

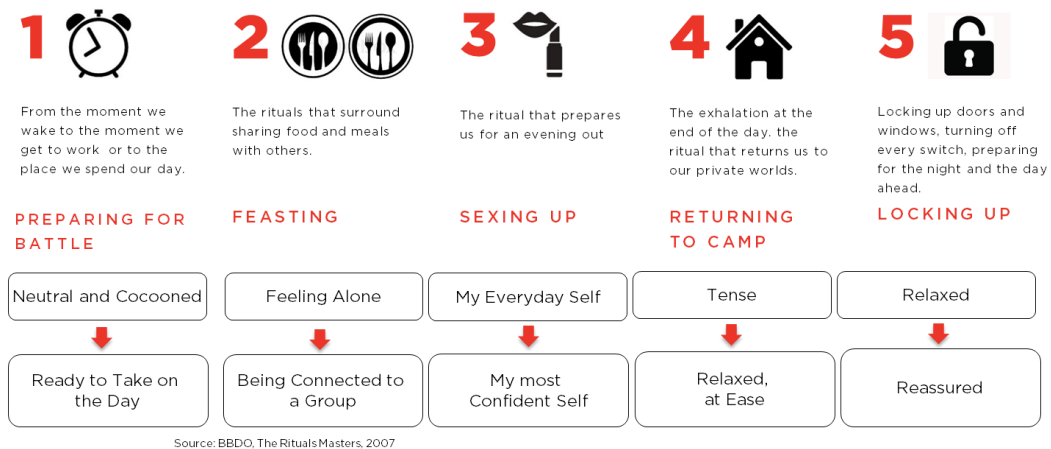
BBDO KNOWS

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Rituals 2019

Rituals 2019

Rituals play an important role in people’s daily lives. It’s a role that goes beyond the rational function of our routines. Rituals are a complex series of tasks, driven by our emotions. They are distinguished from habits on the grounds that they make us feel good, and move us from one emotional state to another, more desirable one. Understanding people’s rituals can lead to business-building ideas. Previous research conducted globally by BBDO identified five rituals that were universal to all respondents, irrespective of cultural differences:



Brands play an essential role in people’s rituals—the presence of a chosen brand and product can be important to achieving the desired emotional transformation. Being on the inside of a ritual affords brands the opportunity for a longer-term relationship. An embedded brand can stay in a ritual and, therefore the basket, indefinitely.

RITUALS AND THE WORLD TODAY

The subject of rituals has garnered the attention of many researchers. Harvard recently concluded that there is still much to be studied in this area due to the complex nature of our rituals and the critical emotional needs they serve in the current context. There is no escaping that the world has become a more volatile and, many would argue, scary place. Politics, economy, climate, migration, terrorism—all these are now sources of uncertainty and perceived danger to our well-being. People are increasingly stressed and worried in times where nothing can be taken for granted and traditional sources of trust have collapsed (according to the Edelman Trust Barometer in 2018, nearly two-thirds of people globally claimed to no longer be sure what is true and what is not). With little to believe in and to be certain of, it is no wonder people seek tighter control, or the illusion of it, within their personal lives. Rituals facilitate this sense of control.

*Rituals 2019***PERVASIVE, INTRUSIVE TECHNOLOGY**

In addition to the external turmoil, many aspects of people's lives have been rendered unrecognizable due to pervasive mobile connectivity and an ever-increasing reliance on smartphones. We are "always on," no matter what we do or where we do it—we look at our phones first thing in the morning and, often, last thing before we doze off to sleep. On one hand, smartphones and technology are empowering people to be more efficient, more informed and more connected than ever before. Rituals are enabled by technology: gathering intelligence on a smartphone in the morning; joining distant friends for dinner over Skype; switching on the heating while on the way home for a more pleasant "return to camp." Yet technology has a flip side that is often in direct conflict with our needs for control, confidence and connection: smartphones distract us, even when we are not directly interacting with them; the abundance of information overwhelms and scares us; and passive consumption of social media content makes us feel lonely and inadequate.

