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ELEANOR RATCLIFFE

University of Surrey

WESTON BAXTER

Imperial College London

MARCO AURISICCHIO

Imperial College London

PETER CHILDS

Imperial College London

NATHALIE MARTIN

Nestlé Research

The role of ritual communication in consumption: A consumer coffee experience

ABSTRACT

Rituals are part of the consumer experience of goods, especially food and drink, and can contribute to consumer enjoyment of and fidelity to a specific product. However, we lack detailed description of food/beverage-related rituals and their potential impact on consumer perceptions, in particular whether and how communicating those rituals to consumers influences their attitudes. Here we use coffee as an example of a ritualized product within the UK market to explore this potential

KEYWORDS

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relationship and identify opportunities for design. In Study 1, we identified rituals associated with coffee preparation and consumption. In Study 2, we found that several procedural aspects of the rituals identified in Study 1 were not consistently conveyed in coffee advertising, indicating a potential gap in communication with consumers. In Study 3, we showed that communicating such rituals to consumers resulted in significantly greater willingness to pay for coffee, mediated by perceptions of social attention. This work connects growing interest in the psychological mechanisms of ritual with work on consumer perceptions and behaviour and carries significant implications for the design of messaging around food experience.

INTRODUCTION

Study of ritual has traditionally focused on those relevant to religion, myth and hygiene and/or has involved deep ethnographic or anthropological explorations of a particular phenomenon (Belk et al. 1989; Bell 1992; Matthews 2017). These approaches largely consist of exploring and identifying the cultural relevance of rituals. Contrastingly, more recent work has emerged from a psychological perspective (see Hobson et al. 2018 and Ratcliffe et al. 2019 for reviews). A third body of research has been exploring the design of rituals, for example, rituals integrated within experience design (Baxter et al. 2020), interaction design (Lévy 2015), service design (Matthews 2017) or rituals at organizational levels (Ozenc and Hagan 2017). This work can be seen as a more formalized expansion of what Grant McCracken referred to as the ‘movement of meaning’ in which designers (of communications, products, etc.) both create meaning and enable the transfer of this meaning through rituals (McCracken 1986). Rituals need not be limited to ‘high days and holidays’; they are common in everyday scenarios such as coping with loss (Norton and Gino 2014), negotiations (Schroeder et al. 2019) or having a drink with friends (Treise et al. 1999).

Increasing understanding of ritual has significant implications for consumer research. Rituals can enhance consumer perceptions of food and drink through engagement in the consumption process (Vohs et al. 2013) and can be used to facilitate behaviour change around consumption through self-control (Tian et al. 2018). Rituals are also conveyed to consumers through marketing (Amati and Pestana 2015). However, three key areas in consumption ritual remain under-researched. First, little is known about the rituals that consumers perform naturalistically with products and how these rituals come to be, since psychological research has tended to use researcher-developed ritual behaviours within experimental paradigms (e.g. Vohs et al. 2013). Second, there is a tendency for brands to design rituals in a top-down manner and feature these in marketing (e.g. Amati and Pestana 2015; Otnes and Scott 1996), but it is not clear whether consumers’ own naturalistic rituals are similarly featured by marketers. Third, the extent to which featuring such naturalistic rituals in marketing influences consumer perception of a product remains under-explored. We address the above points through three studies, using qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to better understand consumers’ rituals and how they are and could be communicated to consumers for a specific product – coffee.

Coffee is one of the world’s most consumed beverages; it is part of the everyday life of millions of consumers worldwide, with revenues of approximately \$448bn in 2020 (Statista 2020). Preparation and consumption of coffee

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is often conducted in a ritualized way (Argan et al. 2015; Stroebeak 2013). Branding and marketing can significantly influence consumer perceptions of coffee (de Pelsmacker et al. 2005; Sörqvist et al. 2013), yet messaging mainly focuses on information provided about the coffee itself and not about *how* it can be prepared or consumed. By focusing on coffee rituals, we draw together strands of existing research on how a well-known, everyday product is prepared, and offer suggestions for how our findings can be used to enhance the perceived value of other goods and services by communicating rituals.

The nature of consumption rituals

As a result of its study in multiple academic domains, ritual has been defined in various ways by different researchers. Rook (1985) defines ritual as a *formalized, prescribed and repetitive* series of actions performed for the purpose of *symbolic meaning* rather than instrumental or functional value alone. However, Norton and Gino (2014) suggest a simpler definition, focusing primarily on *symbolic, goal-directed activities* performed in the *context of certain events*. The nuance of ritual is continuing to be explored against these definitions, especially through experimental examination of the effects of artificially constructed rituals done for the sake of a study, rather than for any inherently meaningful or symbolic purpose (e.g. Tian et al. 2018; Vohs et al. 2013). Still such examples of ritual include an element of non-instrumental behaviour even if direct symbolism may be hard to find. This behaviour, sometimes referred to as causal opacity (e.g. Kapitány and Nielsen 2015), is where the actual behaviour performed is idiosyncratic and lacks clear purpose to complete the goal at hand. In the present article we build on past definitions and consider all the above properties as potential aspects of ritual. At its core, however, we define a ritual as an intentional and causally opaque behaviour or sequence of behaviours resulting in a heightened emotional response. We also acknowledge that while a particular behaviour may be a ritual or not, the degree of ritualistic behaviour may be seen as a spectrum since behaviours can include degrees of intent and causally opaque aspects. This is supported by studies that show more (or less) ritualistic aspects in devised study conditions (e.g. Kapitány and Nielsen 2015) and even calling something a ritual (and believing it) seems to also heighten the effect (Brooks et al. 2016). Thus, this understanding of ritual accounts for highly symbolic actions as well as performance that exhibits deliberate, caring and savouring behaviours that are about enhancing the task itself, for example, making a cup of coffee just right and not just making a cup of coffee.

To engage in the description and creation of ritual, a more nuanced understanding of ritual elements is needed. Hobson et al.'s (2018) psychological framework has aided in this by arguing that rituals serve to regulate affect, behavioural motivation and social connection and do so through a combination of top-down and bottom-up cognitive processing. Such a framework is extremely useful in order to understand how rituals in general can lead to psychosocial benefits, but is limited in the extent to which it explores and explains rituals in specific consumer domains. In the case of coffee, there is a need to understand the types of rituals that consumers associate with this product, and we address this question in Study 1.

