Consumption Culture in Cyberspace

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Abstract

The development of electronic and information technology and the spread of electronic information media has contributed to the formation of a new consumption culture, or a postmodern consumption culture. Postmodern consumption culture emphasizes desire rather than need and want, pursues aesthetic and symbolic values, and embraces signs, codes, and images over substance.

This paper investigates the meanings of consumption, consumer behavior, and consumer empowerment in cyberspace. It also attempts to explore the relationship between consumption culture in cyberspace and postmodern consumption culture. My findings imply the following: First of all, e-commerce is one of the most important postmodern phenomena. However, the features of postmodern consumption culture in cyber shopping are only partially visible. Consumers seem to prefer on-off-line composite type consumption, i.e., modern-postmodern mixed consumption styles over online shopping alone. Secondly, the effect of informatization or postmodernity can be found more vividly in cyber consumer movements rather than on e-commerce. Despite the current status of e-commerce markets as weak and underdeveloped, cyber consumer movements have not only gained popularity among the general public, but have also taken progressive steps toward consumer empowerment.

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Introduction

Consumption in contemporary capitalist society, supported by consumerism, takes on the major role of societal integration for all social, cultural, and economic practices. Consumption no longer entirely belongs to the realm of production. It has its own independent role for the reproduction and consolidation of contemporary capitalism (Bocok 1993). With changes in the function of consumption, the development of electronic and information technology and the spread of electronic information media have brought about a new consumption culture, namely a postmodern consumption culture. The postmodern consumption culture emphasizes desire rather than need and want, pursues aesthetic and symbolic values, and embraces signs, codes, and images over substance. Unlike the past, consumption space, consumption behavior, and consumption culture have taken new forms due to the spread of electronic information media, namely the Internet, which is constrained by neither time nor space.

This paper explores the meanings of consumption, consumer behavior, and consumer empowerment in cyberspace in contemporary Korea. It also attempts to explore the relationship between consumption culture in cyberspace and postmodern consumption culture. It consists of six sections: meanings of consumption in contemporary capitalist society; modern consumption vs. postmodern consumption; the spread of electronic information media and the formation of postmodern consumption culture; the current status of e-commerce or cyber shopping; consumer evaluation of cyber shopping space; who visits Internet shopping malls and why; and cyber consumer movements and consumer empowerment.

Meanings of Consumption in Contemporary Capitalist Society

Historically, consumption culture emerged around the eighteenth century and was a part of the developmental processes of modern society. Consumption was based on modern values such as civil rights, legitimacy, and universal values (Slater 1997). With the establishment of mass production in the 1920s, which caused the popularity of consumption, consumption culture developed into a mass consumption culture.

Following the replacement of Fordism by post-Fordism in the 1980s, mass consumption culture evolved into a new consumption culture, or a postmodern consumption culture. The new consumption culture of the 1980s strongly protected property rights and radical individualism; it emphasized not only desire over need and want but also a signification system of signs for grasping desire (Bauman 1992; Slater 1997; Jeong 1998).

What follows is a historical background of the formation of postmodern culture: With the revival of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the individual became not just a consumer but the modern subject or hero/heroine who has not only civil obligations for social relationships but also civil volunteership. The change in the meaning and position of the individual in contemporary society is closely related to economic realities such as the dependency of production on consumption. In addition, unlike Western capitalism in the 1960s, which had experienced progressive social movements and the "legitimation crisis," capitalism in the 1980s was able to secure its system legitimacy through the crisis and collapse of Eastern socialism and the Soviet Union (Harbermas 1973).

Modern Consumption vs. Postmodern Consumption

The debate on modernity/postmodernity in the 1980s focuses on how the development of science and technology, especially electronic and information technology, has given rise to a new social change. The question is whether or not the change in contemporary society is really new and discontinuous from modernity. There have been many difficulties in defining modernity and postmodernity because they lend themselves to various theoretical interpretations. And yet, the concept of the postmodern has its merits in that it differentiates

new characteristics from those in the past. Therefore, if contemporary society is called postmodern, this means it has new characteristics and modes different from those in the past. One of the most important indicators of the postmodern is the spread of electronic information media, which has reshaped contemporary society into a media-infiltrated society (Jeong 1998). Baudrillard (1968) calls this new environment the "new technological order," a "new sector in everyday life," a "new norm," and a "hyper-civilization." Thus, the postmodern indicates "newness" that is differentiated from the past (Slater 1997; Featherstone 1995; Jeong 1998).

