

Ritual SciDesign™

A FRAMEWORK FOR BRAND ENGAGEMENT



the behaviorist



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Leading brands are using ritual. But they might not actually know they're doing it.



Ritual SciDesign™

Scientific invention
TRANSLATED
brand innovation

The Ritual SciDesign framework was born out of ten years of neuroscience and economics award-winning research from the University of Toronto Rotman School of Management and Harvard Business School.



Rotman
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



HARVARD
BUSINESS SCHOOL



The New York Times

Psychology Today

HUFFPOST

BUSINESS INSIDER

Forbes

The Atlantic

TIME

Inc.

VICE

ELITE DAILY

Ritual SciDesign™

A behavior change framework for unleashing brand power

Rituals are in nearly every consumer or user experience.

Or at least the ones that matter.

Given enough time, a person will spontaneously create a ritual around a favorite product or service. However, this unfolding of the ritual creation process can be cumbersome and tricky to pin down. A bit of a mystery.

As business owners and brand directors, that doesn't mean you sit back and wait for rituals to naturally emerge. After all your customer - a human being no doubt - has an evolved readiness to do ritual. They're wired for it.

The *Ritual SciDesign™* framework takes the usual process of organic ritual creation, and it accelerates the growth through a series of interacting behavior change techniques.

It's science. It's design. It's psychology. It's behavior change. It's branding ...

... it's anything but mystery.

Behavioral Diagnostics



Uncover existing patterns of user/customer behavior to assess current state. Identify barriers and opportunities through focus group work.

Wild World EthnoWork



Take insights from diagnostics and observe real world behaviors "in the wild" and glean hidden insights that come from actual behavior through "ritual spotting"

Quantitative Research



Data collection using *Ritual SciDesign* proprietary survey tools that reveal the hidden drivers of customer/user loyalty achieved through ritual

Behavioral Labs Testing



A comprehensive review of ritual science literature to help devise a set of hypotheses that get run through pilot testing. Outcomes are applied to market context.

Ritual Implementation



Marketing and comms roll-out; tracking KPIs of consumer engagement to optimize scaled implementation and change.

“Ritualize the experience, and you have a customer for life.”

A NEW BEGINNING FOR BRANDS

Brands in the age of a global pandemic

Find a meaningful activity, and I guarantee there's a ritual in there somewhere. Humans ritualize their behaviors in attempt to create personal and collective meaning. This is true for all human experiences, including the consumption rituals that people build around brands.

Rituals are the stickiest of patterned actions, more than any habit or routine. They are repeated, emotional, and meaningful. From this comes a basic fact: Ritualize the user experience and you have a customer for life.

Yet, so few companies are thinking about their products and services in this way. The current global COVID-19 pandemic offers a good opportunity for these companies to rethink their consumer strategy – with ritual at the center of it.

Our work with the *Ritual SciDesign*TM framework shows that the majority of companies lack an understanding of what drives ritual behaviors in consumer engagement.

If they're thinking about rituals at all – and very few are – it's usually some form of guesswork. What's needed, and what we do best here at The Behaviorist, is applying a science and psychology of ritual to help make sense of these peculiar and powerful behaviors.

In past client projects applying the *Ritual SciDesign*TM framework, we have consistently found the following:

90%

OF CUSTOMERS RITUAL EXPERIENCES

70%

OF CUSTOMERS CRAVE ADDITIONAL RITUALS

r = .68

MORE RITUALS = MORE LOYALTY

The return on ritual is clear.

The tricky thing with these behaviors, though, is the question of how they get created in the first place. They just seem to have always existed - just as they are, just as they've always been.

Well, for us scientists, that simply isn't true.

Every ritual that's ever existed has a starting point, a moment of creation. That has to be true, technically speaking, from a psychological and historical perspective. My past research and work with clients has shown that rituals begin in the mind.

From this follows a very important point that underlies our work with *Ritual SciDesign*TM: You have control over the type of ritual you want your people to engage in.

