual behaviours.

Belk et al. (1989) define ritual as an aspect of the sacred, which need not be limited to religiosity but instead pertains to that which is rarefied, or in opposition to the ‘profane’ or everyday. Ritual is also different from mere habit or routine; the two are repetitive, but rituals have more fixed and formal constituent actions, make use of artifacts and symbolism, and result in higher engagement and affective response (Neale, Mizerski & Lee, 2008; Rook, 1985). For example, when celebrating a birthday, one might participate in a birthday cake ritual comprising several ordered steps: being presented with a cake, upon which candles are placed and lit; ‘Happy Birthday’ is sung; after which, one blows out the candles and makes a secret wish, before eating the cake (see Rossano, 2012; Vohs et al., 2013). Fox (2003) observes that the order of food consumption during a meal relates strongly to ritual; for example, eating savoury foods before a sweet dessert in a traditional Western meal. Deviating from these set pattern of behaviours subverts the ritual; for example, eating dessert at the start of a meal is considered unusual and incorrect, even though it would be eaten later anyway.

The illogicality of such a response highlights the “causal opacity” of rituals (Kapitány & Nielsen, 2015, p. 13); that is, they do not appear to have functional necessity or significance. The birthday cake ritual, or the consumption of different dishes within a meal in a certain order, is not necessary to the act of eating per se. Rather, these rituals convey symbolic meaning about the context of the consumption ritual, including the individuals and objects involved (Belk et al., 1989; Fischler, 1988; Fox, 2003). The ritual of singing, and lighting and blowing out candles on
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a cake, conveys meaning regarding celebrating one’s birthday, and positive hopes for the year ahead, that differentiates a functional cake from a symbolic celebration cake. Recent work by Vohs et al. (2013), in which individuals were asked to make ritual gestures before consumption, also draws into question the extent to which symbolism or meaning must always be part of ritual; some rituals may not have functional significant, but equally their symbolic meaning might not always be obvious either. As such, the consumption ritual of birthday cake is easily recognisable, especially to those in the Western world, but the steps involved in consumption rituals for more everyday food and drink experiences are unclear.

3. Frameworks to describe consumption rituals

Theoretical understanding of consumption ritual has developed in a granular manner, with little development of holistic or integrated models that examine ritual as a product of constituent parts. The frameworks that attempt such integration focus on classifying types of rituals, their outcomes, and proposed mechanisms linking the two, but as can be seen in Table 1, rarely do the frameworks address all three topics simultaneously. Table 1 lists key examples of these frameworks, which are examined in further detail below and supported by examples of food and drink consumption rituals from available literature.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

3.1. Typologies of rituals

Ritual typologies focus on categories or types of ritual. As can be seen in the second column of Table 1, literature focusing on descriptions and typologies of ritual behaviours and their outcomes provides informative perspectives on what kinds of rituals exist and how they are
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constructed; in particular, their scale, surrounding context, stage in the consumption process, and level of personal involvement. These concepts are explored further below.

3.1.1. Ritual scale. A first typology of rituals is based on the scale at which different types of rituals occur, from the individual through to group and societal level (Gainer, 1995; Neale et al., 2008; Rook, 1985). Consumption of food and drink relates to rituals at the personal, family, and small group level, particularly with regard to “household rituals” and “mealtimes” as noted by Rook (1985, p. 254). Rook’s (1985) typological framework of ritual scale is broad rather than deep; it enables study of the commonalities between rituals from very different domains of human behaviour, but offers little insight into how consumption rituals in a certain context might be categorised; for example, those relating to food and drink, or even to a specific food and drink category, such as rituals of wine tasting.

3.1.2. Ritual context. Rituals can also be typologised by focusing on the kinds of rituals that occur within a specific context. For example, both Marshall (2005) and Fiese, Foley, and Spagnola (2006) focus on rituals in a food and meal consumption context, integrating meal type or pattern, structure and format, social aspects (i.e., actors and audience), and actions or processes into matrices of the different elements of mealtime rituals. However, context-specific typologies for other domains of consumption rituals are limited, and the development of a typology that focuses on one ritual context may not be applicable to other contexts.