As opposed to modern consumption, postmodern consumption, as a derivative of the replacement of Fordism by post-Fordism, targets specific consumer groups based on lifestyle rather than socioeconomic class, sex, and age in mass consumption. This implies not only that production of standardized products in Fordism has been replaced by that of specialized products in post-Fordism, but also that this replacement has caused the birth of the postmodern. Also, modern and postmodern consumption culture differ according to whether consumption behavior is media-mediated or not. The representative form of modern consumption is department store shopping, which requires physical movement, time constraints, and tangible products. In contrast, postmodern consumption behavior is mediated through the media, including catalogue shopping, TV home shopping, and cyber shopping. The most important characteristic of media-mediated consumption is that there is no need for physical movement in browsing and purchasing, as is true in physical markets. Furthermore, consumption behavior differs according to media types because each media provides different contexts, signs, codes, and images. Under these circumstances, media-mediated consumption behavior has come to have the features of postmodern consumption, which is marked by the consumption of images and signs of products, not substance (Jeong 1998).

The Spread of Electronic Information Media and the Formation of Postmodern Consumption Culture

Contemporary society has been transformed into a media-infiltrated society.[1] Media provides a means to determine people's thought and behavior, and the development of new media implies the transformation of thought styles and behavior patterns. An extreme example is the spread of electronic information media, such as the Internet. The spread of electronic information media has made possible a considerable qualitative transformation of social relationships through abundant signs and images, sufficient information, efficient information transmission, interactivity, and simultaneousness. Social relationships no longer need to be limited by time and space constraints, due to real time and interactive communication provided by the Internet. Furthermore, the Internet can make massive transmission of information by digitizing that information. The Internet can transmit images and sounds, bringing about a transformed cognition style of reality (Poster 1995; Jeong 1998).

Poster (1995) explains this qualitative transformation as "the mode of information." He argues that the mode of information, not the relations of production in the Marxist sense, determines social relationships. In other words, social relationships in contemporary society are not only constructed but are also determined by the information exchange via electronic information media.

The consumption sector clearly reflects the transformation of social relationships caused by the spread of electronic information media. The development of new media has tremendously changed the existing consumption sector. The spread of electronic information media has made production of commodities flexible and the media-mediated consumption possible, thus contributing to the formation of new consumption culture, or a postmodern culture.

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1. A media-infiltrated society is characterized by media that do not represent social reality but construct social reality.

Some distinctive characteristics of postmodern consumption culture include the development of electronic and information technology and the spread of electronic information media. The de-materialization trend has emerged because forms of commodities become information themselves. Secondly, aesthetic factors, such as style and ambiance, have also been emphasized in both the production and consumption of commodities, following the involvement of art and dependency on markets. This phenomena in return reinforces the pursuit of aesthetic trends in everyday life. Thirdly, electronic information media and related products have become typical postmodern commodities. The spread of these commodities contributes to cognitive transformation from consumption of substances to that of signs, codes, and images (Baudrillard 1968, 1983; Featherstone 1991; Jeong 1998).

Consumer Behavior and Movements in Cyberspace

This section will investigate how postmodern consumption culture, which emerged with the development of electronic and information technology and the spread of electronic information media, such as the Internet, is related to consumption culture in cyberspace. The following four aspects will be analyzed to assess the impact of postmodern consumption in Korea: i) the current status of e-commerce or cyber shopping markets in Korea; ii) the consumer evaluation of e-commerce or cyber shopping space; iii) who visits Internet shopping malls and why; iv) the relationship between consumer empowerment and cyber consumer movements.

Current Status of E-Commerce or Cyber Shopping

The development of information communication technology has brought to the market new types of transactions such as e-commerce and cyber shopping. Depending on the major agents in transactions, e-commerce can be classified into four categories: business to business (B to B), business to consumer (B to C), business to government (B to G), government to consumer (G to C). As the purpose of this paper is to analyze the consumption behavior and consumption culture of ordinary consumers, I will limit the analysis to B to C—the transaction of goods and services between businesses and consumers via the Internet or PC communication. Since e-commerce indicates all transactions and shopping activities by consumers in cyberspace, this term will be used interchangeably with other terminology, like cyber shopping or Internet shopping. e-commerce transaction has great potential to be the major stream in the future because of its merits and advantage in global networkability, effective information sharing, low transaction costs, interactivity, promptness, and efficiency. Consumers use the Internet as a means to get utility from games and to access useful information, and as an economical motivation to lower the uncertainty in transactions through the search function. Consumers try to use the Internet as another means of making transactions, in addition to using it as a means for communication and game in the online environment.

