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Measuring Consumer Rituals: A Marketing Application

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Abstract

Rituals are an important part of society, and are a frequent topic of investigation among sociologists and anthropologists. Although researchers have previously investigated ritual, this paper is the first to generate a scale to measure consumption ritual. This study uses a sample of 651 attendees at an Australian Football League game to explore ritual behavior, define the game-day rituals observed, and design a scale to measure consumption ritual. As a newly generated construct, Australian football sports fan ritual has two dimensions – personal and social rituals. For academic researchers, the findings help establish the role of ritual in consumption and the possibility of marketers to generate ritualistic activities to enhance sales. Future research opportunities in other product categories are also discussed.

Previous Research

The roots of rituals lie in religion, yet rituals are pervasive in today's society, even secular Western society (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) contend that in contemporary society the sacred and profane are less distinct. Religion is secularized, and the secular is sacralized, with marketing shaping the process (Otnes and Scott 1996).

As a result of this secularization, there are examples of human rituals in obvious places such as religious ceremonies, political conventions and weddings, and the less obvious such as maternity hospitals, gift giving and at dinner tables on secular holidays such as Thanksgiving Day in the USA. Ancient Chinese philosopher Hsün Tzu stressed the importance of ritual in society when he wrote "those who do not follow and find satisfaction in rites may be called people without direction" (Hsün Tzu, translated by Watson 1967 p. 95). Ritual provides identity and solidarity, and is one of the oldest human activities. Ritual may be as important as eating,

sex and shelter (Grimes 1996). By studying ritual, societal behavior often becomes more understandable and explainable (Wilson 1954).

Defining Consumer Ritual

The terms rite and ritual are used widely throughout literature, and have varied meanings and definitions, usually in the practice of religious activities (Grimes 1996). Most researchers, however, subscribe to Wilson's view whereby studying a culture's rituals can lead to a better understanding of its belief systems (Davis-Floyd 1996; Turner 1969).

While it is difficult to pinpoint a single definition or conceptualization of ritual, there are common themes that run through most of the definitions such as behavioral repetition, symbolism and behavior (Davis-Floyd 1996; Rappaport 1999; Winn 1996). In his study applying grooming rituals to modern consumer behavior, Rook (1985) notes that most definitions centre on the role ritual plays in religion, which is less useful in the marketing context. Rook's (1985, p. 252) definition of ritual incorporates both religious and non-religious behaviors and forms the basis for the use of ritual used in this paper.

"...a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity."

However, Blanchard (1988) argues that ritual must have explicit religious ends, and finds the concept of secular ritual meaningless since almost every behavior in everyday life from brushing teeth to taking the dog for a walk could then be considered rituals. Therefore, it is important to differentiate ritual behavior from habit. Whereas rituals and habits share the common ground of repetition of an event over time, they differ in at least five ways. First, rituals are a repetition of a fixed sequence of multiple behaviors over time (Rook 1985). Second, rituals contain artifacts and symbolism that are taken seriously by the ritualistic consumer (Rook 1985),

and are performed (Moore and Myerhoff 1977) with a sense of formality (Rappaport 1996). Third, a higher level of consumer involvement distinguishes ritual from habit (Celsi and Olson 1988; Tetreault and Kleine 1990). Fourth, ritualistic behavior appears to stimulate a higher level of affective response than does habitual behavior (Warner 1959). Last, rituals are ordered, have a beginning, middle and end (Moore and Myerhoff 1977), and tend to be less amenable to modification or extinction than habits (Kertzer 1988; La Fontaine 1985).

Behavior is a key of Rook's definition, as with the others noted earlier. Rituals are laced with emotion, symbolism and even cognition, but rituals must be performed (Ibrahim 1988; Malley and Barrett 2003) – either individually or in a group. Ritual and behavior go hand in hand. Indeed, the ritualization of the consumptive experience may better explain some purchase behavior than attitudinal variables such as identification or motivation (Park 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Driver's (1996) theory of ritual is more functionally based than Rook's definition (Treise et al. 1999) and suggests that rituals provide three "gifts" to society; order, the experience of community and individual transformation. Advertising agency BBDO Worldwide recently collected responses from 5000 people in 26 countries on their daily ritual behaviors. They found that people of all cultures engaged in similar rituals every day, although the content and meaning of the ritual differed (Brady 2007).