3.1.3. Ritual stage. A third way of typologising rituals focuses on the lifecycle of a product from production to post-consumption. Rituals relating to food and drink may be present during different stages of the process, from pre-consumption manufacture and production of goods to actions undertaken by consumers during and after consumption. This raises the question of whether rituals at the food preparation and consumption stage might alter the effects of rituals or
processes undertaken earlier in the supply chain, or vice versa. For example, Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) comment on ritual preparation of food at Thanksgiving as a way of reappropriating, personalising, or otherwise reasserting agency or autonomy over consumer goods that have previously been manufactured in a large-scale, branded way. However, a systematic approach to typologising rituals across the consumption lifecycle is currently lacking in ritual research.

3.1.4. Personal involvement in ritual. The extent to which rituals are a product of an individual’s own behaviour, or that of another, provides a fourth typology. First, this concerns the extent to which rituals are emergent or designed. Consumption rituals focusing on food and drink, such as Thanksgiving in North America and Christmas meals, are emergent, “guided by no written liturgy”, as Wallendorf and Arnould (1991, p. 17) observe; they are actions arising from consumers themselves, often arrived at by consensus as a result of negotiation – and sometimes disagreement – between the different actors, and as such have inherent personal meanings for those who participate in these rituals. In contrast, branded consumption rituals, such as breaking apart an Oreo cookie and consuming it in stages (Amati & Pestana, 2015), are examples of behaviours designed and communicated to consumers in a top-down way.

Experimental studies of ritual are also designed by researchers, providing participants with standardised instructions for rituals in order to maximise the likelihood of detecting an experimental effect; e.g., the rituals developed in experiments by Vohs et al. (2013) in relation to consumption of food and drink. The extent to which consumers find meaning in these artificially designed rituals can be questioned, and emphasises the need for ritual design as an emerging, multidisciplinary area that can engage with multiple areas of food and drink industries (e.g., food design, marketing, packaging design; see Schifferstein, 2016) as well as academic research.
The second area of research inquiry around the role of self versus other is raised by the finding of Vohs et al. (2013; Experiment 3) that watching someone else conduct a ritual did not generate the same level of positive consumption experiences regarding a beverage (lemonade) as did conducting the ritual oneself. This finding is hypothesised to be linked to the involvement felt by individuals when they perform a ritual. Given that consumption of food and drink is closely linked to social settings and benefits (e.g., Fischler, 1988; Stroebæk, 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), there may be occasions when consumers prepare such items for themselves, and also occasions when food or drink is prepared for them by others, but it is not clear whether rituals linked to such differences in preparation of food and drink would have differential outcomes (Dohle et al., 2014).

Examination of the scales, contexts, stages, and levels of personal involvement relating to consumption rituals provides important descriptive information about the types of rituals in existence. However, literature informing these typologies is poorly integrated, and would benefit from a single framework that unites these different facets of ritual type. Such a framework would then be able to typologise a single consumption ritual, such as eating dessert at the end of a meal, according to scale (personal or small group level), context (post-meal), stage (during consumption), and personal involvement (yes, emergent).

3.2. Components of rituals. Distinct from typologies are the components that together form a ritual. Rook (1985) examined what happens within rituals, arguing that four components are necessary to produce ritual: artifact(s) or objects; a script stating when and how different actions take place; roles for actors participating in the ritual; and an audience in front of whom the ritual occurs. Artifacts and scripts bear obvious relevance to food, drink, and recipes for the preparation of these goods, which can function as symbols of the meaning transmitted through
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ritual. The role of edible, and particularly branded, ritual artifacts in the Thanksgiving consumption ritual is expanded on by Wallendorf and Arnould (1991), who suggest that these foodstuffs are ritualised through their quintessential and singular associations with the ritual and rarely with other events; the use of special or idiosyncratic ingredients; and personalised preparation and service of the food (in the form of recipes) to reappropriate it from its otherwise manufactured or branded context.

In the context of mealtime consumption rituals in particular, Fiese et al. (2006) propose three main components that together comprise family mealtime rituals: communication, such as inside jokes, symbolism, and sharing; commitment, e.g., affective engagements with others and fostering a sense of belonging; and continuity in the form of inter-generational social connection, symbolic connections to past and future, and forward planning. These components differ from those proposed by Rook (1985) in that they refer largely to abstract processes, rather than tangible objects or people.

