

Take One – or Three – for the Team: Consumerism as Play

ABSTRACT

With the expansion of consciousness driven by further discovery and creation of the digital realm, scholars have witnessed the birth of societal structures and cultures, originally found in the physical realm, within the digital realm. This has been documented mainly in the creation of communities within MMORPGs and synthetic worlds¹ [1]. Although these communities are defined as being based around fundamental principles of “play” and “fun” [1], I argue identical communities are being formed within sites dealing with consumerism, and these communities are not exclusive to these virtual worlds. Within my paper I will address the concept of *consumerism as play* using the wholesale outlet site woot.com, and their live-time sales experience, called a “woot-off.” I will analyze how the Internet has allowed for such a type of consumerism that breaks the norms of consuming in the physical world, allowing what once was a normally individualistic goal – purchasing an item for oneself that one wants – to turn into a group goal – helping others get to items they wish to purchase by “taking one for the team.”

Author Keywords

consumerism, Internet communities, Internet culture

¹ A synthetic world is described as being a “an expansive, world-like, large-group environment, made by humans, for humans, and which is maintained, recorded, and rendered by a computer” [1]. This encompasses all three types of worlds: First Person Shooters, MMORPGs, and Social Worlds. However for the purpose of this paper, only the latter two shall be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

A dwarf, an elf, and a wizard attack a ravenous beast in World of Warcraft, while over in Second Life a famous avatar singer performs in front of a group of adoring fans and friends. This is just a sample of a handful of events out of millions that happen daily within communities existing in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) and social worlds. The communities that form in these societies are dynamic and colorful ones, exemplifying all the properties physical communities have, only in a digital atmosphere. It is important to note that although the focus/end goal of both worlds is different², the formation of communities happens almost identically with only a variation in community events. Therefore, as this is the case, it shows that such communities have the ability to form in almost *any* location where people are together in a social environment – whether it be social by nature, or sociality forced upon users due to the need to complete group tasks. However, one might ask, how then could such a community form on a site dedicated to the selling of wholesale items alone?

Although Castronova [1] hints at the answer to this question, by suggesting that it is not surprising if soon all policies will cater to MMORPG style, I will further go in depth into his theory and show, how in this instance, MMORPG structure and theory *does*

² Usually in MMORPGs the focus of the world is to complete challenges and quests, leveling up an avatar character in the process, in the attempts to become one of the strongest, and most powerful in the game, while social worlds, the focus is on being social, naturally.

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help provide a fun environment, even outside the concept of traditional play. To answer this question, I start with a general overview of my case study, woot.com.

The Nature of the Beast: The Principles of woot.com
woot.com is an American wholesale outlet Web site offering both new and refurbished goods for sale on a daily basis. What separates woot.com from other outlet or retail sales sites is that woot.com offers only one product for sale during a duration of a 24-hour period. Even if the item sells out within the first hour, the product will remain on the site until 24 hours has lapsed, where a new one will be put up for sale. However a user can only buy up to three of each daily item – and of course can purchase just one or two as well –thereby limiting users to purchasing only for mainly personal use. In addition to the ability to buy the product featured on the site, if it is still available when you access it, the site also features a blog run by staff members, and a forum for community members. In order to buy from the site you must create an account, and it is through that account you can post on the forum. Although this within itself generates a community of its own, it has no different features, besides the time limit, of any of the other sales sites out there in terms of ability for community participation. It is through a special activity on the site, called a “woot-off,” that the community is taken a level beyond the basics, and principles of virtual world community formations can be seen.

A woot-off is similar to the original concept of the site, an item is placed on the site until it is sold out with the ability to purchase either one, two, or three of the item until it is sold out, however the 24-hour limitation is banished, so instead as soon as one item is sold out the next is placed up almost immediately. A yellow status bar at the bottom of the screen below the item [Figure 1] shows approximately how many of the item are left, to allow community members to see how close to the next item they are, and budget their time accordingly if they wish to be there for the beginning of the next

sale. The woot-off itself goes on for 2-3 days usually, and about once every 2-3 months, but is highly anticipated by the community during the normal sales period.