However, e-commerce is still considered a secondary means, not the essential transaction method. Therefore, despite the remarkable growth in Internet users in Korea, the growth of e-commerce or cyber shopping still falls short of expectations. According to Tables 1 and 2, Internet users in 2002 reached 26 million, but the size of B to C transactions came to 300 billion won, a little more than 1 percent of the total market transactions in that year, far behind market growth expectations. One concludes that either consumers who visit the Internet do not always visit Internet shopping malls, or their visit to Internet shopping malls do not necessarily lead to purchasing. According to Song (2001), consumers search for information on products more frequently than purchasing online. This indicates that searching for information on the Internet does not necessarily lead to purchases. While consumers acknowledge the benefit of the Internet as a useful means for gathering information, in terms of saving time, and finding lower prices and a larger variety of products, the frequency and tendency of purchases at the Internet shopping malls still remains low,

because consumers consider cyberspace transactions as having less credibility than physical ones. Issues of credibility include the risk consumers take in the transaction, in terms of credit card security, uncertainty of the quality of goods and services, and the possibility of leaking personal data and information (Bak Hyeon-ju 1999).

Table 1. Internet Users in Korea

Unit: thousand

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Users	731	1,634	3,103	10,860	19,040	24,380	25,650

Source: National Computerization Agency, *2002 Jeongbohwa tonggyejip* (Informatization Statistics 2002) (2002).

Table 2. Domestic Market Trend in B to C

Unit: 100 million won

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Market size	14	63	150	400	900	1,700	3,000

Source: Sin and Jeon (1998); Korea Institute for E-Commerce, *Gungnae jeonja sanggeo-rae-ui hyeongtaebyeol sijang gyumo* (Market Size of Korean E-Commerce Markets in Terms of Categories) (2001). http://www.ecommerce.go.kr/tong2.asp.

Table 3 shows rapid growth in the number of Internet shopping malls from 9 in 1997 to more than 1,800 in 2001. However, this number itself cannot be interpreted as being representative of the vitality of e-commerce growth, as the total transactions of e-commerce still remains small, as indicated in Table 2. Furthermore, there seems to be many entries and exits among Internet shopping malls, leading to severe competition in the markets. According to a survey by the Korea Chamber of Commerce (1999), about 70.1 percent of the Internet shopping malls in operation are small and medium-sized enterprises (hereafter SMEs), having less than 100 million Korean won in

capital. The majority in the red, with only 6.4 percent as being in the black. Furthermore, e-commerce has been suggested in the past as a means for SMEs to overcome entry barriers in the market and as a source for new business. They do not, however, have any competitive edge over major companies. In reality, consumers displayed a high preference for major companies with high creditability and well known brands due to risk aversion (Bak Hyeon-ju 1999).

Table 3. Domestic Internet Shopping Malls

Year	1997	1998	1999. 1	1999. 5	2000	2001
Number of shopping malls	9	357	226	568	1200-1500	1,867
Surveying source	KAIT	NCA	NCA	NCA	KOCHAM	KNSO

Notes: KAIT: Korea Association of Information & Telecommunications
     NCA: National Computerization Agency
     KOCHAM: Korean Chamber of Commerce
     KNSO: Korea National Statistical Office

Furthermore, according to a survey by the Korea National Statistical Office in 2001, the numbers of on and offline shopping malls are 1,281 (68.6%), more than twice that of online only shopping malls (586, 31.4%).[2] It seems that the basic and minimum conditions for growth potential are in place, but that a full-fledged e-commerce or cyber shopping markets are not yet in operation.

Consumer Evaluation of E-Commerce or Cyber Shopping Space

e-commerce markets were expected to play the role of the perfect information market for consumers, providing full information, interactivity, low transaction costs and effective information sharing

2. Korea National Statistical Office, *Jeonja sanggeorae tonggye josa gyeolgwa* (The Statistical Results of E-Commerce) (2001).

through development of information communcation technology. However, many studies show the opposite results and there is high dissatisfaction among consumers in the real markets. This calls for a closer examination of the consumers' evaluation of the e-commerce market in terms of sufficiency of information, interactivity, transaction cost, and degree of information sharing, all of which have been considered benefits and merits of the Internet.

1) Is Sufficient Information Provided in the Cyber Shopping Space?