More recently, Amati and Pestana (2015) propose a framework which analyses consumption rituals through dimensions comparable to those put forward by Rook (1985), but with greater granularity and more relevance to marketing. Amati and Pestana (2015) use this framework to study a number of branded consumption rituals around food and drink (Oreo cookies and Corona beer), and in so doing identify seven components of consumer rituals: ‘stars and guest roles’, ‘context and moments’, ‘meanings and symbols’, ‘frequency’, ‘sequence and structure’, ‘performance and aesthetics’, and ‘learning and propagation’. The latter property in particular relates to consumption rituals from a marketing sense, in that it evaluates how consumption rituals based around brands can be transmitted to others.
4. Ritual outcomes

Why are rituals conducted, if they do not add to the functional or instrumental value involved in consuming food and drink? Consumers take time and expense to purchase, cook, or decorate elaborate birthday cakes, for example, and to present them in an appropriate context (e.g., dim lights and an audience of friends and loved ones; Rossano, 2012). Outcomes of ritual as presented in ritual theory tend to focus on change, in three separate domains: cognitive change; social change; and affective change, and these are listed in the fourth column of Table 1. Extant theories of ritual often focus on one or two of these outcomes, but rarely on all three (but see Hobson et al., 2018, for an exception). Behavioural outcomes as a result of ritual are discussed within the literature to a relatively limited extent, but see section 5.1 for how these outcomes may occur as a result of affective change.

4.1. Cognitive change

Food and drink are consumed not only for functional or instrumental purposes, but also because of their symbolic value; i.e., what they mean, and by extension what they signal about the consumer to others (Fischler, 1988; Marshall, 2005). Rituals can alter this symbolic value associated with food and drink, as well consumers (Belk et al., 1989; Kapitány & Nielsen, 2015). Such changes in meaning relate primarily to cognition (thoughts, knowledge, and understanding). This section focuses on the ability of rituals to produce changes in meanings associated with consumption of food and drink, and in the way individuals think as a result, including issues of identity and mindfulness.

Rook (1985) and Driver (1998) proposed construction of or change in self-identity as outcomes of ritual. Elaborating further on Rossano’s (2012) birthday cake example, the ritual changes the meaning of the cake from an everyday cake to one that is symbolic of the recipient.
and their birthday. It also identifies the recipient as one who is celebrating a birthday, transforming their identity from one of many to, at least for a short period, a more special or honoured individual. But what meaning(s) might be associated with wider food and drink consumption, and how can rituals effect change in those meanings? Quintão et al. (2017) discuss the ways in which coffee rituals can help to create and reinforce consumer identities as specialists or connoisseurs, but it is not clear whether or how consumption rituals might generate identity-based change for non-specialist consumers of foods and drinks more generally.

Beyond change in meaning, ritualised consumption can lead to change in cognition in the form of more mindful states when eating. Mindfulness involves being fully present from moment to moment, with full awareness of one’s emotional states and physical conditions as well as one’s surroundings. Mindful eating strategies are centered on creating awareness about the external and internal cues associated with the eating event (Fung, Long, Hung, & Cheung, 2016). They are based on ritualised behaviours such as manipulating and eating the food in a specific way whilst focusing on specific sensations (e.g., taste) and thoughts (e.g., how the food was produced; Meier, Noll, & Molokwu, 2017), and chewing each bite of food a certain number of times to enhance awareness of different sensory cues and extend time in mouth (Kristeller & Wollever, 2016). These ritualised behaviours can start before the eating process, e.g., by presenting the food portion in a specific way on the plate, and eating in certain conditions such as at a distraction-free table. Further research is needed, however, in order to ascertain whether mindful states can be generated through broader food-related rituals beyond those associated with eating behaviour; for example, rituals during food preparation.

4.2. Social change
Consumption rituals are described by Belk (1988, p. 151) as a “symbolic way of sharing group identity”, and authors such as Fischler (1988) and Fiese et al. (2006) relate this outcome specifically to food consumption. Use of specific foods during rituals can convey symbolic information about the identity of a social group (Powers & Powers, 2003). In turn, consumption of that symbolic good can be a way to affirm social or cultural identity, and can therefore consolidate group cohesion; for example, consuming Vegemite at breakfast a way to assert one’s Australian identity (Lupton, 1994).