Communicating consumer rituals to audiences

The lack of understanding of what makes a specific type of ritual relevant and meaningful to people, as described above, limits the extent to which ritual

communication can be designed to be accessible and relatable for consumers of certain goods. In the context of branded goods, participation in shared rituals and traditions is an important element of brand community or the social context of a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). These acts support continuity of the brand's culture and identity and engage members of the community with the brand; for example, former students who perceived their university to possess strong traditions and rituals were significantly more loyal to the university brand (i.e. its name and associations) than alumni who did not have such perceptions (Martin et al. 2015).

Advertising is an important medium through which brand rituals can be transmitted (Otnes and Scott 1996), and several well-known ad campaigns featuring rituals easily come to mind: drinking a bottle of Corona beer with a slice of lime; breaking a Kit-Kat biscuit in half before eating it; and Oreos' 'Twist, Lick, Dunk' approach to eating its cookies (Amati and Pestana 2015). Despite the iconic imagery and ubiquity of some of these brand rituals, there is limited understanding of whether and how the rituals depicted in adverts represent what consumers actually do in their own consumption rituals. Given that the value of rituals for brand communities appears rooted in their nature as shared and participatory (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), we argue that it is important for marketing to convey rituals that align with behaviours that consumers recognize and relate to. Using coffee as an example, in Study 2 we examine whether the rituals identified in Study 1 are present in a range of coffee advertising materials.

Effects of communicating rituals on consumer perceptions

While conducting rituals can enhance consumer perceptions of goods (such as enjoyment and savouring), simply watching someone else conduct those same rituals does not have the same effect; this may be due to the lower level of engagement experienced by someone who is watching rather than doing the ritual (Vohs et al. 2013). However, that work was conducted in the context of actually consuming the goods in question, and in an experimental laboratory context, rather than experiencing advertising, communications or other information *about* the goods.

Information provided to consumers regarding production processes can also influence product perceptions, and this may have implications for the study of consumer rituals. For example, when consumers are told that goods are made primarily by people (rather than by machines), they rate those goods as higher in value due to perceptions of greater social (i.e. personal, human) attention to the goods and positive associations with that social attention (Job et al. 2017). Rituals, too, are associated with increased involvement or interest in consumer goods (Vohs et al. 2013). We therefore hypothesize that communicating performance of a coffee preparation ritual through advertising may lead to enhanced consumer perceptions of coffee, mediated through perceptions of social attention or involvement, similarly to findings of Job et al. (2017). We address this question in Study 3 through a quantitative online experiment assessing a naturalistic coffee ritual developed from findings from Study 1.

Aims

This research aims to understand how rituals are undertaken by consumers, the extent to which this is currently mirrored in messaging and the impact

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of ritual messaging on consumer perception to better inform communication design around ritualistic consumption experiences. We explore the case of preparing and consuming coffee, which is relatable to a large part of the global population and is reported to be ritualistic (Argan et al. 2015). We seek to address the lack of understanding about exactly what that ritual behaviour looks like within the coffee domain and how the communication of ritual can lead to various perceptions of the product. This aim is fulfilled through three studies that build on each other to understand (1) whether and how rituals are present in preparation and consumption of coffee; (2) whether and how those same rituals are present in coffee advertising; and (3) whether and why depicting such rituals in advertising can positively impact consumer perceptions of coffee. Together these studies highlight how depicting realistic consumer rituals in product communication can positively impact consumer perceptions. The implications being that those responsible for the design of communication can take a more intentional and informed approach to what may currently be intuitive portrayal of ritualistic consumption.

STUDY 1: EXPLORING CONSUMERS' COFFEE RITUALS

Using methodology similar to Norton and Gino (2014), this exploratory qualitative study aimed to identify and describe self-reported consumer rituals associated with coffee preparation and consumption.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred and fifty adult participants provided qualitative data on coffee rituals. Seventy-five were recruited in person at a well-known food market in London, United Kingdom, and were not compensated for their time. A further 75 participants were UK residents recruited online via the Prolific.ac research participation platform and were paid £1 for their participation (5–10 minutes).

Materials and procedure

The procedure and materials used differed between the two samples, reflective of project development over time and the context in which participants were engaged. Participants recruited at the market were invited to 'share a coffee ritual' in writing on an A4 sheet of paper. Participants recruited online were asked to describe the last cup of coffee they had and any coffee rituals involved, including reasons why and how they felt when doing them. Both procedures took approximately five to ten minutes. Participants provided informed consent to participate (oral consent at the market and electronic consent online).

Data analysis

Responses provided in person were transcribed verbatim. These data and those provided online were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006) using ATLAS.ti software. Responses were read thoroughly and repeatedly by the first author and with meaning of phrases distilled to form a code. Once all transcripts were coded in this way, similar codes were grouped into appropriate themes. Data from the two samples were analysed separately but resulted in identification of the same themes, and so results are combined here.

Results and discussion

Eight key themes relating to coffee preparation and consumption rituals were identified: behaviour; artifacts/objects; social context; time and place; other activities; sensory experiences; affect and arousal; and cognition. These themes, codes that were grouped to form themes and exemplar quotes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Qualitative themes, codes and exemplar quotes regarding coffee rituals in Study 1.

Theme	Codes comprising theme	Exemplar quote
Behaviours	Specificity	'I always make the coffee in the same order.'
	Speed, timing, pausing	
	Motor actions	
	Order of actions	
	Personalization	
	Repetition	
Objects/ artifacts	Milk	'I like to take my morning coffee in this old vintage cup that used to belong to my partner's grandma.'
	Type of coffee	
	Utensils	
	Brand and branding	
	Strength of brew	
	Water	
	Sugar	
	Availability, cost	
	Specific mug	
	Extra ingredients	
	Confectionary	
	Specific furniture	
Social context	With friends or colleagues	'I will often get a coffee as people tend to socialise around the drink-making area.'
	With partner, family	
	Alone	
	Self- versus other-made	
Time and place	Culture, lifestyle	'At work this morning my daily 10am coffee in the cafeteria.'
	Having time available	
	Morning, afternoon, evening	
	Weekend, weekday	
	Seasonal	
	Café, coffee shop	
	At home, at work	
Other activities	Holiday, being abroad	'I drink my coffee whilst writing a to do list for the day.'
	Waking up, preparing	
	Sitting down	
	Going outdoors	
	Other consumption	
	Working, finishing work	
	Caring for health	
	Talking, communicating	
	Not doing anything else	

Table 1: Continued.