According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1985), an individual's self concept is composed of their social identity and a personal identity. In the same way, the rituals that people perform can be either personal or social. Depersonalization is the term used in social psychology to describe an individual's shift in focus from their personal identity to their social identity (Banaji and Prentice 1994). The consequences of depersonalization are that people tend to behave as group members rather than as individuals. Marshall (2002) proposes that public (or

social) rituals are more likely to produce belonging and belief than personal rituals. If this is the case, social rituals will have more influence on attendance and commitment than personal rituals. The objective of this research is to find if consumption rituals can be measured, and if they can, are there different dimensions of consumer ritual?

Developing a Scale to Measure Ritual

What is common among previous studies of ritual is that none have attempted to measure ritual to determine the level of 'rituality' an individual exhibits – either in a religious or non-religious context. This is perhaps due the complexity of the ritual construct, and the almost unlimited multitude of rituals available to be performed. Rituals consist of a wide range of actions that vary from social and public displays, to extremely private behaviors (Gainer 1995). What was needed was a context within which opportunities for social and personal ritual behavior are prevalent and measurable. Professional sporting contests provide such a context.

Sport mirrors society (Eitzen 1999) and often has a mass fanatical appeal matched perhaps only by religion. Qualities such as mystique, tradition, nostalgia and cultural fixation are common to both (Frey and Eitzen 1991). Lipsyte called sport "the single most influential currency of mass communication in the world, sport cuts right through the differences of age, education, language, gender, and social and economic status, all those differences that tend to divide us" (Lipsyte, 1977 as cited in Meenaghan and O'Sullivan 1999 p. 245). Economically, the worldwide impact of sport is growing, and there is a corresponding increase in social and cultural prominence (Pitts and Stotlar 2002).

The scale in this study was developed followed Churchill's (1979) guidelines. Based on the findings in the literature review, this study proposes a two-dimensional construct of ritual comprised of social rituals and personal rituals. Social rituals are those performed either in

groups, or with the purpose of involving others in the ritual. Personal rituals are performed individually and may be observable by others. To address myriad fan related behaviors the researchers generated a list of sample items that covered the majority of rituals performed.

Generating Sample Items

Sample items came from a four-step process; observing fans at professional football games, reviewing previous academic studies involving sports fans, interviewing sport marketing practitioners and consulting sport marketing academics. Gibson, Willming and Holdnak (2002) identified some of the rituals football fans performed on game day in college sports in the United States. Their list includes tailgating, wearing team colors, wearing team merchandise and staying until the game is finished regardless of the score. James, Breezeel and Ross (2001) studied tailgating at football games at the University of Illinois and found that tailgating (before or after the game) was integral to the overall game day experience. Ritual absorbs “behavioral latitude” (Arnould 2001), so behavior such as yelling abusive words at a football umpire from the safety of the stadium seats, that would be unacceptable in general day-to-day life, is an accepted spectator ritual at a game. This original list of rituals was circulated to four sport marketing academics for their input. Then, interviews with three sport marketing practitioners resulted in refining and adding to the items.

Some of the items that resulted from consultation with academics and practitioners included, wearing the colors of your favorite team and wearing official merchandise may be distinct rituals. They were separated in later use. Tailgating, while popular in the United States, is not widely practiced in Australia. However, the concept of gathering socially before a game was believed to be common to all professional sports in all countries. Some of the rituals may be common to both spectators and athletes such as eating the same pre-game meal for each game, or wearing a lucky charm. Both were included in the initial list. Some academics wondered whether

yelling or shouting at different groups (such as umpires or other fans) might be separate and distinct rituals, so three shouting rituals were included. For club events, singing the team song was a common inclusion with all academics and practitioners, and for international events, this transferred to singing the national anthem. While not constructive, fighting with others and streaking (removing clothes and running across the field) were common, although not regular, occurrences across the world. Praying for team success may be planned, spontaneous, individual or performed in groups, so these behaviors were separated.

The Challenge of Frequency

Simply asking attendees at sporting events if they ever perform these rituals, however, is problematic. Frequent attendees are afforded more opportunities to perform the rituals, which could potentially strengthen the relationship between ritual and behavioral outcomes such as attendance. To address this issue, a two part “game day frequency” scale was devised.