A large body of evidence suggests that rituals can create and strengthen social bonds between individuals and groups (Driver, 1998; Gainer, 1995; Hobson et al., 2018; Kapitány & Nielsen, 2015; Wen et al., 2016), and food- and drink-based rituals are particularly associated with social connection (Fischler, 1988; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Spinelli et al., 2017). Meals, in particular, are emphasised as the socially ritualised act of food consumption (Murcott, 1995). Dietler (2010) and Visser (1991) comment on the ability of feasting rituals to generate communitas or social bonding, and Thomson and Hassenkamp (2002) observed that food rituals, such as meal breaks, can help to increase group cohesion amongst healthcare workers. Moisio et al. (2004) and Fiese et al. (2006) both link ritualised behaviours of homemade food to the creation and strengthening of family identities.

Informal consumption of food or drink, e.g., in the form of snack or coffee breaks, serves more than a functional purpose; these provide opportunities to bond with colleagues and peers (Stroebaek, 2013), although the extent to which these breaks are ritualised, and whether social cohesion is increased by their performance, is not clear. However, as noted earlier in this paper, coffee rituals are associated with positive social outcomes in Turkey (UNESCO, 2013) and in particular with regarding to romantic and matrimonial events (Argan et al., 2015), during which
coffee consumption is used as a vehicle for social interaction. Drinking alcohol at a bar, for example, can also be associated with intimacy and/or social connectedness (Treise et al., 1999).

Bonding is one type of social change derived from rituals, especially those related to food; a second is the development and reinforcement of social norms, order, and sometimes even power or discipline (Driver, 1998; Holt, 1992; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Gainer (1995) comments that social bonding is more likely to arise from rituals within ‘small worlds’, such as the family, peers, or colleagues, than larger-scale rituals. Returning to the typologies of ritual put forward by Rook (1985) and Marshall (2005), such small-group settings are relevant for the performance of rituals relating to food and drink, e.g. during mealtimes, breaks, and snacks. Rituals conducted at family mealtimes enable transmission and learning of rules or social norms (Greishaber, 1997), whereas larger-scale community rituals enable the reinforcement of previously acquired social norms (Rossano, 2012).

Rituals of consumption encapsulated in holidays, such as Thanksgiving, traditionally generate social inclusion, but Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) also comment on the potential for social exclusion or segregation through various ritual activities within the wider Thanksgiving experience; e.g., through who is invited to participate or not. Jansen (1997) also observed that ritualised food consumption during meals, specifically in Jordan, can be a way to enforce social segregation along gender divides, and to reinforce the roles specific to those genders. However, there is a lack of empirical, and particularly quantitative, evidence of such effects in response to food- and drink-related rituals, which are typically relevant to an individual or small-group context.

4.3. Affective change
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There is evidence to suggest that consumption rituals, including those relating to food and drink, can also generate changes in individuals’ mood states. Affect regulation has been studied as an experimental outcome of ritual in general; for example, rituals are often performed in response to inferred threats or states of uncertainty in order to reduce anxiety (Boyer & Liénard, 2006; Brooks et al., 2016; Hobson et al., 2018), and can mitigate negative affect after distress or loss (Norton & Gino, 2014).

As noted earlier, consumption of certain foods can also be used as a way to regulate affect (Newman et al., 2007), indicating potential cross-overs between consumption and ritual as a way to deliver affective change. Indeed, Desmet and Schifferstein (2008, p. 295) indicate that rituals associated with food and drink, such as the “first cold sip of beer after a long warm day”, are associated with strong positive affect, while Treise et al. (1999) link alcohol rituals to increased arousal in the form of excitement. Shack (2012) indicates that food rituals amongst tribal groups in Ethiopia can serve to reduce anxiety about food supply, and Lupton (1994) reported that childhood memories of food are associated with feelings of either being in control or being controlled, e.g., by one’s parents. Vohs et al. (2013) observed that pleasure derived from consumption of food and drink was greater after performance of rituals. However, beyond this there is limited experimental research on whether changes in affective states are linked to the consumption of food per se, or ritualised consumption of that food, highlighting the need for further systematic study of consumption rituals around food and drink.