Theme	Codes comprising theme	Exemplar quote
Sensory experiences	Taste Temperature Texture Smell Vision, aesthetics	'I'm normally satisfied with the taste of my coffee after the rituals.'
Affect and arousal	Control, order Liking, pleasure Relaxation Stimulation	'I feel calm as though I have finished something.'
Cognition	Meaning, symbolism Knowledge, learning Speciality/unusualness Involvement Attention, interest, care Correctness/completeness Reflection	'We use coffee mugs which we were given as a wedding present, even though they are chipped and glued back together. These are all objects with lots of symbolism and personal significance.'

Three themes were related directly to the coffee itself:

- *behaviours relating to the beverage*, including preparing coffee using a certain number and order of actions, waiting for it to be ready and consuming at a certain speed;
- *artifacts* involved in preparing and consuming the beverage, including the coffee itself, the extra ingredients, utensils and equipment and cognitive and affective appraisals of them;
- *sensory experiences* of the beverage, such as taste and temperature.

The use of specific, ordered behaviours and artifacts corresponds strongly with existing typologies of ritual, both in a general context (Rook 1985) and in relation to consumption of other goods and services (Amati and Pestana 2015). However, the emphasis on sensory experiences is relatively novel and otherwise not well explored in ritual research.

Three themes related to the context in which the coffee was consumed were:

- *time and place*, including the location and time of day of consumption. Participants were often specific about these locations and times for coffee consumption, which were either chosen for convenience (e.g. at the workplace canteen) or because they were preferred locations for consuming coffee (e.g. on the sofa at home). Environmental context is not well considered in the context of ritual study, while temporal context is more widely researched (Rook 1985).
- *social context*, that is, other individuals with whom or around whom coffee was consumed, such as partners, friends, family and colleagues. This links to the concepts of ritual actors/audiences outlined by Rook (1985) and Amati and Pestana (2015). Within this theme, participants at the market in particular commented on coffee rituals in different cultures, which may reflect the more international, and often touristic, nature of this sample.

- *other activities* done during coffee consumption. Often these related to other types of consumption, for example, of foods and media, such as watching television whilst having coffee; or to wider behaviours such as communicating with others, working or waking up. Rituals conducted as part of a wider range of activities are, again, not well examined in relevant literature.

The final two themes related to how the coffee consumption experience felt to individuals were:

- *affective appraisals* of how pleasant/unpleasant and calming/activating they found it. Participants discussed coffee consumption as a way to either increase positive affect or reduce negative affect, and to either generate relaxation or a state of activation/alertness depending on need state. Sometimes these affective states were achieved alone, and sometimes the coffee was highlighted as a vehicle for achieving positive affective outcomes through social experiences or bonding. These affective appraisals and possible changes link to existing knowledge of ritual as a way to moderate mood (Hobson et al. 2018; Ratcliffe et al. 2019).
- *cognitive appraisals* or what thoughts they had about the experience.

The theme relating to cognition was more novel, as links between cognitive appraisals/states and ritual are only now starting to be explored (Hobson et al. 2018). However, participants indicated that performing certain, ritualized behaviours in relation to coffee consumption resulted in thoughts regarding care and correctness of their procedure, as well as providing opportunities to think and reflect. Within this theme, the concepts of meaning and symbolism also emerged, endorsing findings by Amati and Pestana (2015). However, while symbolism or non-instrumental behaviour was present, many of the behaviours reported in this study highlight the importance of intent and care in the action(s) performed even if overt symbolism was not always easily seen.

The findings from Study 1 provide more nuanced understanding of exactly what behaviours, contexts and outcomes are involved in coffee rituals specifically. In Study 2 we use these findings as a framework to examine depiction of coffee rituals in advertising.

STUDY 2: LINKS BETWEEN CONSUMERS' COFFEE RITUALS AND ADVERTISING

In this study we examine whether or not consumers' coffee rituals identified in Study 1 are present in coffee advertising. Video adverts were chosen as the focus for this study due to their ability to depict behaviours more accurately than static images (e.g. posters, print branding).

Method

Data sample

We collected publicly available video-based coffee advertising published for UK audiences between 2013 and 2018 (i.e. adverts uploaded by brands to YouTube). Data collection was informed by information regarding popularity of in-home coffee brands in the United Kingdom (Statista 2017). This resulted in a dataset of 35 video adverts regarding soluble, roast and ground and

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Table 2: Total number of adverts analysed in Study 2, categorized by coffee type and brand.

Coffee type	Brand	Number of adverts	Total
Soluble	Nescafé Gold	3	10
	Nescafé Azera	2	
	Kenco	2	
	Douwe Egberts	3	
Roast and ground	Cafédirect	2	11
	Illy	1	
	Taylor's of Harrogate	2	
	Lavazza	4	
	Carte Noire	2	
System	Nespresso	3	14
	Dolce Gusto	3	
	Tassimo	8	
			35

system coffee and relating to eleven brands. The numbers of adverts per brand and coffee type are indicated in Table 2. Adverts lasted between 10 seconds and 2 minutes 5 seconds ($M = 46$ seconds, $SD = 31$ seconds).

Analytical approach

Adverts were subjected to directed content analysis (i.e. summarizing the content of each advert using a pre-existing theoretical approach; see Hsieh and Shannon 2005) informed by the findings of Study 1. All visual and verbal content (behaviours, objects, settings, people, text and voice-overs) in each advert was coded using a framework of themes/codes based on the findings of Study 1 (see Appendix 1) by the first author in discussion with other authors. This coding framework was developed based on findings from Study 1 and a supplementary pilot study of physical behaviours of rituals involved in coffee preparation and consumption (achieved via a video analysis of recorded consumer behaviours, not reported here). As a result, we developed an overview of whether codes and overarching themes characterizing consumers' coffee rituals were present or absent in coffee advertising.