Although this seems as merely a faster version of the site’s normal service, a community has built around it that is anything but predictable. As normal days users are forced to wait out the 24-hour period, regardless of whether the item sells out or not – there is no incentive to do anything other than look out for the solitary user’s needs, and compete with other users to get the item first. However, when the woot-off occurs, the solitary nature of purchasing items is changed, being shifted over to a environment that forces team-work, as the selling out of a product does immediately advance the site to the next product. Therefore, as one person cannot make an item sell out, many people must make purchase to achieve an item sell out, and in this case it benefits the community for items to sell out as they get a chance at a potentially bigger and better item, than the current one. The audience has gone from passive consumers, to an active community, where everyone must do their part for the good of the community – in this case purchasing “their share” of items to help the group get to the next one.

This formation of community can be witnessed through the woot.com blog, exterior fan blogs and fan sites, as well as an irc channel in which users join during a woot off to better participate with other users. As community was deemed necessary to form to best explore the world of products woot.com has the potential to offer, the community itself is now not only kept together by the necessity of teamwork, but also by a culture that has immersed over time. Various items, although mostly worthless on the surface, such as a green frog shaped “Leakfrog” – which is only useful if one has a problem with leaking or the much anticipated woot-off prize, a “bag-of-crap” (basically a random item in a bag) – have gained enough cultural capital that active community

participants on the site will purchase the item for cultural status alone, and not necessarily for actual usefulness.

Therefore, in taking the principle concepts that are required to create a dynamic community, such as group goal (MMORPGs) and sociality (virtual worlds), it is, although on the surface surprising to see such a site create such a vibrant community normally seen in virtual worlds, statistically, it is almost guaranteed to happen. In the next section I will shortly step back and address the basic principles of shopping and consumerism from their physical backgrounds, to how they have evolved on the Internet. I will also analyze the basic principles of consumerism and explain how they fit into the grand scheme of things. In the following two sections I will then analyze the community described in the introduction through comparison to its virtual worlds counterparts, showing the parallels between the two, and why I believe it is a near-identical community, and then introduce my concept of *consumerism as play*, addressing how it fits in with the already existing principles of consumerism.

FROM PHYSICAL WALLS TO DIGITAL MALLS

woot.com is not an average shopping area - in terms of digital or physical retailers – whether it is in its 24-hour state or woot-off state. However, I believe the form of community seen on woot.com is created through a combination of both physical and digital practices, which then leads to the use of consumerism as play, therefore I shall first address woot.com's physical origins – such as how/what/why do they sell – before moving on to analysis of MMORPG digital structure later on in the paper – how is this then turned into a rewarding community of fun.

Naturally, one of the major difference between woot and most physical and digital retailers is the fact woot does not offer a product choice, but proposes a solitary product for purchase in which the consumer can *either* accept or decline purchase of.

This is not normally the case in most other forms of retail sales. Consumers can enter the establishment – either through physically entering, turning on their television, or opening up an Internet browser – and see all items the store has for offer at once without any further temporal limitations, other than, naturally, personal time constraints on time spent browsing stores. Even if an item is currently sold out, it does not affect *what* the consumer sees, *or* their ability to purchase other items. It affects only whether or not the consumer can *immediately* purchase the item, but does not cause for further speculation in the consumer's mind as to whether or not a specific item will or will not be up for sale, as they can be aware of all items the store has, or does not have immediately.

Moving beyond this difference however, one will find that these forms of traditional consumerism have left their mark on the purchasing structure of woot.com in a variety of ways – such as the community of people that forms around consumerism. Consuming is something any person of any age, with the necessary income, can participate in. [3] This is the same within the woot shopping community, just as it is with any other establishment. As long as a consumer meets the capital requirements needed for purchasing an item, in most cases who the consumer is does not matter. In consumerism outlets that are physical in nature, this group of people with a common goal – to consume – are all grouped together in one place, therefore uniting them with their common goal, and thus forming a community surrounding it.

In addition to the community aspect brought on by physical shopping, in moving mediums to television, a new aspect appears as the community aspect is somewhat taken away. [3] As catalogue mail order shopping took consuming away from forced community and into the home, television shopping channels took consuming from abstract product, to familiar cultural object. With each product appearing

to be “personally” sold to the consumer – as the consumer is watching the television and the television is “addressing” them – as shopping pulls further away from community, it creates a stronger link between person and object. With this quasi-interactive look at products, as the shopping networks usually focus on showing one item at a time, followed by an elaborate product description this form of consumerism allows the user to become culturally closer to the product – through acquisition of additional information and feeling of connection to the product – but not closer to other shoppers.