Respondents are asked first if they have ever performed the ritual on a game day, and then asked how often. This method provides an ordinal measure of game day ritual frequency using the rituals as indicators of the ritual construct. There are four questions to ask to determine if these indicators are formative or reflective (Jarvis et al. 2003): What is the direction of causality? Do the indicators share a common theme? Are the indicators expected to co-vary? Can you drop an indicator without changing the conceptual domain of the construct? The direction of causality is from construct to measure, the indicators share a common theme and are expected to co-vary, and dropping one of the indicators does not alter the overall concept of the construct. Therefore the ritual construct has reflective indicators.

Purifying the Measure

Pre-test questionnaires were distributed and collected in two student classes at different Australian universities. One sample (N=112) came from an undergraduate level Marketing class,

and the other (N=41) came from a postgraduate class in Sport Management. These samples provided a combined pre-test sample size of 153. For each of the 18 rituals, the students were asked two questions. On those days when you attend a sporting event as a spectator, how often do you perform this behavior? If you perform this behavior, please indicate how effective you believe it is for helping your team win. This second question links the respondent's game day behavior with superstition and was derived from Buhrmann, Brown and Zaugg's (1982) study of the superstitious beliefs of basketball players. Construct validity requires verifying that these 18 rituals measured ritual behavior. To accomplish this, superstition was used a complementary construct. The repeat nature and formality of superstitious behavior dictates that if respondents are behaving superstitiously, then they are also exhibiting ritualistic behavior. Superstition is a sub-set of ritual, so if superstition is found, so is ritual.

To afford students the opportunity to indicate rituals other than the 18 listed, they were also asked to describe any other activities they engage in either before, during or immediately after attending a game as a spectator. The result of a scatterplot shown in Figure 1, reveals superstition exists in the sample, therefore ritual is present as well. The total number of rituals students performed was plotted against the perceived effectiveness of the rituals, each being measured on a 5 point scale (1, not at all effective – 5, very effective). If students believed their rituals had no effect on their team winning, the points should be clustered around the straight line. Almost all data points, however, are above the line, and increasing with distance from the line as more rituals are performed.

Take in Figure 1 about here

Some of the rituals may actually have a beneficial effect on a team's performance, such as wearing team colors or singing the club song. However, other rituals such as wearing a lucky

charm or attending a social event after the game have no effect on team performance and constitute superstitious behaviors.

The most popular game day ritual was wearing team colors (73.2% had performed this at least once) closely followed by singing the club song (70.6%). Only 6.5% of respondents had ever prayed in a group setting for team success. The individual and group pray categories are combined into an overall pray item for the main data collection. The pre-game meal ritual was removed from the scale. Respondents were confused by the question. The amended list of rituals that comprise the overall game day ritual is provided in Table 1.

Take in Table 1 about here

Second Pre-test

A game of the Australian Football League (AFL) was the setting used to test the ritual scale. The AFL is a 16 team competition with the highest media rights, attendances and participation levels of any sport in Australia. The modified questionnaire was pre-tested for a second time on 39 respondents at a Fremantle Dockers home game against the North Melbourne Kangaroos at Subiaco Oval in July, 2004. Questionnaires were distributed to attendees before the game started. Once completed, the researcher collected the questionnaires, gave the respondent a Fremantle Dockers hat as a thank you, de-briefed the respondent and asked further questions about the survey instrument. None of the pre-test respondents indicated problems with the wording of the questionnaire, and all questionnaires were completed within 12 minutes. The results from this second pre-test showed that no further changes were needed to the final survey instrument.

Collecting Data

Data were collected at a Fremantle home game at Subiaco Oval in the AFL. Eight research assistants were stationed just inside four roughly equidistant gates in an attempt to

gather data from both members and non-members. The research assistants handed out 820 self-completed paper questionnaires to patrons as they entered the stadium.

To randomize the sample, the assistants were instructed to approach every fourth individual or group, with further instructions not to give the questionnaire to more than one person in any group. The respondents could either complete the questionnaire on the spot, or return the questionnaire to the same location before the end of the three-quarter time break. A total of 651 completed questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 79%. This response, from a game day attendance of 35,037 corresponds to 1.8% of the overall crowd. A small incentive (cap in team colors) was given to respondents as they returned their completed questionnaire to the research assistant. The number of refusals was low.