Once all adverts had been viewed and coded, a typical representation of each theme/code in the overall sample of adverts was calculated using median number of occurrences. We emphasize that the use of median number of occurrences shows how often different themes and codes were represented within a *typical advert* in the sample (50 per cent of adverts showed less than this median number of occurrences, and 50 per cent showed higher); thus, a median value of 0 for a particular code does not mean that no occurrences of that code were observed at all, but rather that the occurrences were not consistently present enough to be representative of the whole sample of adverts. Median values are used as a measure of central tendency, rather than mean values, to avoid distortion by very low or zero occurrences of codes in some adverts (see Coocsey 2020 for a methodological review).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of directed content analysis of coffee advertising are presented in Table 3. Total number of occurrences across the sample is presented per code, but the discussion of results here focuses on median number of occurrences.

As can be seen in Table 3, codes and themes relating to consumers' coffee rituals were all featured in coffee advertising to some extent, but the consistency with which they appeared varied. Themes and codes that were present in more than 50 per cent of the adverts were being at home: use of objects/artifacts, personalization, coffee and milk during preparation and consumption; talking/communicating; cognitive perceptions of coffee as special or unusual, affective outcomes of pleasure and enjoyment of taste.

Themes and codes known to be important in coffee preparation and consumption rituals that were present in less than 50 per cent of the adverts were being out of the home, time of day/week or being in specific social settings; behaviours that were highly ordered and specific, involving speed/timing, and used specific objects/artifacts; waking up, working or finishing a task; sensory experiences other than flavour and cognitive appraisals of knowledge, attention/care, symbolism and correctness and affective outcomes beyond simply pleasure, such as relaxation or stimulation.

Given that rituals primarily comprise specific, ordered and timed behaviours and are often conducted in specific social circumstances (Hobson et al. 2018; Ratcliffe et al. 2019), it is interesting that these aspects of consumers' coffee rituals appear inconsistently conveyed in coffee advertising. In particular, it is noteworthy that both symbolic and intentional or caring behaviours were lacking in this analysis. Our findings from Study 1 also highlighted how important sensory experiences beyond taste (such as smell, the look of the coffee, its texture and temperature) are when considering consumers' coffee rituals, yet these were not consistently apparent in advertising. We suggest that the inclusion of these procedural elements, naturalistic to consumers, may offer opportunities to enhance perceptions of consumed goods. We test this hypothesis in Study 3.

STUDY 3: EFFECTS OF DEPICTING CONSUMER RITUALS IN COFFEE ADVERTISING ON PERCEPTIONS OF COFFEE

In Study 3, we examined the effect of including coffee ritual behaviours identified as important in Study 1, such as specific, ordered and timed behaviours that focus on sensory experiences in coffee advertising. Specifically, we examined whether including such rituals impacted attitudes towards the product. Building on work by Job et al. (2017), we also examined whether perceptions of social attention to the coffee as it is being prepared (i.e. perceptions of 'other people having attended to an object, thought about it, felt something about it, or having had goals with regard to it' [Job et al. 2017: 786]) might be a potential mediator between these ritual behaviours and positive perceptions. In other words, we see social attention as one indicator of increased intention when performing the act as discussed in the ritual definition. Importantly, we also note that ritual is distinguished as intentional and non-instrumental (e.g. symbolic or idiosyncratic) behaviour that can be seen on a spectrum. Thus, the intent in the study design here was to create a more ritualistic condition where elements of intent and non-instrumental or symbolic behaviour are present based on observations of coffee rituals and explanations given and shown in the previous studies, compared to a control condition where little, if any, such behaviour is shown.

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Table 3: Total number of occurrences and median for the different codes of the behavioural coding scheme in 35 coffee video adverts.

Theme	Codes	Median	Total	Theme	Codes	Median	Total
Social context	Friends	0	61	Time and place	At home	1	59
	Partner	0	21		Outdoors	0	50
	Alone	0	21		Holiday, being abroad	0	31
	Culture	0	20		Morning	0	21
	Family	0	16		Café, coffee shop	0	10
	Other-made	0	4		At work	0	6
	Colleague	0	2		Afternoon, evening	0	4
	Animals	0	2		Having time available	0	2
					Weekend	0	2
					Weekday	0	1
Beverage behaviour				Artifacts	Seasonal	0	0
	Preparation	3	130		Utensils	6	217
	Motor actions	2	118		Brand and branding	4	175
	Consumption	2	101		Type of coffee	1	67
	Personalization, idiosyncrasy	1	44		Milk	1	46
	Variation in behaviour	0	42		Specific mug or utensil	0	17
	Practicality, ease of use	0	22		Water	0	12
	Specificity	0	22		Confectionary	0	8
	Frequency, repetition	0	14		Availability, cost	0	7
	Consistency in behaviour	0	11		Sugar	0	5
	Specific amount, size	0	9		Extra ingredients	0	3
	Order of actions	0	7		Strength of brew	0	2

Table 3: Continued.

Theme	Codes	Median	Total	Theme	Codes	Median	Total
Other activities	Talking, communicating	1	49	Sensory experiences	Taste	1	60
	Sitting down	0	37		Vision, aesthetics	0	69
	Waking up, preparing	0	25		Texture	0	25
	Consuming other goods/services	0	21		Temperature	0	13
	Working, finishing work	0	13		Sound	0	3
	Walking, travelling, on the go	0	9		Smell	0	2
	Not doing anything else	0	2				
	Waiting	0	1				
	Caring for health	0	0				
	Special, unusual, novelty	1	54	Affect and arousal	Liking, pleasure, confidence, satisfaction	3	127
Cognition	Knowledge, learning, effort	0	16		Stimulation	0	28
	Attention, care, mindfulness	0	14		Stress, rushing	0	20
	Symbolism, meaning	0	14		Relaxation	0	9
	Correctness, completeness, authenticity	0	11		Control, security	0	8
					Disliking, disappointment, dissatisfaction	0	6
					Neutral affect	0	0

Method

Participants and design

Two hundred and fifty adult participants, resident in the United Kingdom, were recruited online via Prolific.ac in order to complete an online experiment. They were compensated with £0.60 each for their time (approx. 3–4 minutes). Participants were aged from 18 to 74 years (the plurality, 33 per cent, were aged 25–34). Half were female and half were male. The majority (55%) consumed coffee daily or multiple times per day, 17% several times per week, 12% approximately once per week and 16% less than once per week. Data from one (male) participant were removed due to non-completion of the survey. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the ritual advert condition, and half to the non-ritual condition.

