Seeking Entertainment Through Battle: Understanding the Meaning of Consumption Processes For Male Warhammer Enthusiasts

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SEEKING ENTERTAINMENT THROUGH BATTLE:
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF CONSUMPTION 
PROCESSES FOR MALE WARHAMMER ENTHUSIASTS

RUNNING HEAD: CONSUMPTION PROCESSES OF WARHAMMER 
ENTHUSIASTS

By

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The rationale for this research project follows Cova’s work on consumption tribes (1997). Cova researches how individuals come together to form communitas through consuming products. The goal of this paper is to understand the meanings inherent in the consumption processes for male Warhammer enthusiasts. Warhammer, similar to Dungeons and Dragons, is a miniatures game of battles and spells. Through the use of naturalistic inquiry and in-depth interviews with eleven informants, the authors identify and explain five themes: socialization, attraction to imaginary violence, accomplishment, competitiveness and creativity, which provide insight into the experiential meanings for the male participants.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In his noteworthy study, Cova (1997) examines how people form bonds through consuming products or experiences. He suggests individuals form “communitas” through these consumption processes. Each communita contains unique social and interpersonal dynamics, which are often related to the shared product or experience. This paper continues in this tradition by analyzing meanings inherent to consumption processes for male participants within a battle reenactment game titled Warhammer. Warhammer is unique from other games because it allows participants to imagine and recreate various battle scenarios. The shared meanings and practices that surfaced from our research appear to characterize Warhammer enthusiasts as a specific consumption tribe. The authors hope this study adds to recent literature on consumption processes, as well as sheds insight into the psychology behind why males desire to play a battle-oriented reenactment game.

The tribal nature of consumer groups has been studied by many consumer behavior researchers in recent years. These approaches attempt to analyze consumer groups through consumer experience and cultural patterns rather than demographic or psychographic characteristics. As Thompson & Troester (2002) point out, this approach to understanding consumers emphasizes aspects of social and interpersonal dynamics, similarities or differences in rituals and the emotional relationship that consumers experience with the brand, event, and others in the community. Such an approach can help researchers understand consumers at a more personal level, as well as provide more in-depth understanding than traditional demographic or psychographic segmentation approaches.
**Background and Location**

The informants for this study gathered together at the C&C Game Room in Madison, Wisconsin to play Warhammer. Warhammer is a strategic battle game played with various miniatures on a “battlefield.” The “battlefield” is usually a tabletop with enough space to accommodate several figurines and additional items such as small trees or hills. Players need a basic start-up kit with a small army and an extensive rulebook. Besides the figurines in the start-up kit, there are several different kinds of figures with distinct characteristics and values that can be purchased additionally. Each figurine is used to compete with other participants’ armies through various spells and “battlefield” scenarios. In addition, extensive rules apply to the game. Each figurine or army can defeat others through the accumulation of “damage scores.” According to the rulebook, these scores increase when players are able to defeat their opponents during various battle scenarios.

**Methodology and Findings**

Multiple methodologies were used to study the all male tribe of Warhammer enthusiasts. Naturalistic inquiry and eleven in-depth unstructured interviews were the dominant means of gathering information on the tribe. Additional methodologies such as non-participatory observation, photography and audio recording were also used. Our five-member research team consisted of North American, Scandinavian and Indian male graduate students. The North American and Scandinavian researchers interviewed participants, kept an observation journal, as well as developed their own interpretation of the data before sharing with the rest of the research team. After completing our interviews, we categorized our data through classifying and labeling processes suggested
by McCracken (1988). The categorization processes helped develop the themes in various stages of analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Later, we employed member checks with the project informants. After analyzing the interviews, we noticed five themes emerge during the various consumption processes.

**Socialization:** “Socialization” connotes how the tribe of Warhammer enthusiasts socializes inside and outside of the “C&C Game Room” that serves them as a communita. The notion of friendship was mentioned several times as a main reason why the enthusiasts hang out together. This tribe appears as if it may not have much of a social life outside the game room, but it does socialize a lot within its walls. Nonetheless, the depth of the relationship can also be questioned. Few of the respondents socialized with each other away from the gaming center. Thus, even though they believed the people at the gaming center were their good friends, they rarely spent time with one another.

**Attraction to Imaginary Violence:** Almost all of the respondents held an attraction to violent imagery. There seemed to be two main themes with violence that surfaced within our interviews. First, most of the informants used violent imagery in their descriptions of the game. We simply refer to this component as "violent discourse." The second theme that surfaced in the interviews is referred to as "violent influences." These influences consisted of the media that may have influenced the respondents’ attraction to imaginary violence.

**Accomplishment:** As the informants began to elaborate on the miniatures they revealed a focus on the actual interactions with physical figurines. They were drawn by the figurines’ visual appeal and often invested a lot of time and effort in painting and assembling these warrior replicas. When some of the informants lost a “battle” or
discovered their figurines to be slaughtered, they took it personally as if they were hurt. A second facet of the “accomplishment” theme suggests winning over the more experienced players (often referred to as “the vets”) of the tribe is almost as gratifying.

**Competitiveness:** Winning was important for the players. They point out their preliminary assessment of the environment or of themselves as not being very competitive may be incorrect. In addition, the game’s competitive nature also allows players to be creative through imagining various battlefield scenarios.

**Creativity/Imagination:** Indeed, most of the informants enjoyed consuming Warhammer because it allowed them to imagine and create various war scenarios. It also allowed them to imagine different historical time periods and thus become 'transferred' back in time. In addition, the actual figurines allow the players to enter into a different reality through their fictitious names and physical forms. For example, there are Lizardmen figurines that fight various dragons and other magical creatures. In addition, the hands-on component of the game allows the players to be more active in creating the scenarios as they play.

**References**