Interestingly woot.com combines both aspects – of personalized shopping and communal shopping – that both medium of consumerism have shown, however, without losing the main trait of either form. It forces community, yet still lets the user feel more connected to the product through the “individual sales pitch” received from computer screen – consumer. It takes it one step further, which I shall address in the later section on game theory, in which it turns the community with abstract common goal – consuming in general – to community with concrete common goal – consuming one item to get to the next.

Exploring the Frontier: American Consumerism and the Theory of More

Why the drive to consume so much however? I believe the answer – as woot.com is American – lies in the concept of “fronterism.” Shames (2003) describes shopping as a product of the ideology of the American dream of the frontier – the belief that the world contains unlimited possibilities and wealth waiting to be discovered – or in simpler terms, the frontierism is the desire of the American society for “more.” [2] He argues the urge to invest in the unknown, in the hopes of getting better returns, the original ideal of the frontier – and thus the concept American principles were built upon – has created a society that is completely driven by the concept of more. He states “in America, a sense of quality has lagged far behind a sense of scale.” [2]

I argue that Shames concept of the frontier within consumerism reigns true, and is proved especially through the actions of the American audience – as products cannot be shipped overseas – of woot.com. Users invest money in products they may not need, or want in some cases, in order to help the overall community reach the next product. Not only is this a perfect example of communal cooperation, but it is driven by the common dream of “more” – as the community wishes to see not only the current product, but what other riches may lie ahead. They do not know what will come next, but the common desire to know what comes next, and not miss a chance to get a bargain, bonds the community together – allowing them to successfully work together – as they all have a common goal. The group works together to collectively explore the frontier, fully knowing not everyone will get their dream items, but still realizing they cannot achieve anything alone.

CONSUMERISM

As we focused in the previous section on how consumers can consume, now it is important to address why consumers are consuming in the first place – why they are consuming the product. To define the term product, I shall use an economic definition, stating that products are “bundles of attributes that yield particular benefits” and have been constructed as “vessels of meaning that signify similarly across all consumers.” [6] In other words, products are something consumers want because of what they offer a consumer, physically, socially, psychologically, and ideologically. Consuming itself can be defined as a “type of social action in which people make use of consumption of objects in a variety of ways.” This leads then to two major types of consuming: the structure of consumption and the purpose of consumption. From that general outline, I shall then proceed to analyze the consumerism characteristic of woot.com through the categories Holt identifies in his article on consumerism types, as I believe he is one of the few scholars who studied

consumerism in a way to include the consumerism of play, of which I shall expand upon later. Holt breaks consumerism down into four categories: consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming as classification and consuming as play.

Consuming as Experience

First we shall look at consumerism within woot.com through a psychological nature. This theory bases around the concept of an emotional state that arises during consumption due to how consumers experience the product through both cultural and natural framework used to interpret the experience of the product. [6] For woot.com, the natural high received by grabbing an elusive item – such as the notorious “bag-of-crap” – or purchasing an item last minute before it sells out, is a huge motivator to continue participating and consuming through the community. One could go to the store and purchase the same item from a variety of retailers, yet more joy is experienced for these users through the site, therefore the experience is worth the cost.

Consuming as Integration

With the social and cultural framework established through consuming as experience, leading to a heightened joy beyond basic feelings, it is natural to move from consuming as experience to a more broader reach, consuming as integration. This is, arguably, one of the most important aspects of consumerism when dealing with community and consumerism in woot.com.

Consuming as integration is defined as being “how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings” in dealing with rituals that integrate objects into the community, allowing them to have symbolic properties. [6] In other words, this is where the enrichment of such a framework used in consuming as experience, adding to the already existent social and cultural frameworks, happens. This is the combining of object and self, giving objects additional meaning beyond the basic properties the item physical has.

Most of the integration established through woot.com is through use of the forum, but the most dedicated members of the community also use internet relay chat (IRC) and additional external sites. Product value is achieved through both normal socialization and inside jokes of the community, but also ones produced through contests sponsored by woot.com. woot.com contest deal with incorporating products sold on woot.com with amusing themes set at the beginning of a contest period by the woot.com management. The popularity of such contests and posts allows for fads to arise within the woot.com community, allowing some items to get more leverage than others depending upon how they are presented through forum talk and contest images. Similar to principles of mall theory talked about in the previous part of this section, through viewing the forum and the site, just as in a mall one would view advertisements and showcasing as influential in decision making, consumers acquire through the forms not only items – they may not buy any in fact – but the establish “a well-developed sense of the significance of those commodities.” [3]