5. Mechanisms responsible for outcomes of ritual

The majority of research on ritual has focused on identifying and categorising ritual types and outcomes of those rituals, especially with regard to the social outcomes of food rituals. Models of the causal mechanisms linking ritual to such outcomes are relatively less studied and
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occur primarily in psychological research. Where they are studied (e.g., Vohs et al., 2013) these mechanisms are proposed as mediating variables; i.e., outcomes of ritual that, in turn, generate outcomes of their own. These mechanisms or mediating variables can be grouped into three distinct categories that help to clarify how rituals produce certain outcomes: mechanisms linked to affect, or emotion; those linked to cognition, or patterns of thought; and, to a limited extent, those linked to the physical actions involved in ritual behaviours. Frameworks relating to these mechanisms are listed in the third column of Table 1. Given the relative paucity of literature in this area relating specifically to food rituals, we draw here on wider research on rituals in general.

There is within ritual study, especially in relation to consumption of food and drink, a lack of understanding about the specific ways in which affect, cognition, and behaviour might be involved in delivering ritual outcomes, compounded by the fact that some concepts suggested as outcomes of ritual (e.g., affective appraisals such as liking or pleasure) may be mechanisms through which further outcomes (e.g., happiness, social change) can be delivered. This further highlights the need for a holistic, process-based model of consumption ritual.

5.1. Affect

Proposed affective mechanisms linking ritual and ritual outcomes remain limited, especially in relation to food and drink. However, those available focus largely on ritual as a way of generating affective appraisals of control over a situation, which in turn may lead to improved affective or behavioural outcome states. For example, Norton and Gino (2004) indicate that performance of ritual can produce an outcome of reduced negative affect through the mediating mechanism of process-based order; e.g., a funeral service in response to the death of a loved one (the ritual) creates a sense of order and offsets lack of control (mediating mechanisms) and in
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turn reduces grief (outcome). Brooks et al. (2016) indicate that a pre-performance ritual can reduce feelings of anxiety (mediating mechanism) that can improve behavioural performance (outcome). Recent findings by Tian et al. (2018) also demonstrate that pre-consumption rituals can heighten feelings of self-discipline, which then translate to enhanced behavioural control over food consumption. Together, these findings raise the question of whether consumption rituals around food and drink specifically can be used to increase affective appraisals of control, and thereby reduce negative affect resulting from stress or anxiety, for example, in a similar way to how food consumption can be used in general to regulate affect (Newman et al., 2007). Such mechanisms may also explain findings of how food rituals can reduce anxiety in the face of food insecurity (Shack, 2012).

Liking a product (i.e., a positive affective appraisal) as a result of performing rituals oneself may also be relevant as a mechanism that leads to further outcomes. For example, Dohle et al. (2014) showed that making a milkshake oneself resulted in more of it being consumed than if the milkshake was made by an experimenter, and this was mediated by increased liking of the self-made milkshake. These authors also note that food or drink preparation performed by a significant other may also be liked due to positive affective regard for such an individual, raising important questions about the actors involved in consumption rituals and how their identities in relation to the consumer may affect subsequent outcomes. With regard to mindful eating, mindfulness techniques as described in section 4.1 can enhance healthfulness outcomes related to food consumption, with the effect mediated by greater enjoyment (Arch et al., 2016).

5.2. Cognition

Cognitive mechanisms explaining the outcomes of ritual focus on the meaning of the ritual and associated components (e.g., a symbolic value of a foodstuff; see Powers & Powers, 2003),
and also on attention or interest arising as a result of undertaking the ritual. Change in meaning can be conceptualised as an outcome of ritual performance in itself, but several ritual theorists also identify meaning as a mechanism responsible for further cognitive, affective, and/or behavioural outcomes of ritual (Belk et al., 1989; Kapitány & Nielsen, 2015; McCracken, 1986); that is, performance of a ritual can change the meaning or symbolic value of an individual or object, which then leads to subsequent outcomes. For example, the ritual surrounding a birthday cake generates change in meaning of both the cake and the recipient, and this change in meaning is a means through which social bonding can occur. However, there is a distinct lack of empirical examination of the role of meaning and how it affects ritual outcomes.