Measures and stimuli

Two short, advert-style videos were created for the study by two professional designers and a videographer in a similar mode to those created in a study by Kapitány and Nielsen (2015). In the ritual condition, based on the findings of Studies 1 and 2, the advert (58 seconds) featured a behavioural coffee preparation and consumption ritual depicting sensory-rich actions that highlight intention and caring behaviours that suggest non-instrumental meaning (shaking the coffee jar, observing change in coffee colour after adding milk, stirring the coffee a specific number of times and contemplating the finished coffee cup). In the no ritual condition, the advert (27 seconds) featured only functional preparation and consumption behaviours (e.g. no shaking of the coffee jar, brief stirring, no contemplation). Stills of the ritual and no-ritual videos are shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

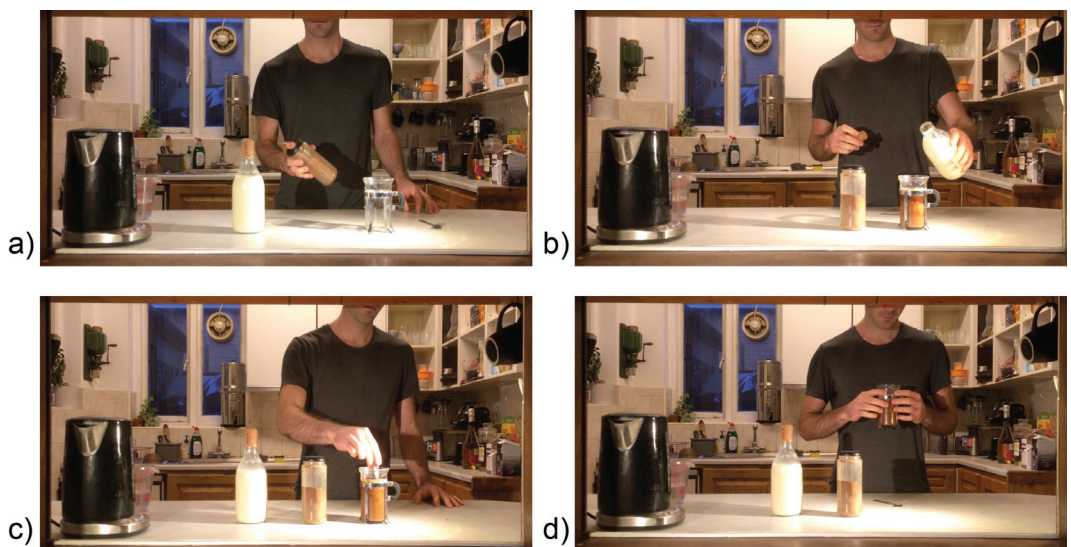


Figure 1: Illustrative stills from the ritual condition video, showing key behaviours of (1) shaking the coffee, (2) observing colour change, (3) stirring a specific number of times and (4) contemplation.

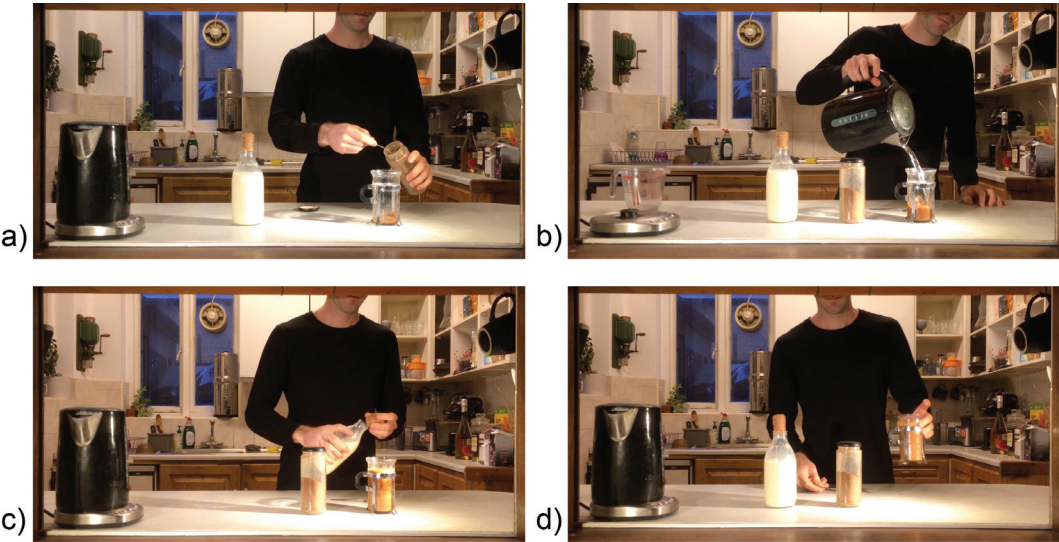


Figure 2: Illustrative stills from the no ritual condition video, showing key functional behaviours only: (1) adding coffee, (2) pouring water, (3) adding milk quickly, and (4) taking the coffee away after brief stirring.