In addition to this, it is through consumer participation – or perceived participation – that consumers feel more linked to the site in general, and more involved in it – therefore giving items more values. As Holt uses an example of baseball to exemplify this – how spectators would have “imaginary arguments with managers (of the baseball team they supported)” [6] consumers here also have such imaginary contact with the producers – who obviously cannot possibly read all the hundreds of thousands of posts they receive during a given woot-off – on what to do next in the woot-off, and therefore they feel as active consumers in this aspect. You can see examples of this when consumers plead for trendy items to the “powers that be”:

“bring out the leak frogs!” (Oct. 23, 2008 10:41 PM)

“cmon Bacon Salt. there’s still hope.” (Oct. 23, 2008 10:41 PM)

The Bacon Salt example is a very interesting one, in fact, as the woot-off before the October woot-off, Bacon Salt was the very last item of the woot-off. Unhappy consumers, who did not get their chance at a bag of crap, then ragged on the bacon sale, making fun of it, and disagreeing with the decision to post it instead of a bag of crap. However, through this highlighting, Bacon Salt made it to the woot hall of fame, so to speak, and is now a heavily requested item, mentioned on most forum topics, including this one on the forum for a blood-pressure monitor:

“<sigh> Still no bacon salt. What’s left, cruel world...?” (Oct. 23, 2008 10:39 PM)

Consuming as Classification

What you purchase at woot.com is important to the community, as the community has its own social and cultural norms established through the process of working together, therefore, the community also deals with consuming as classification. This occurs when objects “viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meanings act to classify their consumers”. [6] The things you buy, as well as the quantity you buy, will affect your status within the woot.com community. This directly affects a user’s experience (consuming as experience), as life within the community will be more enjoyable if you are perceived as helping, as opposed to not helping. Although this is not the most influential form of consumerism Holt describes, it is still necessary to touch upon it, as it does play a role in the existence of the community.

Consuming as Play

This is the final form of consumerism described by Holt, dealing with the aspect of consuming with others and enjoying the social interactions that occur through such form of consumption. [6] This can be seen by friendships and “inside inside jokes” – jokes not made obvious to even the main section of the

community, but only to certain subgroups. The socializing that occurs within the community naturally while consuming is going on, provides a fun aspect and a incentive to continue to both consume and socialize as both result in participation within the community.

Holt’s concept of consuming as play is the first step of my classification of woot.com, and which I will bank my final analysis off of. I believe Holt was ahead of the time when analyzing the concept of consumerism in 1995, and, although he could not see where consuming as play would function within Internet communities, he still understood that play and fun were important aspects of encouraging consumerism. As Holt argues, and I continue in this paper, I believe this is a phenomenon that need to be addressed more, as the Internet offers increasing possibilities for formation of communities of play.

FOUNDATION OF “FUN”: WOOT.COM AS COMMUNITY OF PLAY

What makes an MMORPG? Part of the definition is arguably in the name, it’s a game (G) that contains a large group of people working together (MM) online (O) in a task-based environment (RP). As per the loose definition of a MMORPG, one can see the attributes that makes such a game are also part of the structure of woot.com. It’s a large group of people working together consuming online (MMO) in a task-based environment – to get to the next item by playing the role of consumer (RP). So perhaps the better question to address is the “G” in MMORPG. What makes something a game, and does woot.com fall under that category?

A majority of scholars [1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12] will argue that the concept of play is what defines a game as being a game. To take it further in analysis, by looking at not only what a game should be, but what a *successful* game should be, scholars such as Castronova argue it is the *fun* of the world of play – i.e. game worlds – that allows for it to be a success. [1, 8] Therefore, in this paper, I shall analyze game

structure through the aspects of the game world that not only allow for a vibrant community to form, and allow users a structure of which they can achieve success in the game, but also analyze it through the framework of what structure makes a game fun.

