The gifts and consumption: exploring the Russian online gift-exchange communities

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Exchange is changing:

traditional practice & virtual space

Types of exchange

What (service /commodity)

Where (online / offline)

How – level of reciprocity (paid/unpaid and gift / exchange)

Exchange in Soviet time

Planned economy (products deficit) created the system of paper-based announcements

Example of online gift-exchanging activity

Обменяю, отдам новая тема

- → ▲ Приму в дар - общий (377) 17 Сентябрь
- → ▲ Отдам даром - общий (37) 17 Сентябрь
- → ВНИМАНИЕ! п.2.1.1 для "Обменяю, отдам"
- Что-нибудь на что-нибудь (18) 17 Сентябрь
- ▲ Ищу взрослое - общий (500) 17 Сентябрь
- меняю все, добавления (6) 17 Сентябрь
- ▲ Новая детская обувь - общий (254) 17 Сентяб
- Попробую обмены снова (25) 17 Сентябрь
- ▲ Детское питание, др. продукты, напитки - об
- ищу для беременных и малыша (22) 17 Сентябр
- Обмен детское на детское, взрослое на взрос
- Меняюсь в центре днем (53) 17 Сентябрь
- ▲ Купоны, акции, скидки - общий (223) 17 Сентя
- ▲ Ищу детское - общий (398) 17 Сентябрь
- Подушками одеяло в детскую кроватку (3) 17 С
- Хочу все подряд (40) 17 Сентябрь

Женские кофточки

grafinya.u 165

1. Терракотовая кофточка-водолазка, размер 46-48, на рукавах красивые кружева со стразиками. Состояние на 5.
2. Бирюзовая кофточка в полоску на 48-50-й размер.Состояние отличное.
3. Синяя кофта с коротким рукавом в хорошем состоянии, 50-й размер.

Россия (Russia), Москва, ОВ, 18:15 - 19:15

Комментарии: 0

Желающие: 0

Чашка

kojp and kirpi 70

Примерно на 400 мл. Керамическая. **Желтая**. Я бы даже сказала, что цвет светло-лимонный. С картинкой и надписью «главное, ребята, сердцем не стареть»
Надо будет помыть. На ободке есть малюсенький скол, но визуально он не заметен и пить из чашки не мешает. Я его вообще заметила случайно. До этого раз пять чашку осматривала и ничего не замечала.

Россия (Russia), Санкт-Петербург, По договоренности. Приемущественно пр.Большевиков, Технологический институт, Нарвская. Иногда (редко!) бываю в районе пр.Просвещения, Гражданского пр., Девяткино, Удельной, Комендантского пр., Старой деревни.

Комментарии: 0

Желающие: 0

Яндекс.Директ

«to buy, to use, to throw out»…
versus
secondary usage of things

- Over the past few years reciprocal communities have a **significant growth**
- The pioneer network was founded in the **1990s and consists of 24000 participants**
- According to one of the largest Russian-speaking gift exchange communities, **the number of its members almost doubled annually**. 2014: more than 230 thousand members, more than **2 million gift exchanges**

The relations in gift-exchange communities are **under no control by the formal institutions** and have specific "networking" nature

Example of 1st page - I

otdam-darom.livejournal.com

Username Password Log in Remember Me Forgot your password? Create an Account

You are viewing otdam_darom

Search at otdam_darom

ОФФТОПИК СНОСИМ И БАНИМ Убедительно просим перед размещением объявлений в данном комьюнити ознакомиться с правилами! Обязательно указывайте город, и НЕ НАДО ЗДЕСЬ НИЧЕГО ПРОСИТЬ. ЗДЕСЬ ТОЛЬКО ОТДАЮТ!

Отдам даром (читайте правила!)'s Journal

(Latest 20 entries) (Calendar) (Friends) 38264103/7159573 (**ПРАВИЛА**) (User info)
Navigate: (Previous 20 entries)

Wednesday, October 8, 2014

10:24PM - Котик Арсений (1 год) отдаётся в добрые ручки.

(nushka89)

Оригинал взят у **nushka89** в Котик Арсений (1 год) отдаётся в добрые ручки.

В активном поиске дома годовалый кот Арсений.