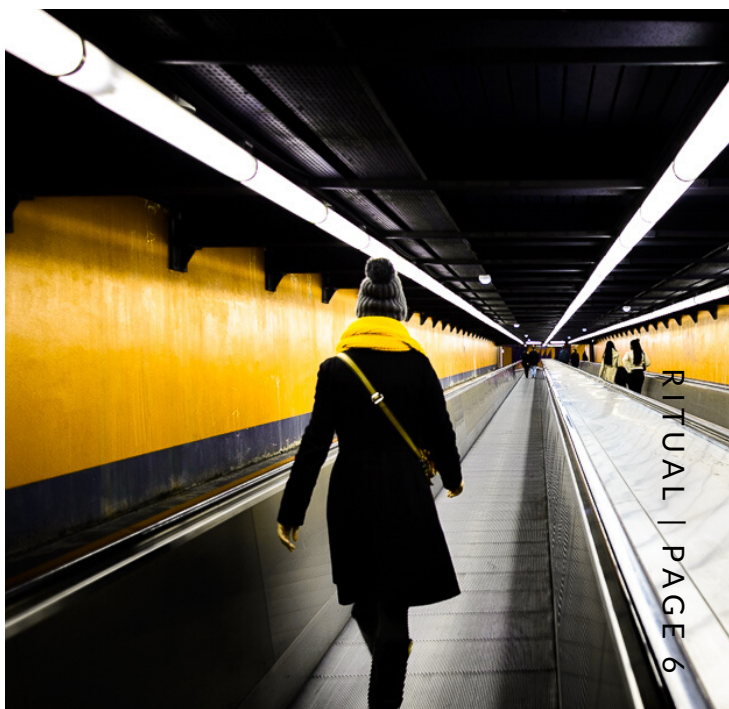
Let's be clear. That's not a bad thing. In fact, it's a great thing. It suggests, for one, that we can be deliberate about shaping people's most meaningful ritual, in order to create brand experiences that are healthy, sustainable, and open to all.


In multiple focus groups and consumer surveys, we have found that one of the biggest barriers to adopting successful ritual behaviors is their level of perceived (in)authenticity.

In work done with Major League Soccer (MLS) we found that attempts to enforce new ritual or to borrow from existing practices created a backfire effect: fans showed low adoption rates because the new behaviors felt fake.

So here's the dilemma: We need the ritual to be created, but people are picky about what early behaviors they are willing to accept as part of that ritual.

The solution? Create a fresh start - a new beginning in which customers are more open and less picky.





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So that takes us to now, the period of COVID-19. In times of great upheaval, when the status quo gets totally turned upside down, we see new consumer behaviors being adopted across markets. This is, and will be true, of our current situation of COVID-19.

Right now is the time for brands to test out the ritual creation process for their products and services. We've seen in past work that new beginnings serve as a type of psychological and temporal landmark – a fresh start when consumer minds are more open to trying new things.

For creating new rituals, this is a window that can help reduce the risk of certain brand initiatives being seen as inauthentic and forced. If there's ever a time to experiment with ritual creation, it's now.

Once brands and businesses see the value of reinventing with ritual, the next important step is to execute on the ritual design and the associated scientific testing. The process is a balance between seeing the ideal behaviors (called “ritual spotting”) and supporting them to ensure the optimal behaviors that get changed are aligned to the brand image.

Let's be clear. The COVID-19 crisis is a trying time for people, businesses, and the overall global economy.

But as we navigate our way through it, and eventually find ourselves on the other side, we'll see before us an opportunity for brands to reinvent themselves through ritual - to help build meaning through human-centric product and service design.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BRAND CAPTURE

The power of ritual: a hidden secret weapon

Brand value is the crux of a company's continued success. Just ask Apple.

For years, various market and consumer reports have hinted at the things that matter most for building good brand value. Things like commitment, novelty, authenticity, trust, presence.

So how do you design products and experiences to make a brand **psychologically capturing**? In all the trade secrets of brand strategy, one piece has been overlooked: rituals.

There's a growing science and psychology of ritual that's started to shed light on many of the puzzling aspects of human behavior.

Ritual, as we've come to learn, is the basis of all human culture and a core feature in the evolutionary history of the human species.

Rituals emerge as a byproduct of physical interactions between people and the external environment. They are mere movements and actions to begin.

But, in time, those physical actions get transformed into a symbolic ritual that stands for something big, something sacred. While most recognize this to be true of religious life (think ritual prayer), research tells us it's the same underlying psychology and neurobiology for how consumers relate to their most cherished brands.

It's been shown that when people look at their favorite brand logos, there's an activation in the brain's reward circuitry — not unlike that with cultural and religious symbols.

So, whether Apple, Amazon, Google, or Mercedes, we worship our most beloved brands. We are fanatical in our loyalty and following.

That feeling of emotionally connecting to a brand and having that shared social identity comes from and through ritual.

If your brand or company wants a true fan, you need to get your customers to ritualize your offering.

Below are the three unique features of ritual that, if properly applied and integrated into design strategy, have the capacity to truly transform brand value for your customers

“We worship our most beloved brands.”

1

Repeated and predictable

- done "just so" according to a ritual script
- little room for improvisation or change
- customers rely on predictable order of events



2

Meaningful and sacred


- rituals are inherently meaningful - starting right from infancy
- narrative and stories attach to the ritual
- represents a core value of customers

3


Social and unifying

- rituals have a built-in social building function
- global brands unite customers across geographies through shared consumer experiences
- Builds a tribe with invincible borders





Rituals may appear on the surface to be silly superstitions. But don't be fooled. True fans are cultivated through the magic of ritual.





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