Even though the best way to protect consumers is to reduce the asymmetry of information by providing full information, this still exists in the e-commerce market. According to Jo Hui-gyeong's study (2001), which conducted a survey among consumers with e-commerce transaction experiences, many consumers complained not only because they had some difficulties in accessing necessary information, but also because the information provided was not sufficient. They list insufficient information about products as a major cause for the asymmetry of information, claiming that most information provided on the Internet is for business needs. They note that e-commerce is not geared towards consumers' concerns, such as providing information about the products themselves, the most critical information influencing consumers' purchase decisions.

Ku's (2002) study also supports this reality. Many consumers visit sellers' home pages to get more information about products. While consumers positively recognize the convenience of using sellers' home pages, they felt the home pages were unable to provide convenient channels of communication. Consumers prefer bulletin boards as a major communication channel, while sellers tend to choose e-mail. Ku's study classifies corporate home pages into many categories. Among them, consumers identify the most useful home pages as those that stress effective communication between consumers and sellers. These home pages also provide quality information about products and services. These results clearly show that consumers expect high quality information and smooth communication with sellers in cyber shopping.

Song (2001) also reveals that there is some doubt among consumers about e-commerce in terms of the sufficiency of market information. There are more people who use both the Internet and traditional methods to collect information than those who search information solely through Internet. This may reflect the fact that the Internet alone cannot provide all the information needed to make the decision to purchase products and services. Bak Hyeon-ju (1999) also shows a high correlation between information satisfaction and product satisfaction, thus clearly implying that sufficient information plays a big role in cyber shopping. More importantly, the fact that Internet consumer groups provide much valuable information about the quality, use, and maintenance and repair measures, which might be difficult to obtain from commercial sources and have good responses from consumers, confirms the importance of information in the e-commerce.

Kim and Bak (2002) also echo the importance of information in cyber shopping. Among the benefits of cyber shopping for consumers —price, information, and convenience—information is the most influential factor in making the decision to purchase. In other words, the more consumers feel the benefits of information, the higher the probability they will buy the product. Most cyber shopping malls focus on the benefits of price and try to provide lower prices. Price does have great influence on market competition in e-commerce, cheaper prices in e-commerce can be very attractive. However, their study shows that information helping consumers during the purchasing process, not just lower prices, is most desired by consumers in cyber shopping.

Consumers also use different selection criteria for products, in terms of "benefits." Even though consumers reveal a different degree of recognition about benefits, depending on the products, they generally find the benefits of useful information and the convenience more important than those of price. This indicates that in order to sustain e-commerce, it is more important to make consumers feel and recognize the efficiency and convenience of useful information, in addition to providing a lower price. It is key to the vitality of e-commerce for

consumers to experience the benefits of useful information and convenience, because benefits of products' price are always fixed. Those from information and convenience, however, can be newly created and ever changing. Kim and Kwon (1999) also indirectly show the importance of useful information for consumers. That is, compared with non-Internet users, Internet users consider the information and time used in their purchasing decision more important than price.

2) Does Interactive Communication Work Well in Cyber Shopping Space?

Previous studies claim that transactions in cyber shopping malls via interactive communication channels would relieve consumer complaints and dissatisfaction and protect consumer rights and improve services, but this method has proved inefficient in the actual market.

Bak (2001) shows that consumer hot lines are the only channels through which consumers can communicate with Internet shopping malls. However, most of them are exclusively operated, denying other consumers access. This would limit the opportunities for consumers to share experiences with other potential consumers and may increase the risk and lead new customers to experience the same problems. Furthermore, only a few consumers use the open bulletin board to express their problems, and webmasters do not reply promptly to the consumer's opinions. In order to maximize the interactive merit of cyber shopping malls, it is necessary to have more open operation of Internet shopping malls and active participation by the consumers. As mentioned earlier in Ku's (2002) research, the difference between consumers and large companies, in terms of the home pages as communication channel, is related to the cost-benefit issue of their willingness to realize interactivity. However, Internet consumer groups use bulletin boards as their major channel for information sharing activities, and it works positively as interactive media. Bulletin boards works as a venue for sharing information and exchanging Q&As, thus making consumers active, rather than passive participants.

Who Visits Internet Shopping Malls and Why

There are three motivations for cyber shopping: purchasing, information gathering and for entertainment. When consumers buy specific products in Internet shopping malls, they also visit Internet shopping malls to obtain necessary information and to gain pleasure from an entertainment perspective (Seo et al. 2002). Consumers shop both for utilitarian as well as hedonic values. Babin et al. (1994) treat consumers' shopping activities as work and consider utilitarian values from the accomplishment of purpose or obligation of shopping. Hedonic values, On the other hand, come from activities in pursuit of pleasure and fun, more personal than shopping based on utilitarian values. Shopping activities organized by hedonic values focus more on the pleasure of shopping, like freedom, realization of fantasy, and escape from reality, not just for the purchase of products itself. Those shopping experiences are more stimulating, self-orienting, and as a means rather than purpose.