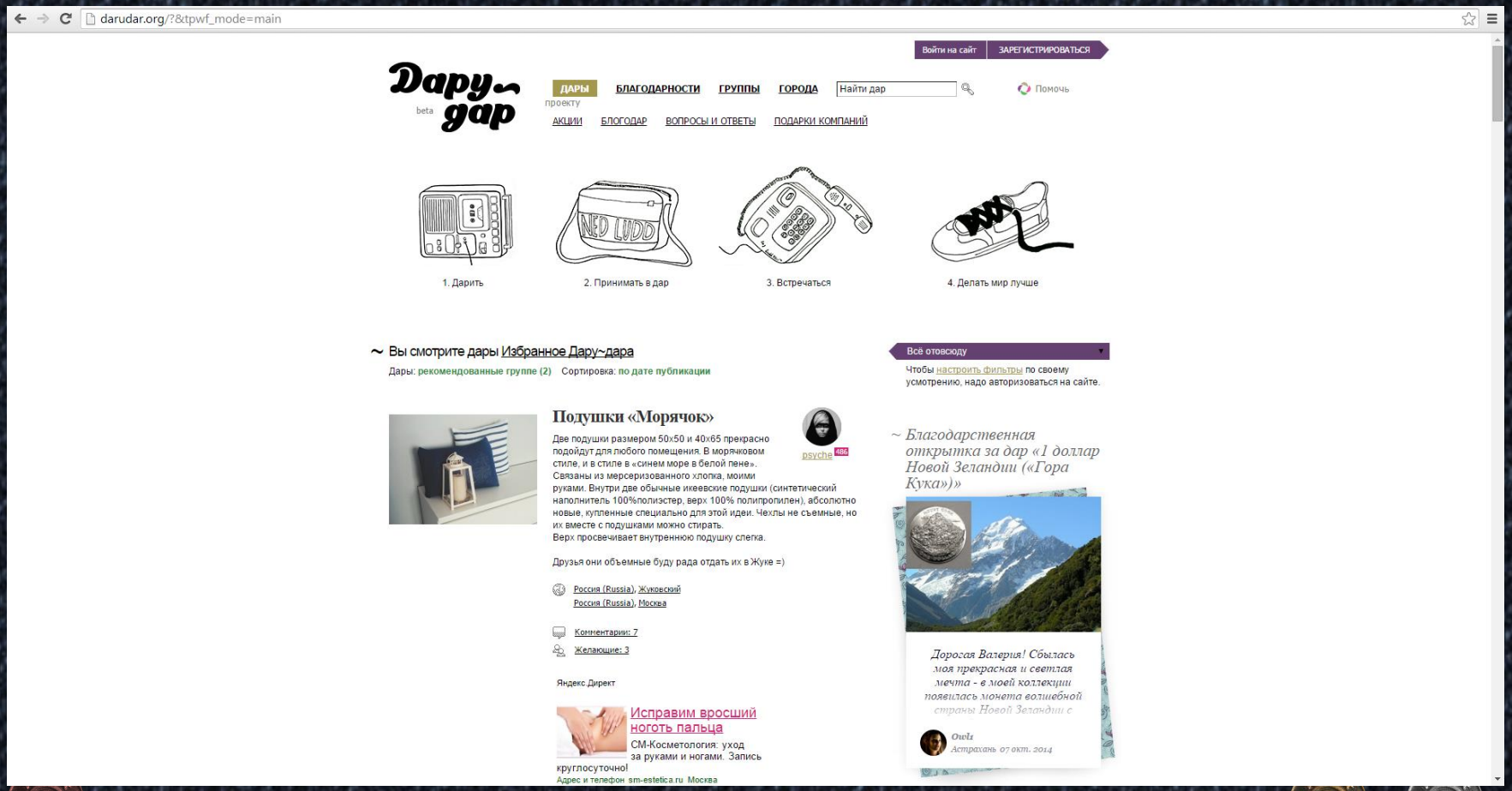
Арсений с нетерпением ждет своего хозяина. Котик добрый, ласковый, мурчащий – просто замечательный Здоров, кастрирован, привит. Лоток и когтеточка на пять с плюсом.
Приезжайте к нам знакомиться с Арсением: 8-925-6Ч2-ЧО-8Ч Григорий

Еще фотографии Арсения: https://vk.com/album-73919626_200370551

(comment on this)

LJ MAGAZINE LJMAPS Лечебные грязи Куяльницкого лимана Surprise me Новый день, новая жизнь!

Example of 1st page - II



Our research focus

- Segment of **virtual informal economics**, which implies gift exchange relations between it participants.
- The **online gift-exchange communities** – are virtual platforms, where users make free of charge (or based on individual equivalence valuing) exchange of different daily demand objects: books, children's products, interior items, dishes and others.
- The key words in nomination of such kind of communities are “give free”, “give a gift” etc.
- Internet makes possible for gift exchange communities members **to share information about gift**, but the meeting with gift giving take place in real (offline) world.