The Sample

The sample was 55% male, with an average age of 38.1 years. The gender split of the sample compares favorably with the overall gender split of AFL games in Perth of 57.6% (Megalogenis 2004). Approximately 61% of the respondents were members of the Fremantle Football Club, and of those members, 94% purchased season tickets. The Fremantle Football Club reports that during most home games, 65% of the attendees are Fremantle members. The sample profile appears to indicate that the sample is similar to the attendee population.

Ninety seven percent of attendees report performing at least one ritual on game day. Wearing team colors to a game is the most frequent ritual performed (86%), followed by singing the club song (80%) and purchasing team merchandise (62%). Twenty-two percent of respondents report individually praying for team success, only 2.5% of respondents report ever having a physical fight with other attendees on game day, and 4.5% report exposing parts of their body that they would normally keep covered.

Cleaning the Data

Data cleaning is a mixture of judgment and process to arrive at a dataset that can be used with multiple analyses with a minimum of bias. From the initial dataset the researcher checked outliers and removed a handful of cases that were predominantly missing responses. The result of data cleaning provided a mostly complete dataset of 643 responses. To maintain the integrity of the analysis and underlying factor structure, the researcher removed those variables where less than 5% of attendees reported performing the ritual at least once. Only 4.5% of attendees reported ever exposing their body while at a game, and only 2.5% reported fighting with other attendees, so these two items were removed from the list.

Additionally, the three items that measured arguing at a game (arguing with umpires, players or other attendees) were removed. Arguing was deemed to be too simplistic (i.e. not requiring multiple behaviors), non-sequential, functional rather than symbolic and subsequent reflection revealed that the various forms of arguing did not fit the definition of ritual.

Also, there was a very high correlation (0.91) between wearing the team uniform and wearing team colors, so wearing the team uniform was removed as it was redundant. Given the ritual construct has reflective indicators; low communalities (below 0.2) required removing two further variables (attending a social event and participating in the sport at half-time) which left a list of eight game day rituals. The dataset was randomly split to accommodate both exploratory and confirmatory analyses leaving two datasets, each with over 300 cases.

Analysis

Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed nine correlations above 0.3, which along with a significant Bartlett test of sphericity ($X^2 = 455.7$, 28 df, $p < 0.001$) and a KMO measure of sampling adequacy of 0.731 indicates sufficient correlations exist in the dataset to validate

applying factor analysis (Hair et al. 2006). Principal axis factoring was used along with Direct Oblimin rotation. Direct Oblimin is the rotation technique best suited to obtaining multiple factors with theoretically correlated constructs (Hair et al. 2006). The scree plot indicated two underlying factors with Eigenvalues over 1. The pattern matrix indicates the dimensions of this two-factor structure as shown in Table 2 and explains 52% of the variance in the data. Values below 0.3 in the pattern matrix were suppressed for clarity.

Take in Table 2 about here

The first five rituals representing factor 1 are all observable social rituals that involve many participants or observers. The remaining three rituals in factor 2 are personal, and tend to be more private. Therefore, factor 1 is labeled Social Ritual, and factor 2 as Personal Ritual. The next step was to validate these factors using confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modeling (SEM) with the AMOS software package (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999).

Missing Data

SEM does not deal well with missing data points in the dataset (specifically AMOS is unable to calculate modification indices with any data missing), so cases with missing data should be removed or the missing data should be estimated and replaced. Rubin (1976) argues that missing data can be replaced with unbiased estimates if the data is missing completely at random (MCAR). Rather than removing cases with missing data, the best method of estimating missing data is Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML), which yields the least bias in the missing data (Arbuckle 1996; Enders and Bandalos 2001). Little's MCAR test revealed a non-significant value ($X^2 = 1661.639$, $df = 1528$, $p = .009$) which indicates the missing data is MCAR, and can be replaced using FIML.

Fan Ritual Scale CFA

The items found in the exploratory analysis were entered into the measurement model seen in Figure 2.

Take in Figure 2 about here

Inspecting the modification indices revealed that error terms e2 and e3 should be co-varied to increase model fit. Normally error terms should only be co-varied when it can be explained theoretically. In this case the error terms relate to two items – making/bringing a sign and buying team merchandise. It is plausible to believe that attendees were somewhat confused between these two items as they could have brought a sign from home that they had purchased previously from the team store. It is reasonable to believe that these error terms can be co-varied. The indicators listed in Table 3 show the model to be a good fit for the data (Hair et al. 2006; Hu and Bentler 1999; Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger 2003).