Dependent variables were adapted from Job et al. (2017). Items were prefaced with ‘based on the video above ...’. We asked participants about (1) willingness to pay (one item, ‘How much would you be willing to pay for this coffee?’, reported in pounds/pence); (2) perceived enjoyment of the product (one item, ‘How much would you enjoy drinking this coffee?’, rated 1 = not at all, 7 = very much); (3) perceived quality (one item, ‘How would you rate the quality of this coffee?’, rated 1 = very low, 7 = very high); (4) likelihood of buying the product (one item, ‘How likely would you be to buy this coffee?’, rated 1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely); and (5) perceived social attention (four items, averaged to produce a mean score: ‘To what extent did people think about/feel something about/attend to/have specific goals or intentions about the coffee as it was being made?’, where 1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). The social attention items were adapted from Job et al. (2017) to evaluate whether participants perceived the coffee as being the subject of social attention (i.e. increased care/intention) from the person depicted in the advert.

Procedure

Participants provided informed consent and basic demographic information (age, gender, occupation, coffee drinking habits) before watching the advert relevant to their experimental condition and completing the dependent variable measures. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked, debriefed and financial compensation was transferred online.

Results and discussion

Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare scores between ritual and non-ritual conditions. Descriptive statistics of scores per dependent variable

are provided in Table 4. Participants were willing to pay significantly more for the coffee in the ritual condition than in the non-ritual condition, $t(247) = 2.11, p = .04$. However, they were no more likely to buy the coffee in the ritual condition, $t(247) = -.38, p = .70$. Perceived enjoyment of the coffee did not differ significantly between conditions, $t(247) = .38, p = .71$, and neither did perceived quality of the coffee, $t(247) = 1.23, p = .22$. However, participants rated perceived social attention to the coffee as significantly higher in the ritual condition, $t(247) = 6.55, p < .001$.

Given that the ritual condition had a significant effect on perceived social attention towards the coffee, we examined whether this social attention mediates the relationship between ritual and willingness to pay. This was conducted using bootstrapped mediated regression in the PROCESS module of SPSS (Hayes 2017). There was a significant indirect effect of ritual on willingness to pay, as mediated by social attention (effect = .17, SE = .05, LLCI = .08, ULCI = .27), indicating that watching preparation and consumption rituals in coffee advertising may act on willingness to pay by increasing perceptions of social attention towards the coffee.

Findings from Study 3 indicate that rituals increase perceived social attention towards a good or service. This builds on work by Job et al. (2017), which linked mere human involvement in production with increased valuation of goods. Here we show that the things that humans do, in the form of ritual behaviours, can also convey social attention and positively impact consumers' valuation of goods. In Study 1, we observed that coffee preparation and consumption rituals were often conducted for in a social context or for a social purpose. Now this study has shown that the increase in perceived social attention as a result of ritual results in higher value being placed upon the coffee product, without affecting perceptions of the quality of the product itself. Advertisers and others involved in communication design can leverage this relationship by including relevant ritual behaviours in their communications to consumers.

It is notable that consumers reported willingness to pay significantly more for the coffee in the ritual condition (an absolute judgement), but not significantly more likelihood of buying (which implies some level of choice or comparison between goods). Comparison of purchasing choice in a within-participants rather than between-participants design may clarify this issue by allowing participants to explicitly 'purchase' either the ritual or non-ritual coffee. Possible effects on perceived enjoyment and quality perceptions may also be better examined when participants are presented with the ritual or

Table 4: Mean (SD) scores on imagined purchasing behaviour and perceptions of coffee in Study 3.

Dependent variable	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
	Ritual condition	Non-ritual condition
Willingness to pay (£)*	1.42 (0.86)	1.20 (0.74)
Likelihood to buy	2.98 (1.65)	3.06 (1.65)
Perceived enjoyment	3.70 (1.69)	3.62 (1.68)
Perceived quality	3.79 (1.35)	3.58 (1.34)
Perceived social attention*	4.20 (1.60)	2.98 (1.34)

* $p < 0.05$.

non-ritual adverts including tasting of coffee, instead of participants needing to forecast how they *might* feel during the consumption of the product following the preparation ritual.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Individuals prepare and consume coffee in highly personalized, specific ways, involving various contextual factors that lead to positive psychosocial outcomes. While this may appear to be common sense, there has until now been a lack of systematic, psychologically based examination of this kind of ritual, with previous work on beverage-related rituals rooted primarily in sociological or ethnographic approaches (e.g. Stroebeak 2013). This work sought to bridge these types of investigations by linking a qualitative understanding of the portrayal of ritual to a potential psychological mechanism behind the importance of such portrayal, namely perceived social attention. In Study 1, we identify components of rituals that relate to coffee specifically (i.e. behaviours, artifacts and sensory experiences of them), the contextual factors surrounding these components and the cognitive and affective states involved in their processing.

In Studies 2 and 3, we show that these coffee rituals are not consistently depicted in coffee advertising, yet the inclusion of such rituals in communication leads to higher valuations (i.e. willingness to pay) by consumers. Rituals clearly have an ability to positively influence consumer perceptions of goods when performed by the consumers themselves (Vohs et al. 2013), but here we present the novel result that communicating rituals in a video-based communication context can also generate positive outcomes, especially in the form of willingness to pay.

Moving beyond (coffee) consumption

Much of the recent experimental research on ritual has focused on consumer goods such as food and drink (see Ratcliffe et al. 2019). We have used coffee as a case study to exemplify how rituals are present in and can positively influence everyday interactions with goods and services. However, rituals have important roles in much broader processes and concepts such as social interaction, grieving, organizational behaviour and national identity (Matthews 2017; Norton and Gino 2014; Ozenc and Hagan 2017; Schroeder et al. 2019). Our finding that rituals can convey social attention may provide additional opportunities to use these behaviours as ways to encourage better relationships between individuals and large, frequently impersonal organizations, for example. One emerging area that is key to such developments is that of ritual design: the intentional creation or adaptation of rituals to improve the experience of individuals.