Research questions

- to give an analytical description of reciprocal online communities,
- to reveal their social order in terms of social structure.

what rules and mechanisms exist in this type of informal economy

what motivates people not acquainted with one another to exchange gifts

the way this social structure operates

Research strategy

- ***Nethnography***. The research team systematically observed 4 of the most popular reciprocal communities in Russia. Communities was described on the basis of a uniform protocol.
- ***Personal (offline) semiformalized interview*** with representatives of the communities. So the informants became those who were involved in gift exchange right at the moment.

❖ 6 interviews in Moscow with 5 women and 1 man, the age of informants varies from 18 to 55 years.

Our research role in this work was “hidden”, i.e. without announcement of the fact of monitoring exchange interactions. The initial assumptions were: 1) a priori publicity and openness of communities, and 2) expected changes in both the interaction of participants and the articulation of the presence of the researcher

Gift exchange phenomenon: description and methods of interpretation

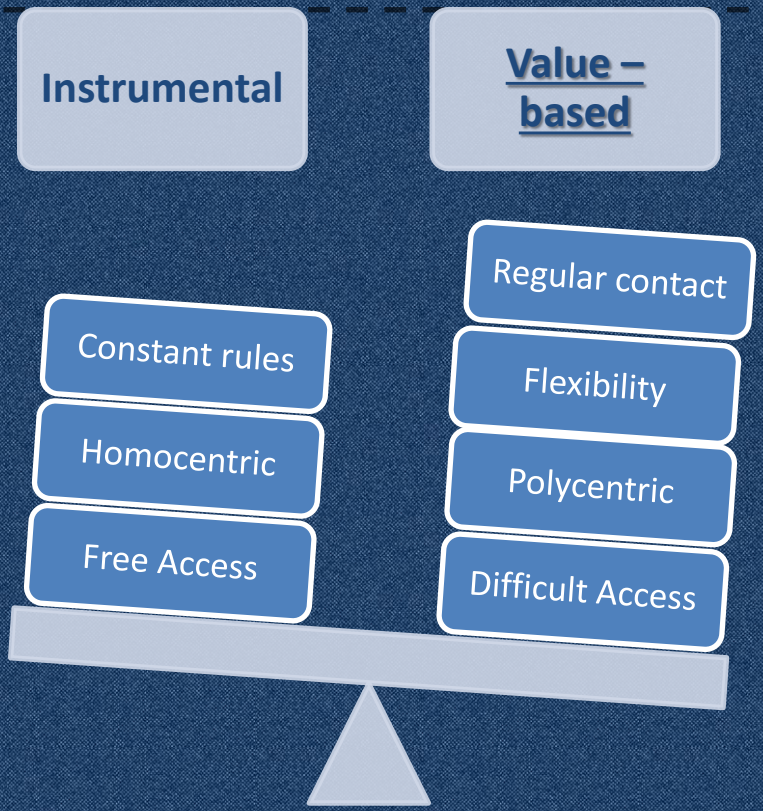
- Transit the consumption practices to Internet
- Transit to new type of consumption culture (redistribution of resources)

- **Post-materialism** as economic and socio-cultural paradigm (R.Inglehart; L. Milbrat)

Gift exchange communities

structure & mechanism

Types of gift-exchanging communities



Gift-exchanging communities

Instrumental

- ***«We do not have democracy. We practiced democracy once (see question about cats), and more will not do such a stupid thing»***

  [Moderator, reciprocal community based on livejournal.com, Moscow]

- ***«… "Virtuals" are very unreliable. They may come to meeting, or may "forget" to. In most cases, they are ephemerals with just made journals. Almost all of them only ask or accept; I don't remember the case that they make offers»***