Take in Table 3 about here

Tests for convergent validity show mixed results. Reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha revealed a value of 0.724 for the Social Ritual scale, and 0.640 for the Personal Ritual scale. While these results are somewhat low, they are acceptable for exploratory work in the social sciences (Churchill 1979; Nunnally 1978). The factor loadings were all significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, and ranged from a low of $r = 0.33$ to a high of $r = 0.66$ with four of the items below the $r = 0.50$ rule of thumb (Hair et al. 2006).

Conclusions

The results show that sports attendees at AFL games perform two types of rituals on game day: personal rituals such as praying for their favorite team to win, and social rituals such as singing the team song with other members of the audience. This study is the first to define

consumption rituals, and then generate a scale to measure consumption rituals. This study has taken ritual out of its religious roots into an application in mainstream secular society.

A further theoretical contribution answers Rook's (1985) call for using fresh research constructs to gain a broader perspective on consumption. The scale developed for measuring fan ritual can be used in other sports marketing studies in other countries. The principles underlying the scale development help to generate modified ritual scales for investigating the ritual consumption of other consumer goods and services.

Limitations and Future Research

The scale developed to measure fan ritual in this study simply marks the starting point. It is incomplete, and the mixed results on convergent validity show that it should be refined and then replicated in future studies. If there are common rituals involved with attending varied sporting events around the world, then researchers should incorporate these into subsequent scales. Analysis of the indicators of social ritual suggests social ritual may be multi-dimensional. Perhaps there are mainstream social rituals such as wearing team colors and singing the club song, and more 'hardcore' social rituals such as face painting or making a sign to bring to the game. Concentrating on measuring social rituals alone may help refine this construct.

Marketing Implications

Holt contends that for the construct of ritual to have real meaning, both the antecedents and consequences of ritual should be described and analysed (Holt 1992), not just the traits of ritual. Since rituals are less amenable to modification or extinction, then investigating the link between ritual behaviour and desirable marketing outcomes such as behavioural loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, commitment, purchase frequency or game attendance is the next obvious step for marketers (Neale 2006). Holt wants to know what leads people to be ritualistic, and what are

the outcomes of ritual behaviour. Can marketers of other products learn from the study of ritual? Obvious services that have close ties with ritualistic behavior such as religion would be an interesting test. Certainly churches, synagogues and mosques are rich with ritual ceremonies, but marketers have also woven rituals into the purchase and usage of some consumer products. For example, the HOGs (Harley Owners Group) meet regularly to socialize and ride their motorcycles together. This is a ritual that Harley Davidson facilitates and encourages with its marketing.

In much the same way that some consumers are more prone to use coupons/vouchers than others (Lichtenstein et al. 1990), an intriguing study would be one that tests whether some people have a higher propensity to be ritualistic than others, and if so, what the antecedent personality characteristics would be. Parker (1984) suggests social rituals are influenced by both physiological and psychological arousal which further broadens the scope of antecedents. Donavan, Carlson and Zimmerman (2005) have begun this process by investigating the personality traits antecedent to identification. They found extraversion, agreeability, need for arousal and materialism to influence need for affiliation, which in turn influences identification. These traits would be a good starting point in examining the personality-ritual link. Mowen (2004) also found a relationship between the personality trait of competitiveness and behaviors related to vicarious achievement such as watching sports. Future researchers can similarly analyze the ties between ritual and cultural background. Mannell (2005) calls for a vigorous examination of the cultural factors that causes differences in leisure consumption.

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Figure 1: Scatterplot of Ritual and Superstition