Yu and Jeong (2002) show that consumers with these two values can be distinguished more clearly in cyber shopping. In their study, reasons for consumers to visit Internet shopping malls fall into two categories: i) the search for information about products to buy; ii) to kill time or to obtain some pleasure. These goals can be accomplished more efficiently and effectively once provided with a more accessible environment in cyberspace. Seo and Kim (2002) show that Internet shopping mall users have diverse emotional experiences. For example, consumers feel stability, unexpectedness, tediousness and tenacity from the cyber shopping environment. These emotions surface depending on the characteristics of sites and purchase procedures. On the other hand, emotions like showing-off or discouragement occur only in traditional shopping. This comes from the fact that there is no face-to-face contact with the salespersons in cyber shopping. Efficient search functions, convenient log-in procedures, the design and colors of shopping malls, the clarity of product display, and the speed of display all have a great impact on consumers' emotions. As for information, convenient search functions, the vari-

ety and depth of information, and accurate and timely information providing are the major factors determining shoppers' reactions to the site. The diversity of products and price ranges, as well as the variety of different brands and their product quality also have a big influence on consumers' emotions (Seo et al. 2002). Many recent studies pay attention to the concept of flow and some studies show that consumers indulge more in the Internet when they feel the flow and feel more pleasure in an interactive environment (Hoffman and Novak 1997).

Yu and Jeong's (2002) study shows that consumers differentiate between utilitarian values and hedonic ones in their visits to Internet shopping malls and have various experiences, depending on their values. It also finds that consumers have a feeling of control and independence, in addition to positive and negative emotions, from pursuing pleasures in the Internet sites. In particular, this finding has significant meaning in that these kinds of feelings of control and independence come from the specific characteristics of cyberspace. And also, for the group that pursues utilitarian values, diversity of products and quality of information on the sites contribute greatly to consumers' pleasure, which in return affects the willingness to revisit these sites. On the other hand, the group pursuing hedonic values puts more value on structure and the playground of shopping sites, in addition to the above-mentioned diversity of products and quality of information the sites possess. This pleasure and stimulus have impacts on willingness to visit the site and purchase products.

Now, I will review and briefly summarize the existing literature about who visits Internet shopping malls and which products are most popular in cyber shopping. Yi and Kim (2002) reveals that people who spend many hours online, even those with a short usage history, and those who are highly capable of maneuvering the Internet, tend to use cyber shopping more often than others. People who have a positive attitude toward e-commerce and informatization, as well as knowledge and skill are more likely to consider Internet shopping malls useful for making purchases (Bak 1999). Another study by Han and Bak (2000) came to the conclusion that the degree consumers

feel comfortable about the Internet and the risk they feel in the Internet environment would be major factors in influencing consumers' decisions to purchase. In addition, Jeong (2003) shows that consumers who emphasize symbolic, expressive, and epistemic value in making a purchase are more likely to be more motivated to buy online. The degree of practical value has little influence on their decision. An online impulse purchase is more likely to occur because the Internet overcomes limits of time and space, leading to a greater chance of addiction than other media. Although the potential for addiction does exist, online shopping can be viewed as a positive new consumption culture. It may give consumers rents of opportunity costs, by taking less time, providing convenient methods of the purchasing, and reducing transaction steps and costs in wide electronic media environment. In short, those who engage in cyber shopping use the Internet at the level of high affinity and control and pursue aesthetic values in purchasing product.

Secondly, consumers choose markets depending on the characteristics of the products. For example, consumers will buy purses, which have a high personal preference, but small price diversity in traditional markets. However, products with lower personal preferences and price diversity would be more likely purchased in the Internet market. Only products with higher efficiency in the Internet markets than in traditional ones will be traded in an Internet market (Nam and Kim 2002). The top products purchased at Internet markets are books, followed by music CDs, performance tickets, PCs, and home appliances. The common factors among these products are that the quality of these goods are well standardized and, hence, there is no problem in buying these products without inspecting them in person. With these, digital products and contents show a high growth rate (IMResearch 2000; Jo 2001).