Through studies on game structure [10, 12] and the economics of fun, described by Castronova, [1,8], I will analyze woot.com through the following characteristics of games I believe make up the foundation for a successful fun-based game: Acquisition, Consumption, Property Ownership, Creation of Self, Creation of Items, Creation of External Resources, Cultural Capital, Mission/Purpose, History, Equal Competition, and Risk. I chose these basic structures from a variety of readings (Bartle, Castronova, Malaby, Taylor) picking the concepts most agreed upon in all sources, and thus then defining them in my own terms. For each characteristic I will briefly introduce the concept, followed by a table analysis of the characteristics – showing their presence in either MMORPGs or woot.com, and how they are present in either. [Tables 1, 2, 3, 4]

Consumption, Acquisition, and Property Ownership
Acquiring objects, using them, and feeling ownership over them is a main part of most games. Some form of item usage is important, as, in most cases, the better/more items you have the more successful you are in the game – both skill-based and social-based. Skill-based in the fact a users avatar is made stronger with better equipment (avatar capital), allowing a user to kill monsters and complete quests better, and social-based in the fact certain items allow a user to gain social status (cultural capital). Items can be acquired a variety of ways, but mainly through either user-based trade or quest/task completion.

In Table 1 you can see that woot.com has all of these characteristics, as it allows people to acquire, consume, and own objects – through both individual effort and communal process. The entire purpose of woot.com is to acquire items – through

purchasing them (trade) or through completing contests and winning certificates (quest/task) that allow a user to get items as well without using monetary capital. Ownership is a huge part of woot.com’s user community, which you can visually see, as in most user’s forum signatures a listing of all items purchased by that user – along with dates and amounts purchased. Displaying of items owned to gain social and cultural capital is a major part of community based games, making woot.com no different than any other participation based community.

Table 1: This is a comparison chart of MMORPG game culture to woot.com culture dealing with acquisition, consumption, and ownership

	MMORPG [A]	woot [B]
Acquisition [1]	YES	YES
Consumption [2]	YES	YES
Ownership [3]	YES	YES

- [1] Acquisition of Items: A) Accumulation of digital items; B) Accumulation of physical items
- [2] Consumption of Items: A) Consumption of digital items through digital item/currency trade, physical currency trade, and quest/task completion; B) Consumption of physical items through physical currency trade and contest completion (quest/task)
- [3] Ownership: A) Items digitally are owned (not legally physically except in rare cases such as Second Life) but socially owned; B) Items are legally, socially, and physically owned.

Creation of Character, Property, and Knowledge
Going through the process of defining yourself as a character in the game world, both through gathering skills and gather respect (or for some hatred), is a fun part of game play. Becoming known in a community and/or respected or hated for a skill, personality, or knowledge, happens in all games, whether the user is aware of it or not. Whenever a user participates in a game with other humans, and in some cases even AI [1], they are constantly leaving impressions on people, and further defining who their character is – in some cases, as black and white a definition as

either good or evil. Through defining your character, and interacting with other people, you, and items in the game, are constantly developing various levels of cultural capital based around such social definitions generated through communication with others.

While accumulating this character definition, users are also often gathering capital (as discussed in the previous section), creating items (through either combining items together or, in games such as Second Life, programming), and creating bases of knowledge. Knowledge production is an important part of game communities, and communities in general, as participatory culture ties everyone further into immersion in the subject, and allows them to feel closer to the final product. [11] Such creations of knowledge, such as those described in participatory culture, could be another research angle within itself, therefore, I just touch upon it here, recognizing its significance in the site, and then continue on for the sake of the scope of this paper. However, such examples can be seen within the forums, fan sites (such as seen through sell bots, etc. listed at the wiki site: http://woot.wikia.com/wiki/Woot-Off_Checkers).

Although some attributes of creation are not possible on woot.com – such as raw creation of items – still others are in abundance. Creation of cultural capital through group participation – as documented in the beginning with the cultural capital of leakfrogs and bags-of-crap being high for no particular reason other than they are valued by the society – is abundant in the forums, as well knowledge creation through both product description, advice, and external resources, allowing the team to achieve and participate better in woot-offs. Table 2 shows the comparison and further defines how these concepts are present in both MMORPGs and woot.com.

Table 2: This is a comparison chart of MMORPG game culture to woot.com culture dealing with creation of self, items, cultural capital and resources

	MMORPG [A]	woot [B]
Creation (Self) [4]	YES	YES
Creation (Items) [5]	MAYBE	NO
Creation (External) [6]	MAYBE	YES
Cultural Capital [7]	YES	YES

- [4] Creation (Self): A) Creation of self achieved through completion of tasks, group participation, and gaining of human and avatar capital; B) Creation of self achieved through completion of purchases, group participation, and gaining of human and username capital.
- [5] Creation (Items): A) In some MMORPGs/social worlds, items can be created within game system constrains; B) woot.com users cannot create items through the woot.com system
- [6] Creation (External): A) MMORPGs often create knowledge communities, such as wikipedias and other various collections of information and information storing sites; B) woot.com users have created knowledge communities based around product knowledge, and tools to help users better complete woot-offs.
- [7] Cultural Capital: A) Items gain social capital through community culture (based on relative helpfulness in the game, as well as favourite items of user culture); B) Items gain social capital through community culture (based on relative helpfulness in the physical world, as well as favourite items of user culture).

