Research Article

Understanding the Collecting Experience: Purchase Motivations and Social Collecting Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the purchase motivations and collecting behavior of self-assessed Funko Pop collectors. It finds that the individual collector's self-identification influences individual purchase and collection decisions. It also finds that social collecting behaviors may influence individual collecting behavior, suggesting that collecting communities may establish collecting norms and experiences. This study maps out the collecting experience, provides a unique perspective on social collecting behaviors, explores the nuances of the collecting experience, and recommends potential direction for managers.

Keywords: Collecting, Collecting experience, Social collecting

Introduction

Collecting enhances brand loyalty (Slater, 2001). Despite this, extant marketing literature explains little about collecting. Most collecting literature may be found in psychology, focusing mainly on defining collecting and what may be collected (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991; Danet & Katriel, 1994; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004), identifying collecting behavior (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991; Danet & Katriel, 1994; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Formanek, 2012; Long & Schiffman, 1997), and understanding collecting motivations (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Formanek, 2012). Collecting in marketing literature builds upon previous discussions and explores consumer collecting behavior (Slater, 2001; Slater, 2000) and collecting experience (Gentile et al., 2007).

There is still much to learn about collecting from a marketing context (Spaid, 2018). Nevertheless, there still needs to be a greater understanding of social collecting behaviors and how these affect individual collecting behavior. The discussion on the collecting experience must also be expanded, particularly about brand-specific collecting experience. No global framework or paradigm currently describes an experience, as current frameworks focus on developing and delivering experiences.

How important is it to understand the collecting experience? Collecting is a different type of consumption, and the collector is a different type of consumer (Slater, 2001). Collecting manifests and enhances brand loyalty (Slater, 2001). The collecting experience generates value for the brand (Gentile et al., 2007). Furthermore, experience has been the focus of

marketing ever since Pine and Gilmore published their seminal work on experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Experience has found prominence in both literature and practice. Yet little about collecting experience has been explored in extant literature. While experience literature has pushed for the formalization of a general model of the consumption experience, it has yet to develop a framework that describes, interprets, and evaluates consumer experience (Chaney et al., 2018).

This study attempts to further the discussion on consumer experience, specifically in the context of the consumer collecting experience, through the study of the collecting experience of Filipino Funko Pop collectors. How does one describe a collecting experience?

To describe an experience is to tell a story. Central to stories are the main characters, their motivations, and their experience. Thus, to describe the collecting experience, the study sought to answer the following:
1. How do individual collectors make the purchase and collecting decisions?
2. How does the collecting community affect individual collecting behavior?

This study contributes to the discussion of collecting and brand loyalty, collecting and consumer co-creation of value, and collecting and consumer experience. More importantly, it provides the groundwork for developing an experience framework.

What is collecting?

Collecting is defined in different but similar ways in extant literature (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004). Most studies agree that collecting is "the selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession, and disposition of an inter-related set of differentiated objects (material things, ideas, beings, or experiences) that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute" (Belk et al., 1991).

Discussion on collecting also involves differentiating it from similar activities. For example, literature is specific that collecting is not accumulation—or the amassing of similar objects for the sake of it, not hoarding—or building up a stockpile with no consideration for organization, and not investing—or accumulating for arbitrage (Belk et al., 1991). There are three necessary traits of a collection to differentiate it from ordinary accumulation and hoarding (Spaid, 2018): (1) interrelatedness—a collection has a motif that ties them together (Danet & Katriel, 1994); (2) selective—a collector follows systematic criteria (Belk et al., 1991); and (3) sacredness—a collectible is a non-utilitarian object that has a place of honor in a collection.

What is the collecting experience?

Collecting is considered an aesthetic experience (Danet & Katriel, 1994). For collectors, the objects they collect—the mug, the magnet, the pin—are no longer objects purchased and collected for their utilitarian value. Each piece in the collection becomes a sacred icon that represents moments in a collector's life or beliefs and values that a collector holds (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991). Collecting results from the cumulative experience of a collector, and their collection is a symbolic "museum of the life of the collector" (Belk et al., 1991).

Collecting represents a different level of consumption—a brand collector is different from a brand consumer (Slater, 2001). Collecting is the "distilled essence of consumption" and a "modern consumption experience" (Belk et al., 1991). From the brand's standpoint, a brand collector creates more value than a regular consumer because a brand collector does not buy the product merely to consume the product but primarily because of the value that the brand represents. According to brand equity literature, the consumer's recognition of and loyalty to the brand (Aaker, 1991) and their emotional attachment to the brand (Kelle, 1993) manifests this value.

Value is co-created with consumers (Ramaswamy, 2009) by celebrating ownership (Belk et al., 1991). Collections are physical manifestations of a collector's commitment to the brand; they are not mere objects to be consumed but are visible reminders of their brand loyalty (Slater, 2000). Collectors become brand ambassadors because they make the brand visible in the marketplace: they "protect the

brand, market the brand, and advertise the brand" (Slater, 2001).