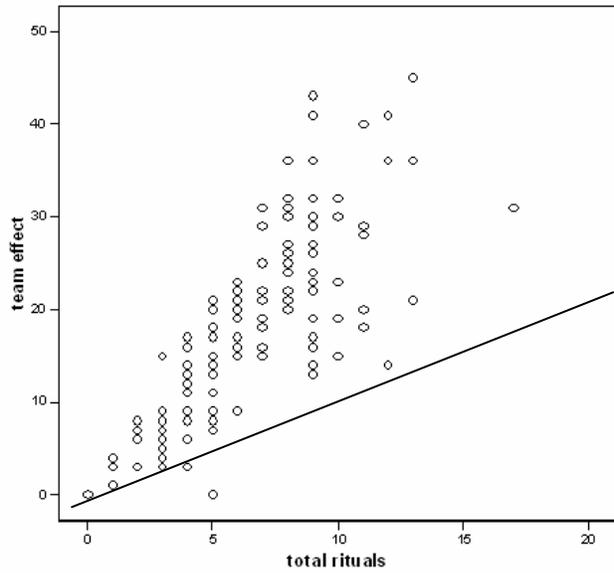


Table 1: List of Game Day Rituals

Rituals	
1	Paint/decorate body
2	Make/buy sign
3	Purchase team merchandise
4	Wear team colors
5	Wear any part of official uniform
6	Sing team song/national anthem
7	Social event/tailgate
8	Argue with/shout at attendees
9	Argue with/shout at players
10	Argue with/shout at umpires
11	Participate at halftime/fulltime
12	Expose part of your body you normally would
13	Physically fight with other attendees
14	Wear a visible lucky charm
15	Wear a lucky charm that cannot be seen
16	Pray for team success

Table 2: Pattern Matrix Structure

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Sing Team Song	0.685	
Wear Team Colors	0.667	
Buy Merchandise	0.586	
Make Sign	0.529	
Paint Face/Body	0.470	
Wear Visible Lucky Charm		0.659
Wear Non-visible Lucky Charm		0.636
Pray for Team Success		0.542

Figure 2: CFA Model for Fan Ritual

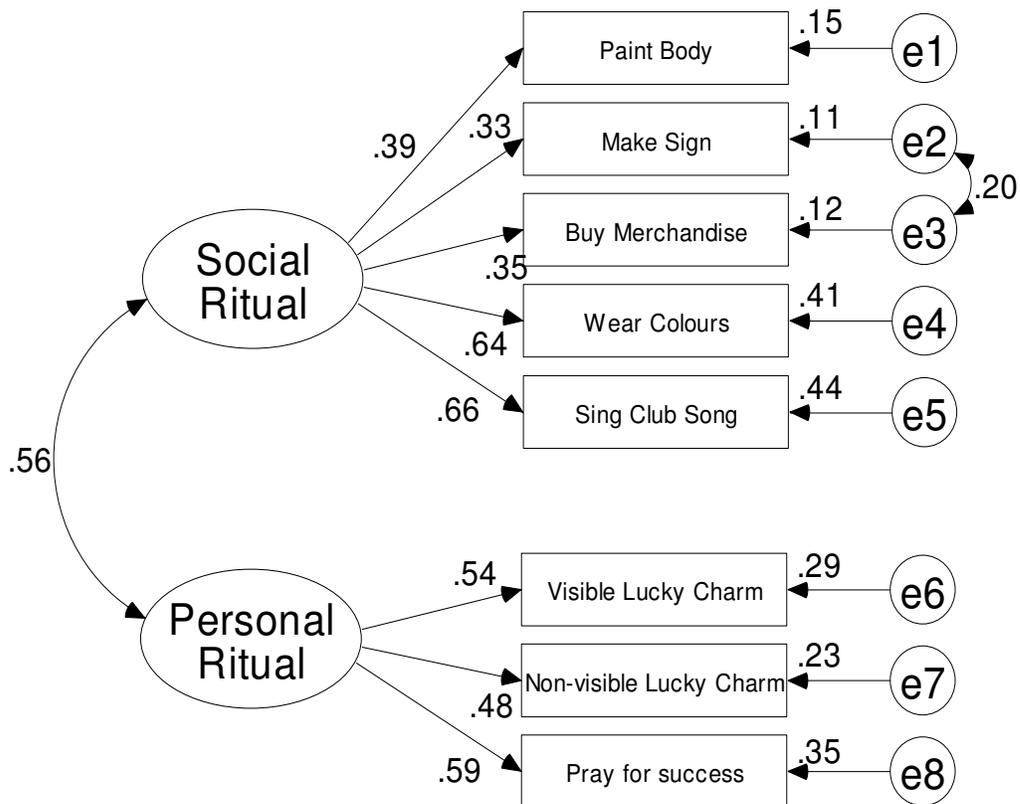


Table 3: Fit Indicators for Fan Ritual CFA

Fit Indicators	Value
Chi-square	28.22
Degrees of Freedom	18
p	0.059
X ² /df	1.568
RMSEA (Confidence Interval)	0.042 (0.00-0.07)
GFI/AGFI	0.977/0.954
TLI	0.940
CFI	0.962
Std Residual Co-variances over 2.58	none