

Liminality in Conspicuous Consumption: The Curious Case of 'PC Master Race'

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Abstract

This paper explores the development of collective identity of an online forum of PC gaming enthusiasts 'PCMR' on Reddit. Emerging in 2011 as a fringe group within the larger gaming subculture, PCMR grew to be the largest gaming platform-specific consumer collective on the Internet. Through a netnographic study and automated analysis of 27.5 mil. postings and 226k images, I demonstrate how this process was associated with a transition from mechanical solidarity to a state of *communitas*. I find that the liminal nature of the PC gaming hobby, which is associated with ambiguities and anxieties absent from experiences of consumers whose platform of choice is a major game console, was integral to this transition and corresponding decrease in oppositional brand loyalty. Findings provide evidence that liminality, which has often been seen in a negative light in prior consumption-oriented studies, may enhance consumer experiences, produce intense collective joy, reduce intergroup conflict.

Subject Areas: *Branding, Customer Satisfaction and Delight, Hedonic Products, Theory and Philosophy of Marketing*

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media