Cyber Consumer Movements and Consumer Empowerment

The spread of the Internet has been accompanied by positive signs and symptoms in consumer movements (Yi and Bak 2000). Firstly,

consumers are more likely to access public and educational information via Internet home pages rather than printed matter. Secondly, consumer consulting information and outcomes, once exclusive, are now released and shared among consumers. Due to effective information sharing, consumers have become self-educated and deal better with their purchased-related problems. Thirdly, in addition to the relationship between consumers and businesses, cyber consumer movements also emphasize and reinforce the interactive relationship among consumers. Consumers can resolve the problem of information asymmetry[3] by writing and sharing their opinions and information of their common interest on bulletin boards of anti-sites or Internet consumer group sites. Especially in the latter cases, the more the members, the less likely the information asymmetry would be. Fourth, the Internet has the capacity to transform the silent masses into powerful, vocal one not only by prompting the real time transmission of information, effective information sharing, and low transaction costs, but also by participating in online signature campaigns for consumers' boycott and by exhibiting their collective power. Thus, the Internet can contribute to consumers' empowerment followed by revitalized cyber consumer movements. Also, there has been a new change in terms of members and leadership in consumer movements. Housewives and females used to be the main members of consumer movements in the past. However, residents in local and regional areas, males, and workers—especially white collar workers—also joined and play leading roles in cyber consumer movements. In fact, male web operators or masters dominate anti-site type cyber consumer movements (Yi and Bak 2000).

Cyber consumer movementscan be classified into three types: information providers, anti-site, and online consumer groups (Yi and Bak 2000). The information providers are consists of sites that provide specific and professional information based on consumers' occupations or experiences. Besides these sites, such as the Information Plaza for Consumers (*sobija jeongbo maeul*) and Consumer Cop (*sobija banjang*), provide information not offered by companies about consumer problems that receive positive reactions from consumers. Included in this movement are those sites, managed by consumption-related academia, such as universities for consumer education. This type of cyber consumer movement could, sooner or later, contribute more to resolving the problem of information asymmetry.

Second is the anti-site, which express complaints and resistance against certain enterprises or products. Anti-sites are named usually either "anti-XX company" or "anti-XX product" based on the problems and complaints voiced by consumers. This can lead to the formation of a civic campaign to an outright product boycott. Although consumers used to express their complaints on companies' home page boards or public bulletin boards of online consumer groups, individual consumers began to make their own anti-sites because access to Web sites has became much easier. They write about their own experiences and voice complaints, get sympathy and favorable responses from other consumers, reach a consensus, and receive spotlight by the press, enhancing their potential influence on enterprises. They then obtain visible and tangible outcomes, such as a negative effect on the sales of anti-products due to cyber consumer civic campaigns to boycott them (Yi and Bak 2000). An (2001) lists the characteristics of anti-sites as follows: out-group oriented, expression of anti-target, the anonymity of site operators, accessibility of domain names, the credibility of posted materials, prior inspection and post measure for posted materials, an effective bulletin board, and movement into portal sites.[4]

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3. Information asymmetry is caused as consumers were totally dependent on low quality and limited information provided by companies.

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4. Anti-sites provide consumers with the power to claim consumer rights. "Anti" used to be interpreted as resistance against dominant culture or opposition and rejection. Anti-sites in general deal with a variety of issues, from criticism on individual movie stars to claiming consumer rights. Consumer anti-sites focus more on consumer right protection to specific products or companies. Thus, in the process, there exist many cases or claims not supported by evidence or facts, only based on subjective positions and claims. These sites have a tendency to use more aggressive, emotional and antagonistic. However, some cases have recently found that these anti-sites engage in collective actions to request companies' reform, with more specific and objective evidence (Yi 2001; Kim 2003).

Since the "Group of People Who Would Like to Quit Goldbank," the first anti-site established in Korea in July 1999, many anti-sites have opened. The court decision in June 2000 stating that the anti-sites against the Samsung Corporation and Samsung Apartments were legal led to more anti-sites, and their popularity started to grow (see Table 4). If the parties involved would come to a compromise or resolution, then the anti-sites disappear. There are many cases, however, in which the sites cause an escalation in disputes. Furthermore, since it is much easier for these sites to be organized or dissolved

Table 4. A Few List of Anti-Web Sites

Site Name	Address	Major Cause
Cyber Action Network	http://www.n119.org	solidarity of anti-sites; consulting
Anti-Web	http://antiweb.gazio.com	categorical list of anti-sites
Anti Fuji Movement	http://antifuji.org	problem for reproduced toner
Anti Anycall	http://www.antianycall.org	Anycall's messaging error issue
Nix domain case	http://www.ihateifree.com	Nix domain matter
NSPB	http://myhome.sinbiro.com/ ~glbank/index.html	group of people who would like to quit Goldbank
Anti Kia	http://antikian.systek.co.kr	accidents by Kia cars
Anti pyramid	http://antipyramid.org	group of victims by pyramid sale scheme
AntiChosun	http://www.urimodu.com	legal suit of professor Jang Jip Choi
Anti Kornet	http://user.chollian.net/ cholhwan/anti.htm	high speed Internet issue
Thrunet	http://my.dreamwiz.com/ durunet	Thrunet user group
Anti Dreamline	http://user.netpark.co.kr/ ~sila99	Dreamline user group