Ritual design

Much of what has been written about rituals has either taken a descriptive stance, such as the anthropological explorations of cultural meaning (e.g. Belk et al. 1989), or focused on quantifying ritual effect (e.g. Norton and Gino 2014). This body of work does much to understand both the broader, cultural context and more specific situational value ritual affords. However, more work is needed to better realize this value in a range of ritual applications, from the behaviours consumers undertake to the messaging they

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receive, and even the organizational processes that produce both. In this article, we show how such ritual design could be extended to communication campaigns to be used in outlets such as advertising. Specifically, communication designed to highlight social attention enacted through ritual may more strongly convey deeper meaning associated with the product through the use of the types of ritualistic elements found in Table 1 or similar findings related to other contexts. To our knowledge, there have been some (e.g. Lévy 2018) but few such design efforts to date that seek to identify and make explicit specific essential ritual elements and their strength. The present work will add to this space to provide grounding and clearer direction for the use of ritual in consumption communication. Importantly, this meaning can be communicated through visualizing rituals others perform, since there is some question as to whether simply explaining to consumers how ritual is performed may increase the actual actions (i.e. rituals) taken by the consumer (Spence 2021). Such a focus on ritualistic social attention portrayed through communication may become even more topical as automation of a growing number of services becomes greater and such ritualized modes of engagement can be a meaningful way to differentiate the value offered by humans.

More broadly, the design community can leverage the growing body of work around ritual to address a wide range of contexts within and beyond consumption experiences. Solidifying identities and roles (e.g. brand ambassador, community gatekeeper) that relate to brands, products and other people could be achieved through the crafting of ritual. Ritual design may also aid a number of public health issues. For instance, leveraging outcomes linked to ritual such as a heightened sense of control around diet (e.g. Tian et al. 2018) or seeking to find meaningful ways of changing existing social rituals linked to the use of tobacco, excessive drinking and other habits could be meaningful directions for ritual design. In this light, ritual design should consist of not just creating new rituals but also altering and, in some healthy contexts, strengthening existing rituals. For instance, the use of unhealthy food in social rituals, such as community gatherings, could be altered to incorporate healthier food. Rituals enacted when shopping could produce greater control over cravings and result in healthier decision-making. Such a ritual could be part of an individual's own making or facilitated, for example, through a digital application. In all these contexts, design efforts will benefit from a more grounded approach to understand the mechanisms at play that improve the interaction of focus. Indeed, our experience in workshops with diverse participants is consistent with Schifferstein (2016) that designers have synthesized knowledge about ritual into a product and service development process and developed tools to aid in said process. Designers seeking to encourage ritualistic behaviour may explore either a top-down approach where a ritual is suggested to a target demographic, or a more subtle approach where ritualistic behaviour is afforded in the design of a system such that users can create and enact their own meaningful behaviours.

This notion of ritual design may push against a long-standing approach that focuses on reducing friction (e.g. hassle associated with selecting and preparing food) within the consumption process. The intentional nature of ritual, almost by definition, contradicts this as it requires intentional engagement with an activity often defined through pauses or peculiar behaviours that may increase consumption time. In this regard, ritual shares a common

element of intentionality and may thus contribute to a growing and broader trend of mindfulness and ethical consumption. This intentional consumption may benefit both consumers and organizations. A focus on visualization has been a suggested route for developing tools to support the analysis and designing of ritual (Lévy and Hengeveld 2016). This work then helps build on this type of visualization design research. For instance, consumers may find ritual to improve their experience, enhance their control and authenticate their experiences. Organizations may find that ritual can elevate the craft within the production process and associated perceptions of value. This work invites additional design research that helps to carefully understand and design for the communication of more frictional interactions that enhance user experience.

Limitations

Our series of studies uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, necessary in order to understand both the quality of consumer rituals and their quantitative relationships with advertising and consumer perceptions. However, we acknowledge some methodological limitations in each study.

Study 1 collected data from participants both in person and online. Results were similar in each sample and were therefore combined for presentation here, but it may be that participants sampled in person at a food market, without compensation, were more interested in food and drink rituals, traditions and associated behaviour than the participants sampled online and financially compensated and may have provided more in-depth or considered answers. Participants sampled online, by definition, have ready access to a data device and understand how to gain value from data by providing survey input and thereby represent a subset of society. This study also relied on recall without the aid of visual or other aids, which may have provided additional subtleties to the work. Study 2 sampled video-based adverts only, and as such, depictions of ritual in other formats (such as print adverts and on-product branding in store) may have been missed. However, since rituals involve multiple behaviours, video was the best type of data to analyse for this purpose. In Study 3, we again collected data online and asked participants to imagine how they would behave and feel about a coffee product in a 'mental model' scenario. As such, it is not clear whether the effect of rituals on willingness to pay will persist in actual purchasing scenarios. Future behavioural research should examine whether consumers do pay more for products advertised using ritual behaviours, in addition to simply being willing to pay more. Asking consumers to choose between goods with and without ritual advertising, in a within-participants experimental design, may also clarify whether the presence of ritual in advertising can lead to preferential choice as well as willingness to pay more.

We note also that the ritual advert in Study 3 was longer than the non-ritual advert, due to its more elaborated behaviour; this may have affected participant responses in itself, but we consider this elaboration an inherent part of ritual – they simply take longer and involve more behaviours than performing quick, functional behaviour. A further study designed to investigate this discrepancy in video length would help confirm its impact. While we

have sought to limit other differences in the video not related to behavioural differences, there remain some differences such as the length of sleeves of the preparer, which could impact the study.

The focus of our three studies is coffee, as an example of a consumer item that is associated with ritual and can be advertised to consumers using this approach. It is not yet clear whether effects on consumer perceptions, and links with social attention, will translate to other experiences where rituals might be designed and included in communications. The research also was based in the United Kingdom, and rituals and practices surrounding coffee consumption vary widely globally. Aspects of such cultural variation, including the meaning given to moments of coffee consumption (e.g. social versus personal), practices for self or other service with beverage and a focus on function versus enjoyment of coffee, are all examples of things we expect may differ by region. Future research should widen understanding of the effects of rituals and mechanisms responsible from the food and drink consumption domain, including cultural differences.