Cognitive states of attention and interest through engagement into a ritual have also been conceptualised as significant mechanisms through which ritual can generate affective change. Vohs et al. (2013) found that intrinsic interest in consumption was increased by performance, but not observation, of ritual, and this interest in turn led to enhanced affective experiences of consumption. Boyer and Liénard (2006) propose that attention to ritual actions provides respite from anxiety in the face of abstract threats by way of occupying cognitive resources such as working memory, e.g., through attention to the scripted, repetitive, and often idiosyncratic behaviours required to perform rituals. This theory of ‘action-parsing systems’ suggests that cognitive processing of ritual actions may be responsible for the outcome of affective change; i.e., that it may mediate relationships between ritual and affective outcomes. Contrastingly, Visser (1991) argues that the repetitive actions present in rituals, including food rituals, enable focus on the meaning of the ritual rather than its constituent behaviours. As with topics discussed above, the limited extent to which these topics have been subjected to experimental study makes
firm conclusions hard to draw, but the cognitive mechanisms through which rituals around food and drink lead to subsequent psychosocial changes is worthy of further scrutiny.

5.3. Behaviour

The role of physical actions around food and drink in generating ritual outcomes is underexplored, but emergent in recent literature. Hobson et al.’s (2018) process-based framework proposes that bottom-up, perceptually-driven processing of the behavioural aspects of ritual and top-down, cognitively-driven processing of their meaning together generate three distinct outcomes: social connection, affective regulation, and regulation of goal states/performance. This framework is novel in its integrated identification of outcomes of rituals and the mechanisms through which they may occur. The recency of this framework means that empirical support is lacking, but its presence aids the generation of experimental hypotheses needed for model testing, which may in turn aid explanation of how rituals generate certain outcomes, within consumption research and beyond. The physical actions involved in certain eating behaviours, such as chewing, may also lead to cognitive outcomes in the form of mindfulness as discussed in section 4.1.

Further, and similarly to Boyer and Liénard (2006), Hobson et al. (2018) suggest that ritual behaviours comprising elaborate physical actions can lead to affective change, such as mitigation of anxiety, by way of distraction (i.e., occupying working memory through remembering a sequence of steps or actions). The work of Boyer and Liénard (2006) and Hobson et al. (2018) is not specific to the food and drink domain, but it raises important questions of how the physical actions relating to food and drink preparation and consumption might be implicated in ritual outcomes, and whether working memory might be a mediator of such a relationship.
6. Overview of research on rituals and way forward

Associations between food and ritual worldwide and across cultures are without question. However, there is a lack of common approaches that can be applied to qualify or quantify rituals and their constituent parts across different domains. Similarly, researchers in different fields have identified many outcomes of rituals in general and specific to food and drink, and potential mechanisms responsible for these outcomes, through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Despite the plurality of approaches, these outcomes and mechanisms appear broadly categorisable into four: cognitive (and especially meaning-based); affective; behavioural; and social. What appears strongly lacking in food and drink consumption research, specifically, is a framework that integrates these areas, and considers consumption ritual as a holistic process comprising ritual behaviours, outcomes, and mechanisms. As it stands, existing theoretical frameworks often focus on one type of outcome or mediator, and rarely consider the different stages in rituals and their effects. This complicates systematic study of rituals and the translation of findings from one domain of research to another, e.g., from rituals in general to consumption rituals regarding food and drink.

The literature examined above highlights several areas for future research that may be fruitful in identifying what consumption rituals in relation to food and drink look like, what outcomes they produce, and the mechanisms of action that lead to such outcomes. Below we outline specific research questions or topics that have arisen as a result of this examination, and possible ways in which they might be studied.