Source: Cyber Action Network (http://www.n119.org); Yi and Bak (2000).

than traditional consumer movements, it is not easy to list them. They create a solidarity website, like the Cyber Action Network (http://www.n119.org), and exchange information and opinions among themselves (Yi and Bak 2000; Kim 2003).

Companies offer varies responses to anti-sites. However, Most respond negatively, such as posting another negative comment against anti-site on the bulletin board or deleting the posted complaints or even closing the board. Some big companies even initiate their own version of the anti-site, in order to prohibit someone from opening one. Or they open a typical Q&A section in order not to release negative comments to others (Yi and Bak 2000; *Chosun Ilbo*, 7 May 2000).

Domestic anti-sites can be weakened once the target issue disappears, and the site is removed altogether; there are too many comments and information not supported by evidence and facts; if the numbers of users is small, limited to a few victims; or they are incapable of producing constant, good quality content (Kim 2003).

The third cyber consumer movement is the online consumer group,[5] whose part-time participants voluntarily provide detailed and professional information or experiences about products and service. Usually, this type of consumer movement, different from anti-sites, which are usually operated by one man or a few like-minded people, has many participants who share information for the same concerns or causes and work as towards creating a grass-roots consumer movement through online community activities. Included are product-online consumer groups, such as cars, laptops, camcorder, and KT ADSL.

The majority of online consumer group members initially participate out of a personal need to obtain information, without any direct intention in joining a consumer movement. But, a few core participants voluntarily work hard by spending much time to organize, provide information, and sustain the community. In general, this type of online consumer community provides information on purchases and

5. This part, Internet user group, is based on the study by Yi and Bak (2000).

the use of products and services, and share consumption-related personal experiences, either positive or negative. This kind of information, including merits and weaknesses, and evaluation comments through personal experiences, will have some influence on other potential consumers' decisions. Furthermore, since it is operated by members only, there is less chance that this bulletin board tis used irresponsibly or becomes filled with the subjective comments that anonymity encourages. The quality of information and comments can be controlled. In these sites, people can exchange information freely through posting comments or real time cyber chatting.

Summary and Conclusion

The development of information communication technology and the spread of the Internet have led to a new type of transaction by way of e-commerce or cyber shopping markets. However, it would be more appropriate to say that e-commerce has not taken its full-fledged form at this stage, in which only the basic and minimum conditions have been laid for future growth potential. At present, the number of visits to cyber shopping sites by consumers is only a small percentage of the visits to Internet sites. Though they might visit cyber shopping sites, people do not frequently make online purchases. Furthermore, the e-commerce market takes up only a negligible proportion of the overall market. Although the number of Internet shopping malls has rapidly increased from 8 in 1997 to 1,867 in 2001, in reality, they are still insignificant. Moreover, most Internet shopping malls still operate in the red, with only 7% of online stores considered profitable. And in contrast to expectations, the success rate of SMEs is considerably lower than that of large companies. In terms of the type of operational structure, shopping malls operating both on- and off-line are nearly double the online only operations. Rather than occupying an independent position, it is suggested that Internet shopping malls play a supplementary role for overall market transactions.

Examining the views and evaluations of consumers regarding e-commerce or cyber shopping space, consumers were found to have complaints and were generally unsatisfied, because the high expectations of complete information, interactivity, low transaction costs and effective information sharing via the Internet, have fallen short of reality. Although many Internet shopping malls attempt to offer goods and services at a reasonable price, product information plays the most important role in consumers deciding whether to buy from an Internet shopping mall. Additionally, ease and convenience of information access is also found to have an impact on purchasing behavior. Although there is no need to emphasize the importance of information in e-commerce in informatization society, such as Korea, an Internet powerhouse, not only are the need and want of consumers are not being met in reality by Internet shopping malls, but they also are unable to keep up with postmodern consumption culture in contemporary society, which embraces and consumes personal tastes, information and images over substance.