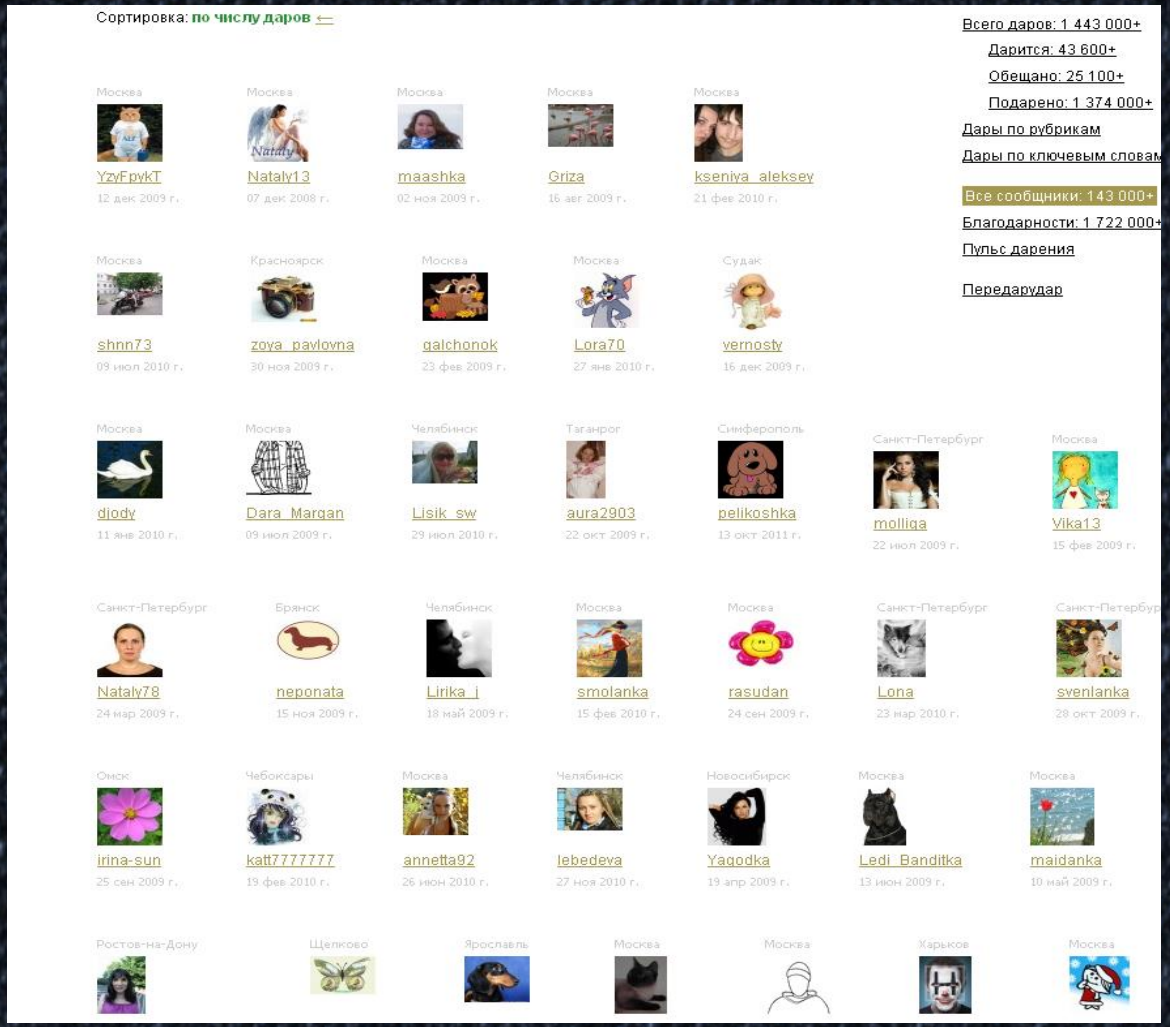
  [Moderator , gift-exchange community based on livejournal.com, St-Petersbourgh]

Value- based

- ***«…what is the any-time, any-place gifts exchange ? This is space of the maximum trust to each other. It is a general beliefs in the nobility and honesty person. This means that everyone will do what he can, and to get what he really needed»***

  [Developer of international Russian-speaking community of the gift exchange]

List of participants (sorted by number of gifts)



Women are the main actors

- **Hard life situations, which naturally "include" group solidarity**, stimulate people to search gifts, give goods or exchange needless with needful:
  - relocation ("*have rented a flat without furniture, looking for something to sleep on*"),
  - critical life situations ("*I've remained alone with my children, the husband has gone, and children's clothes are needed")*
  - *etc*

Commodity as the subject of interactions

Reciprocity is a **continuation the life and history of things** [Appadurai, 1986].

Things: durables, books, items for babies, clothes etc.

Opportunity for **moneyless consumption**

Commodity from home to home. Appreciation system

Благодарности

Alenaaaaaaaaaaa благодарит за дар формы для льда

Ольга, спасибо за классные формочки! Уж летом они точно не будут лежать без дела! Например, рыбки уже плавают в яблочном соке:)
Спасибо еще раз!