6.1. Need for a specific framework for food and drink consumption rituals

As noted above, existing study of consumption rituals draws on theoretical frameworks and concepts from many different topics and disciplines in wider ritual research. A key finding of
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this paper, shown in Table 1 and expanded on this body of this paper, is that there is currently poor integration between literature that describes consumption rituals (in terms definitions, typologies, and constituent components), examines outcomes of those rituals, and identifies potential mechanisms linking ritual performance with such outcomes. There is a need for greater integration of these ideas into a framework that can be used to describe, explain, and quantify the complete consumption ritual process, similar to the broader ritual framework put forward by Hobson et al. (2018) but inclusive of the nature and context of the good being consumed. In order to facilitate rigorous empirical study of consumption rituals, e.g. in relation to food and drink, a framework is needed to aid researchers in qualifying and quantifying the various constituent aspects of rituals (i.e., components, outcomes, and mechanisms of action). Such a framework would aid identification of existing rituals within consumer experience of food and drink, and would offer opportunities to propose ritual-based strategies that can enhance consumer benefits such as change in mood and enhanced social connection. It would also facilitate identification of the scales at which (personal, family, group, or other) food- and drink-related rituals occur, and whether the same ritual occurs at different scales or involving different numbers of actors.

6.2. Personal involvement in the consumption ritual process

Discussion of the nature and constituent parts of ritual identified the roles of actors and self-involvement as important, but as yet understudied, aspects of consumption rituals. In the specific context of food and drink rituals, it is unclear whether emergent, self-developed rituals lead to the same or different consumer outcomes as designed, researcher- or manufacturer-developed rituals, and whether different mechanisms may be involved in such outcomes. Experimental comparisons of rituals that participants construct themselves, versus following instructions, may
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shed light on this issue. Similar comparisons of consumption rituals that are self-conducted or other-conducted may reveal whether agency can lead to outcomes beyond consumption satisfaction (Vohs et al., 2013) and amount consumed (Dohle et al., 2014). An extension of these research questions would be to evaluate consumption rituals not only when the good is prepared and consumed, but also during manufacture and production. Can these rituals also have effects on consumer evaluations and outcomes, and might they interact? For example, do consumption rituals that occur when harvesting a raw material (e.g. grape harvest) or when transforming it (e.g. aging in barrels) into an edible food interact with later, preparation (e.g. decanting)- or consumption-based rituals to affect outcomes? Teasing apart the individual effects of these rituals in an experimental setting, and comparing them to conditions in which such rituals are combined, would shed light on rituals throughout the consumer goods supply chain and their respective contribution to the final perceived benefits.

6.3. Consumption ritual outcomes

Study of existing literature on rituals revealed three main categories of outcomes relevant to consumption rituals: cognitive, social, and affective change. Within all three there are research questions yet to be addressed. With regard to cognitive change, it is experimentally unclear whether rituals change the meaning(s) associated with consumption of food or drink, and whether such changes can in turn enhance consumption experiences.

Regarding social change, it is yet to be examined experimentally whether consumption rituals around food and drink produce social benefits such as bonding or social cohesion; rather, this has largely been examined through qualitative research (e.g., Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2002; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Such experimental study is important to establish causal, rather than relational, links between consumption ritual and social benefits.
Finally, with regard to affective change, existing research suggests that consumption rituals may deliver affective benefits for consumers, but it is unclear whether this relates specifically to appraisals of the foodstuff being consumed or might extend to general affective states of the consumers themselves. Again, self-reports of affective appraisals and states within experimental studies would suit this research question. It would also be valuable to know if any such change in short-term affective states may translate to long-term commitment to a food or drink brand as a result of repeated performance of rituals, which would suit a longitudinal research paradigm.

This literature review has also identified a number of areas where further study of consumption rituals around food and drink may lead to important applied outcomes. Enhanced theoretical understanding of how rituals are linked to outcomes, and for whom and in what contexts, will lead to better design and development of rituals intended to produce specific cognitive, affective, and/or social outcomes through services, packaging, food design and other means (see Matthews, 2017, for examples of rituals in service design more broadly). One such area that has been highlighted in this review is that of mindful eating, operationalised through ritualised eating behaviours focusing on specific aspects of the foodstuff. Outcomes of such eating rituals may have implications for public health, e.g., by increasing satiety and reducing energy intake, offering opportunities to design foods and associated rituals that can help consumers to eat less whilst still being satisfied (Forde, van Kuijk, Thaler, de Graaf, & Martin, 2013; Bolhuis, Forde, Cheng, Xu, Martin, & de Graaf, 2014). Ritual design informed by empirical evidence may also help to create or enhance social bonding, and to generate meaningful experiences with food, such as facilitating the transition from consumption to being a connoisseur.
6.4. Consumption ritual mechanisms

In addition to open research questions about outcomes, the surveyed literature also raised questions about how such outcomes arise as a result of consumption rituals. Addressing such questions is important to understand more about what drives positive cognitive, affective, and social outcomes, and will inform better design choices about how consumer rituals can be created or encouraged.

