

Preface

More than at any other time in our careers as marketing academics, the topic of rituals in marketing and consumer behavior seems to be more vigorous and varied than ever. Although both of us have been working in this intellectual arena for more years than we may care to admit, 2024 saw the publication of two full-length books by academics that targeted a more general readership, and that probed the purposes and pervasiveness of (typically) consumption-oriented rituals—a fact several of our contributors allude to in their chapters. At the same time, the academic research on rituals within marketing continues to broaden, as researchers who were trained in social-psychological methods, once content to cede the terrain of ritual to their more sociologically or anthropologically minded colleagues, have begun to dig into this topic with gusto as well.

Within the commercial and cultural spheres, several factors recently have contributed to people's interest in—and need for—meaningful, symbolic, and repeated practices that serve a variety of functions, from helping them manage crises to simply providing them with escapist and extraordinary occasions they can anticipate and (hopefully) enjoy. Consider, for instance, how people created and sought out rituals to help them cope with the challenging restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic—from family game nights over Zoom to reinventing family traditions that both commemorated important milestones and enabled them to conform to social distancing guidelines (e.g., drive-by birthday parties, community sing-alongs from balconies). During that time, many of the consumer-oriented rituals that marketers both tout and depend upon—large holiday gatherings, lavish weddings, family vacations—were severely curtailed. But as has typically been true when cultural or institutional constraints rein in ritual activity, participation in and expenditures on these occasions often came roaring back as soon as restrictions were eased. The average cost for a wedding in the USA, for instance, is now higher than at pre-pandemic levels—and many consumers are opting for “bucket-list” vacation trips to compensate for their inability to travel during the “COVID years.”

When we edited our first volume on consumption rituals over 20 years ago, the study of rituals was not as extensive in marketing and consumer behavior

as it is now. So we took an interdisciplinary approach, seeking authors outside of our discipline who were in fact studying consumption or marketplace rituals without necessarily understanding rituals in those terms. This new volume contains twice as many chapters as the first—all from scholars whose academic homes are found in business schools. Their chapters provide robust support for the commercial importance of rituals, so we will not repeat those assertions as a rationale for supporting our motivation to curate this compilation. What we can observe is that compared to 20 years ago, recruiting contributors for this volume was easy, as we simply reached out to active scholars whom we knew (or who were referred to us by others working in the area) to achieve our goal of gathering together work from scholars that reflects the theoretical, global, and functional diversity of consumption-oriented rituals around the world, and to offer provocative findings and potential avenues for further study. Given how much we both learned from our contributors about the benefits, challenges, and sometimes disturbing aspects of ritualistic consumption, we believe we achieved that goal.

To that end, we now gratefully engage in the traditional ritual of acknowledging those who have helped us produce this book. First, we thank our contributors, and those who served as our own co-authors, for their enthusiastic and patient participation throughout the preparation and editing of these chapters. Next, we thank our team at Routledge for shepherding this book through the acquisition-to-printing process: Alex Atkinson, Mohana Chatterjee, and Ilakya Raghuraj. We also thank those scholars and co-authors (many of whom are included in this volume) who have partnered with us and supported our own work on rituals throughout our careers. Finally, we thank our families for being our favorite partners in the myriad consumption rituals we've been fortunate enough to enjoy. We hope this book serves to inspire students and scholars in their quest to understand and study the fascinating phenomena of consumption and marketplace rituals.

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