Accumulated social capital

The most honorable participant

YzyFpykT 3 757 почтальон

ЕЁ ДАРЫ ДАРИТСЯ ЕЙ КОММЕНТАРИИ ГРУППЫ

АКЦИИ БЛОГОДАР КОНТАКТЫ ОТЗЫВЫ 38 0

Blocked participant

Kristina-83 616 заблокирован

ЕЁ ДАРЫ ДАРИТСЯ ЕЙ КОММЕНТАРИИ ГРУППЫ

АКЦИИ БЛОГОДАР КОНТАКТЫ ОТЗЫВЫ 0 13

История блокировок сообщника Kristina-83

Период блокировки: 29 дек 2010 г. – навсегда

Нарушение норм этики и морали при общении с людьми.

Злоупотребление доверием сообщников в корыстных целях.

Извращение целей и миссии сообщества, для удовлетворения личных амбиций.

Roles and hierarchy in the community

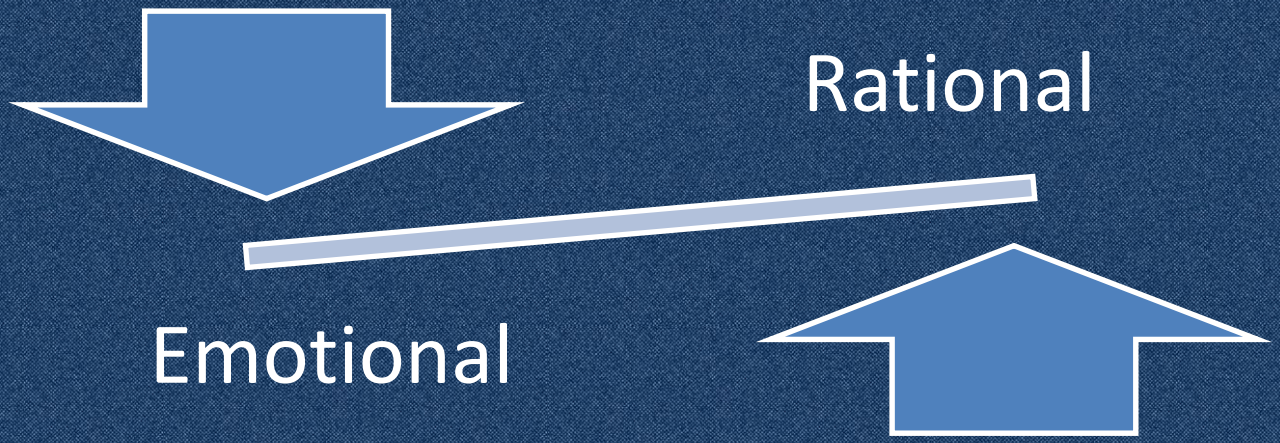
- ***Developers*** *- create free gifting service for different people who can make gifts to each other - with a maximum benefit and pleasure*

- ***Caretakers*** *help participants to hold communities traditions, to communicate with each other in the most difficult situations in order to use the tools of free gifting service. They have its own code, the main principles of which are "Help" and "Do No Harm"*

- ***Postmen*** *help donors (gift makers) to transfer the gifts to other cities, saving them time and money, and unite participants, living in different cities*

- ***Patrons*** *and many other participants' help developers maintain service, and improve it further ...*[Quote from the developers of international Russian-speaking community of the gift exchange]

Motivations



Gift-exchange is not the practice of deprived groups, but the form of communication and consumer solidarity of individuals

Russian online gift-exchange communities

Conclusion

Practice of resource redistribution

A kaleidoscope of needs and possibilities for people with different level of “capital”.

1) Minimizing (**from over-consumption to smart**)
2) Normalizing (**from under-consumption to normal**)
3) Maximizing (**from under-consumption to over**)
4) Balancing (**“horizontal" strategy**)

New type of sociability

The practice of online gift-exchange:

- **indicator of growing social mobilization, the birth of a new type of sociability.**

- **way of expanding social links, additional criteria for the "scale" of personal prestige through the specific status appreciated in the community.**

«…positive consequences of sociability»

- **Practice** with the especial values, norms and repute systems, self-control and trust inside the group.
- **It cannot be reduced** only to a forced "naturalness" of economic relations in the conditions of lack of money resources.
- Mastering the rules inside gift-exchange communities can produce **specific competencies of their members**.