Mission/Purpose and History

In order for a game to be successful, users need to feel a sense of purpose and mission within the world. Although this is not the case for all virtual worlds as literally as quest completion, such as The Sims Online and Second Life, all games have at least a vague sense of purpose, whether it be being social, or being the best warrior you can be. To help build a sense of mission and purpose, having a history to the game and in the game world also helps. When users feel their actions leave a lasting impact, it creates a chain of history that both inspires further actions – in the sense of basing action upon past events – and in the sense that users feel they have a chance to be remembered if they do something great.

As Table 3 shows woot.com has both of these concepts, as the mission/purpose of the site is quite clear – help buy products to get to the next product and advance to the frontier of consuming, and history

is established through user oral history of past woot-offs and woots.

Table 3: This is a comparison chart of MMORPG game culture to woot.com culture dealing with mission/purpose and history.

	MMORPG [A]	woot [B]
Mission/Purpose [8]	YES	YES
History [9]	YES	YES

[8] Mission/Purpose: A) Users work both separately and together to complete tasks to advance in the game; B) Users work both separately and together purchasing items to advance the possibilities of consuming further.

[9] History: A) Through the course of existence of the game world (with human players) history is developed out of major events in the game; B) History is developed from recollection of past items and woot-offs, findable in logs the blogs keep.

Equal Competition within a Risky Environment

It is human nature to enjoy competition, but competition is only fully enjoyed when the playing field is level. A sense of fairness is important in all gaming environments, therefore, competition is important between characters, where all users must start from 0 and work their way up the ladder. While working on establishing their character and gathering assets, the environment also has to have risks that make playing the much more exciting and dynamic.

As Table 4 shows, this is true for both places. Although in woot.com, physical capital is an influence, someone can be very wealthy, but still not be accepted and have success in the community. Those with physical capital also have an advantage in games, as they can buy their way to the top, but it does not lead to community success in either instance. The aspect of risk in both makes success in the game, or in woot.com, even more exciting, as the achievement may or may not have been possible – but still the user accomplished it.

Table 4: This is a comparison chart of MMORPG game culture to woot.com culture dealing with risk and equal competition.

	MMORPG [A]	woot [B]
Competition [10]	YES	YES
Risk [11]	YES	YES

[8] Equal Competition: A) All users start out on the same level and compete to work their way to the top of a social and avatar capital hierarchy; B) All users start out on the same level and compete to get items and work their way to the top of a social hierarchy.

[9] Risk: A) Success in achieving items and completing tasks is higher when there are risks involved; B) Success in purchasing an item is higher when there are risks involved.

EXPANDING UPON CONSUMERISM AS PLAY

I feel this aspect of consumerism is necessary to expand upon, as it deals with a touched-upon, yet overlooked aspect of consumerism within a group dynamic. It is not just consumerism for individual fun [6] but it is consumerism *where participation with other individuals is necessary to have individual fun.*

The community at woot.com is more than just a collection of people consuming on an individual basis and only making choices influenced by the group dynamic – such as is arguably the case in society with the emergence of trends and fashion – but it is a collection of people working together to both succeed in a common goal *and* build a form of collective intelligence through participatory culture.

It has gone from consumerism being consumer vs. consumer, where people fight against one another to get the bargaining – letting the *every man for themselves* mentality run free – to people working together to help other get bargains (MMORPG community) while helping other produce knowledge about products (knowledge community). *The community functions together as a group – and would be unable to function were they not to consume as a group – in order for the group to consume at the most optimal level.* The group expects those who reap benefits, such as buying good deals or getting wanted items, to help the rest of the team in return, helping others to achieve the same goals, by putting in their share of the work. This sentiment is often expressed by users

in both chat and forum posts, such as one user who, during a particularly slow to sell out item, posted to other users “do your part, take three for the team.” [7]

Therefore this form of consumerism goes beyond consuming as play, as loosely defined by Holt, and expands to encompass both *consuming as fun*, *consuming as play*, and *consuming as community*. This is consumerism not just in the presence of other users, but *with* other users, including them in the process of consuming.

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