BEING "ALWAYS ON" IN THE "NEVER NORMAL"

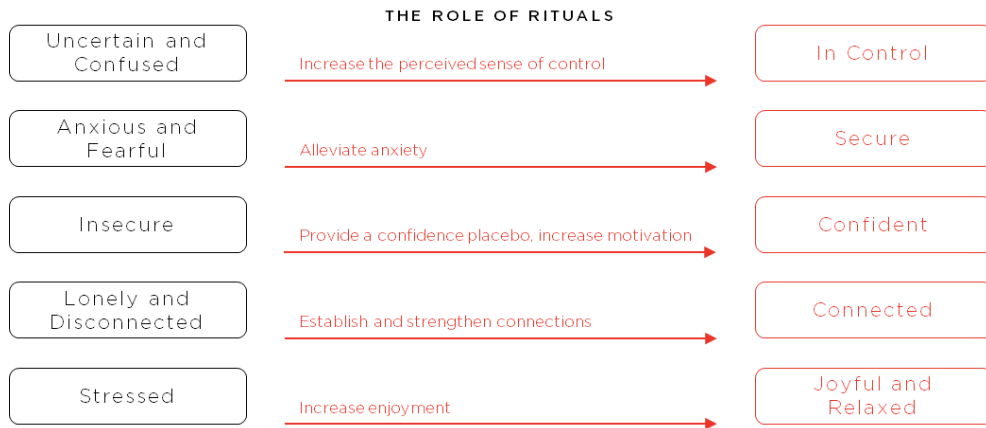
Being "always on" in the "Never Normal" is having a profound impact on our emotional well-being. According to Gallup's Global Emotions Index, "collectively, the world is more stressed, worried, sad and in pain today than we've ever seen it," as people's daily negative experiences are on the rise and positive ones remain unchanged.

As a result, we feel a heightened need for control, security, confidence, connection and joy. According to Maslow's pyramid, these need states are called "deficiency needs," which means that they "arise due to deprivation". I.e., we only feel the need for control in the context of uncertainty, and we only feel the need for connection when we feel lonely. The current external context, driven by global uncertainty and technology, has deprived people of many of these, and the loss has given rise to heightened needs.

RITUALS AND THE WORLD TODAY - PART TWO

Rituals have been the subject of multiple experimental studies by anthropologists and behavioral scientists because of the role they play in meeting heightened needs in our lives.

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Beyond the emotional transformations specific to different rituals, research suggests that, today, thanks to their repetitive, predictable and structured nature, rituals give those who perform them a sense of control, security, confidence and connection. Most significantly for businesses, rituals can elevate a brand at the moment of consumption. BBDO has identified five ways in which our rituals have evolved and the resulting opportunities for brands.

The first of these five evolutions is *Daily Life Flexes*.

DAILY LIFE FLEXES

Historically, rituals have been an easy-to-identify series of actions that help us transition from one state to another: from before work to work-ready (Preparing for Battle); from hungry to eating (Feasting); from our “normal” self to our best self (Sexing Up); from work to home again (Returning to Camp); and from “open” to locked up (Locking Up). These states were static and protected by various endpoints: the internet was stationary; we left work at work; we waited a week for the next episode of our favorite TV shows, which we watched at home; our personal lives were private; and we shopped in-store using a chip or a PIN.

Today, our average day does not have the same predictable linearity. This means that as our daily life flexes, so too do our rituals. For example, we don’t need to go to our physical homes to Return to Camp—we can escape in the same way by watching TV on our commute, calling a family member on our lunch break, or video calling a housemate from the pub. We go to the office, we work from home, we WeWork. Gathering information is now the first thing most of us do via our mobile phones, before we’ve gotten out of bed. For those of us who are freelancers, returning to camp can be leaving camp; i.e., getting out of the house, having been working at the kitchen table all day.

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Inevitably, this overarching lack of definition impacts our daily decisions and, crucially, our relationships with brands. As a result, there is enormous opportunity for brands to help us flex our rituals, so that we can have the same sense of control on-demand. To better understand these opportunities please request the Rituals paper from the BBDO team at bbdo@bbdoknows.com.

Brands need to work harder than ever to earn a place on the shopping list, as contemporary shoppers are more demanding and fickle than ever. A continued understanding of rituals and the role they play to our well-being is critical to earning a more meaningful and sustainable role in people's complex lives.

If you are interested in learning more about the subject of this article, please contact **Melanie Norris**, norrism@bbdoknows.com at BBDO KNOWS.

ABOUT BBDO KNOWS

BBDO KNOWS is a planning resource for the BBDO network and our clients.

BBDO KNOWS offers thinking, strategy, insights and inspiration on key categories, key themes and consumer segments.

If you are interested in learning more about the way BBDO thinks please contact **Melanie Norris**, Managing Director, Head of Planning, norrism@bbdoknows.com

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