With regard to affective mechanisms, it is unclear whether certain affective experiences, such as feelings of control or liking, might mediate relationships between consumption rituals and ritual outcomes in a food and drink context. In relation to cognitive mechanisms, study of meanings associated with consumption of food and drink in the presence and absence of rituals will shed light on how rituals can generate wider benefits. Lastly, the role of the physical actions involved in consumption rituals merits further understanding, e.g., when preparing a food or beverage for consumption, in order to understand their effects on outcomes of ritual.

Examination of the role of working memory (and/or other constructs such as distraction) in the relationship between performance of physical actions in consumption rituals and their eventual outcomes is one question that might be further examined.

7. Conclusions

This literature review aimed to illustrate key concepts relevant to consumption rituals, and especially those based around food and drink. Much of the existing work in this field has focused on describing these rituals and/or ritual outcomes, rather than providing an integrated and systematic approach to modelling relationships between these two factors by including mechanisms of action. Study of emotional outcomes of ritual in general has also largely focused
on reducing negative affect, with limited but growing attention to positive affective outcomes such as pleasure and enhanced consumption experience and perceptions.

Study of rituals, and especially rituals around food and drink, has the potential to deliver positive change in a number of ways. At the level of the product or good, it can help to increase consumer enjoyment and satisfaction (Dohle et al., 2014; Vohs et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). At an individual level, consumption rituals based around food and drink can be harnessed to change mood and the way individuals think, especially about their self-identity (Belk, 1988; Hobson et al., 2018; Lupton, 1994). At a social and societal level, such rituals can also be used to develop bonds between small-group members, to establish order or group culture, and even to affect public health (Dietler, 2010; Hobson et al., 2018; Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2002; Wansink & van Kleef, 2013). In these ways, consumption rituals around food and drink can add important psychosocial value to daily life, and we encourage further study from psychological, design, and consumer research perspectives in order to facilitate these goals.

8. **Funding**

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9. **References**


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Table 1. Key concepts from relevant theoretical frameworks/models of ritual, separated by focus on constituent aspects of ritual, outcomes of rituals, and hypothesised mechanisms linking the two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors (date)</th>
<th>What constitutes ritual</th>
<th>Mechanisms of action</th>
<th>Ritual outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell (1992)</td>
<td>Definitions, components (meaning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belk et al. (1989)</td>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>Cognition (meaning, symbolism; imposition of self onto object)</td>
<td>Cognition (sacralisation of object)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks et al. (2016)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Affect (control)</td>
<td>Affect (reduced anxiety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver (1996)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social (order, community, transformation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiese et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Typologies, components (food rituals)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainer (1995)</td>
<td>Typologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobson et al. (in press)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognition (top-down processing of meaning); behaviour (bottom-up processing of actions)</td>
<td>Social (connection), affect (self-regulation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holt (1992)</td>
<td>Components</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social (order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapitány and Nielsen (2015)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognition (meaning, causal opacity)</td>
<td>Cognition (meaning), social (bonding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCracken (1986)</td>
<td>Components (ritual processes)</td>
<td>Cognition (meaning, symbolism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neale et al. (2008)</td>
<td>Typologies (scale)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rook (1985)</td>
<td>Typologies (scale), components</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognition (identity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetreault &amp; Kleine (1990)</td>
<td>Components</td>
<td>Affect, cognition, and behaviour</td>
<td>Cognition, Social (identity, order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tian et al. (2018)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Affect (self-discipline, control)</td>
<td>Behaviour (food choice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vohs et al. (2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognition (engagement)</td>
<td>Affect (positive affect)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Definitions focus on what a ritual is (and is not); typologies focus on types or kinds of ritual; components focus on necessarily elements within a ritual.