CONCLUSIONS

Rituals are of increasing interest to psychological, behavioural scientists and designers as well as other professionals for the positive outcomes they can afford, including change in individual cognitive and affective states, change in social relationships and changes in the way people relate to objects and experiences. In particular, rituals can influence the way consumers perceive and respond to consumed goods and services, and there is growing attention to the mechanisms that underpin these changes. In this article, we have used coffee as a case study of a consumer good surrounded by consumption ritual. We have identified naturalistic consumer rituals identified with coffee, highlighted areas in existing marketing materials where coffee rituals are not conveyed as fully as they could be and shown how conveying such rituals can positively impact consumer perceptions of coffee through psychosocial mechanisms. The emergent field of ritual design is well positioned to take advantage of this increased understanding in order to develop, for example, rituals that can increase the financial and psychological value that consumers place on goods and services, and to design ways in which these rituals can be shared within brand communities. Specifically, this research supports design activities through the direct identification of ritualistic behaviours associated with consumption and the mechanism through which perception is altered that communication designers can leverage.

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APPENDIX 1 - ADVERT CODING FRAMEWORK

Brand:
Coffee type:
Advert name:
URL:

Framework box: Theme	Codes	Frequency	Framework box: Theme	Codes	Frequency
Drivers: Time and place	At home		Drivers: Social context	Friends	
	Outdoors			Partner	
	Holiday, being abroad			Alone	
	Morning			Culture, lifestyle, celebration	
	Café, coffee shop			Family	
	At work			Other-made	
	Afternoon, evening			Colleague	
	Having time available			Animals	
	Weekend				
	Weekday				
	Seasonal				
Behaviour: Beverage behaviour	Preparation		Behaviour: Objects/artifacts	Utensils	
	Motor actions			Brand and branding	
	Consumption			Type of coffee	
	Personalization, idiosyncrasy			Milk	
	Variation in behaviour			Specific mug or utensil	
	Practicality, ease of use			Water	
	Specific speed/timing			Confectionary	
	Frequency, repetition			Availability, cost	
	Consistency in behaviour			Sugar	
	Specific amount, size			Extra ingredients	
	Order of actions			Strength of brew	

Brand:			
Coffee type:			
Advert name:			
URL:			
Event: Other activities	Talking, communicating	Mechanisms: Sensory experiences	Taste
	Sitting down		Vision, aesthetics
	Waking up, preparing		Texture
	Consuming other goods/services		Temperature
	Working, finishing work		Sound
	Walking, travelling, on the go		Smell
	Not doing anything else		
	Waiting		
	Caring for health		
Mechanisms/ outcomes: Cognition	Special, unusual, novelty	Mechanisms/ outcomes: Affect and arousal	Liking, pleasure, confidence, satisfaction
	Knowledge, learning, effort		Stimulation
	Attention, care, mindfulness		Stress, rushing
	Symbolism, meaning		Relaxation
	Correctness, completeness, authenticity		Control, security
			Disliking, disappointment, dissatisfaction
			Neutral affect

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Eleanor Ratcliffe is a senior lecturer in environmental psychology at the University of Surrey. Her research focuses on links between environment and well-being, including natural environments that facilitate psychological restoration or recovery, experiences of tranquillity and social care within urban spaces, place attachment and identity, creative and prosocial outcomes in different physical settings and sensory engagement with the environment. She also conducts research and teaching on consumer and user experience, especially with regard to improving perceptions and behaviours around goods and services through storytelling and meaning-making.

Contact: School of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, UK.

E-mail: eleanor.ratcliffe@surrey.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0545-1583>

Weston Baxter is an associate professor of design engineering at Imperial College London where he leads the Interaction Foundry, an interdisciplinary research group that explores the intersection of behaviour, design and organizational or societal challenges. He has a strong interest in developing behavioural design processes and methods including ritual design. Through his consulting, Weston leads projects and training on a range of behavioural design topics from food consumption and public health to the future of work and placemaking. He also has an affiliation with the Royal College of Art where he is the first-year lead for the Innovation Design Engineering master's programme run jointly with Imperial College.

Contact: Dyson School of Design Engineering, Imperial College London, Imperial College Rd, Kensington, London, SW7 1AL, UK.

E-mail: weston.baxter@imperial.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0187-1276>

Marco Aurisicchio is an associate professor in the Dyson School of Design Engineering at Imperial College London, holds a Royal Academy of Engineering industrial fellowship with Procter & Gamble and teaches in the innovation design engineering programme run jointly with the Royal College of Art. Prior to joining Imperial, he was a research associate in the Engineering Design Centre at the University of Cambridge where he also undertook his Ph.D. in engineering design. His current research interests are in the areas of sustainable manufacturing and consumption, engineering design for a circular economy, consumer science, product-service systems, closed-loop systems and sustainable materials.

Contact: Dyson School of Design Engineering, Imperial College London, Imperial College Rd, Kensington, London, SW7 1AL, UK.

E-mail: m.aurisicchio@imperial.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1119-4336>

Peter Childs is the co-director of the Energy Futures Lab at Imperial College London, professorial lead in engineering design at Dyson School of Design

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Engineering, Imperial and chairperson at Q-Bot Ltd and BladeBUG Ltd. His professional interests include creativity tools and innovation, design, heat transfer and rotating flow, sustainable energy and robotics. His former roles include director of the Rolls-Royce University Technology Centre for Aero-Thermal Systems, director of InQbate and professor at Sussex University and founding head of Dyson School of Design Engineering at Imperial.

Contact: Dyson School of Design Engineering, Imperial College London, Imperial College Rd, Kensington, London, SW7 1AL, UK.
E-mail: p.childs@imperial.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2465-8822>

Nathalie Martin is a senior expert in sensory, consumer and behavioural science, a wide-ranging expertise she applies to breakthrough innovation in beverage, food, packaging, communication, services and that covers the whole consumer/caregiver/healthcare professional journey (purchase, usage, disposal). Her research interests include multisensoriality; perceptual, emotional, behavioural dynamics of the food and beverage experience; contextual, cognitive and social drivers of healthy and sustainable behaviours. She has contributed to 75 papers in international scientific journals and more than 150 communications in international symposium. She is passionate about transforming sensory, attitudinal, behavioural insights into growth opportunities that are beneficial to the well-being of the living beings and the preservation of their home planet.

Contact: Nestlé Research, Vers-chez-les-Blanc, 1000 Lausanne 26, Switzerland.
E-mail: nathalie.martin@rdls.nestle.com

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2086-3773>

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