In addition, interactive communication issues in cyber shopping space are also significantly limited by the closed operation and negative responses by companies and Internet malls. For example, while consumers prefer online bulletin boards as a major channel of communicating with companies, companies show a tendency to use e-mail as a major means of communication for information sharing among consumers, which is restricted in terms of information compared to online bulletin boards. In addition, there are many instances in which companies or Internet shopping malls delete online posted complaint comments, or even shut down online boards. However, online consumer groups provide the perfect space for consumers to voice their views in an online bulletin board in order to share information, thereby making interactive communication possible.

Consumers visit Internet shopping malls not only for the purpose of purchasing a particular product but also to acquire necessary information and entertainment. The value pursued by consumers in Internet shopping malls can be clearly differentiated by their preferences. The distinction between the two groups—those pursuing utilitarian values and those hedonic ones—is clearer in the e-commerce markets

than in the traditional markets. More specifically, while the former group, which pursues utilitarian values, focuses only on the diversity of products and quality of information on the sites, the latter group places higher value on structure and variety of features of shopping sites, in addition to the products and quality of information. This pleasure and stimulus influences customers' willingness to visit and purchase products. In addition, frequent online shoppers not only have high affinity for and ability to control the Internet, but also place more value on symbolic value, expressive value, and epistemic value in their purchase. These results strongly indicate that frequent online shoppers, in addition to their goal of acquiring products online, are highly motivated to fill aesthetic, entertaining and symbolic needs. The features that arise from cyber shopping suggest a postmodern consumer culture implied in cyber shopping, that is, an understanding of tastes and codes as well as the trend towards the aesthetic in our everyday life.

The development of information communication technology and the spread of the Internet have led to many recognizable changes in various consumer activities that strengthen and empower consumer rights in Korea. Cyber consumer movements are largely divided into three types. First, the information provider type provides not only specific and professional but also comprehensive information for consumer problems. Normally, consumers might find it difficult to access such information from commercial sources, such as companies. Second, "anti-sites" are a type of cyber consumer movement that allows consumers to express their concerns or complaints on a specific product or company. Based on negative experiences and problems with companies experienced by consumers, "anti-sites" allow for the boycotting of products or services. Previously, although there were many postings of complaints about strong-armed tactics by companies on the company's homepage boards or online consumer groups' bulletin boards, more anti-sites have emerged in cyberspace because it has become easier to make websites. These sites attempt to reduce the sales of a particular product, and are known to have a negative effect on the sales of those products. Third, online consumer group sites provide a space to share and exchange detailed and specific information based on the experience of the consumer who has used or has interest in a specific product or service. Online consumer groups with critical mass have recognized effect on the market. As a result, companies are making the effort to directly address the complaints of these group members.

In the past, consumers were at a disadvantage if companies produced low quality goods and selectively released information. However, these three forms of cyber consumer movements emphasize and strengthen the relationship between consumers, and relationship between business and consumers, and hence helping to resolve the issue of asymmetry of information. Furthermore, cyber consumer movements with anti-sites and online consumer groups activities in cyberspace have turned silent masses into powerful, vocal ones. Rather than acting solely as cyber consumer movement sites for specific products or companies, information sites are differentiated from the types of consumer movements, such as anti-sites and online consumer groups in that they offer comprehensive information on all consumer issues. Accordingly, anti-sites and online consumer groups are expected to play greater roles in cyberspace in terms of the establishment of consumer empowerment and realization of civilian rights. In particular, for Internet user groups, in addition to the compensation from damages received, it is more a matter of building a consumer community and grass-roots consumerism based on common interest.

It is expected that the spread of the Internet will widen the scope of cyber consumer movements. Women, the major consumer activists of the past, have given rise to a new group of activists, including rural residents, men, and workers—especially white-collar ones. In particular, men are becoming more involved in the creation of anti-sites.

The following conclusions are applicable to the cyberspace consumption culture in Korea. Firstly, the practices of e-commerce or cyber shopping space can be considered one part of the postmodern cultural phenomenon emerging from the spread of electronic infor-

mation media such as the Internet. However, the features of post-modern consumption culture in cyber shopping are only partially visible. Consumers seem to prefer on and offline composite type consumption, i.e., modern/postmodern mixed with consumption type over online alone. The following fact also supports the argument that consumers with aesthetic and symbolic values and those with higher Internet skills are more receptive and respond positively to e-commerce or cyber shopping. Secondly, the effect of informatization or postmodernity can be found to be more affirmative in cyber consumer movements rather than on e-commerce. Despite the current status of e-commerce markets as weak and underdeveloped, cyber consumer movements not only positively affect the general public, but also provide progressive steps towards consumer empowerment.

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