Brand collectors build stronger relationships with the brand than brand consumers (Slater, 2000) because they believe they are part of the brand's history. Collectors do not just consume the brand but also form an emotional attachment to it (Slater, 2001). They are more likely to purchase and provide more marketing value for the brand. Value is co-created through experiencing the brand (Gentile et al., 2007; Ramaswamy, 2009). Collecting entails increased customer involvement through the consumer's emotional affinity to the brand or through values and beliefs shared by the consumer with the brand—a higher customer involvement means a more enhanced customer experience (Gentile et al., 2007).

What motivates collectors to collect?

Buying behavior, which includes collecting, is influenced by a buyer's self-perception (Spaid, 2018; Langner, 2013), affirming the assertion that collections "serve as extensions of self" (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991). The established taxonomy of collecting motives affirms that collector perceptions of their identity explain why they collect: self-relevance, social relevance, and historical preservation and continuity (Formanek, 2012). For collectors, collecting addresses an emotional need (Muensterberger, 2014) and serves to affirm a person's sense of self (Belk et al., 1988), thereby providing psychological security (Muensterberger, 2014). There are two other motivations: financial investment and addiction (Formanek, 2012).

There are three collection stages: acquisition, possession, and disposition (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1991). Specific behaviors characterize each process. Collecting behaviors fit within two broad contexts: social behaviors and solitary behaviors (Spaid, 2018). Table 1 summarizes these processes and behaviors.

Table 1. Social and solitary collecting behavior

Collecting processes	Collecting behavior	
	Social	Solitary
Acquisition	Hunting (Formanek, 2012; Long & Schiffman, 1997); Network (Long & Schiffman, 1997); Trading (Belk et al., 1988)	Researching (Danet & Katriel, 1994; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004); Planning (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004)
Possession	Sharing (Formanek, 2012; Hughes & Hogg, 2006); Consulting (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Hughes & Hogg, 2006); Dealing (Rubel & Rosman, 2001)	Displaying (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004); Admiring (Spaid, 2018; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982); Cataloging (Hughes & Hogg, 2006)
Disposition	Selling (Price et al., 2000); Trading (Belk et al., 1988)	Bequeathing (Price et al., 2000)

What is social collecting?

Collectors need recognition and acceptance. They need others to recognize collecting as being a worthwhile endeavor as this legitimizes what is otherwise seen as abnormal hoarding or acquisition (Belk et al., 1988). They need approval or permission, specifically from family or close friends (Hughes & Hogg, 2006). Collectors consider collecting hard work because collections are often built piece by piece (rather than in bulk). Being recognized for their hard work by others, particularly by fellow collectors, is essential to them (Slater, 2000).

Competition is part of the collecting experience because of the limited availability of collectibles (Long & Schiffman, 1997; Slater, 2000; Spaid, 2018). On the other hand, collecting is also a cooperative endeavor, with many collectors joining clubs and communities to share

information with fellow collectors (Long & Schiffman, 1997; Spaid, 2018).

Collecting clubs and communities become venues for collectors to exhibit collecting behavior. Collectors join clubs and attend conventions to socialize, share information, and trade collectibles (Slater, 2001; Long & Schiffman, 1997; Slater, 2000). A collecting community provides a safe space for collectors to behave as collectors because they recognize and legitimize collecting as a socially acceptable endeavor (Carey, 2008).

Collecting rituals are informal collector agreements and work as social contracts that regulate collecting behavior. Collectors create and follow procedures for acquiring, caring for, and displaying their collectibles (Danet & Katriel, 1994) based on community-approved collecting standards and procedures (Carey, 2008).

The acquisition ritual or the pursuit of a collectible is one that collectors consider a significant aspect of the collecting experience (Long & Schiffman, 1997; Slater, 2000), with many collectors expressing the love for the chase as much as, if not more than, possessing the collectible itself (Slater, 2000). Collectors also define rules on possession. For example, Swatch collectors buy two of each—one to wear, and one to keep mint in a box (Long & Schiffman, 1997).

How do we describe the collecting experience?

The current paradigms used to describe and explain experience are based on storytelling elements. While there is currently no globally accepted experience model, there are two experience frameworks that were developed with the intent of being used in the context of experience delivery: (1) the Disney guest experience and the experience delivery system (Kinni, 2011) and (2) Rossman and Duerden's experiencescape (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

Disney delivers its exceptional guest experience through a three-point delivery system based on storytelling elements: characters, setting, and plot (Kinni, 2011). People or the characters refer to their Cast Members or employees of Disney. Place or the setting refers to the parks and all of the objects present in the parks. Processes, or the plot, refer to how the characters interact with the setting. These refer to procedures and protocols governing guest flow and engagement.

On the other hand, Rossman and Duerden's experiencescape (Rossman & Duerden, 2019) expand Disney's delivery system, specifically the setting and plot. The setting is expanded to include place, time, and objects. The plot is expanded to include rules, relationships, and blocking: (1) people refer to individuals involved in the experience, regardless of their location, (2) place refers to the physical space or chronological time in which the experience occurs, (3) objects refer to physical, social and symbolic objects that play a recognized role in the experience, (4) rules refer to protocols, norms, expectations, laws that influence the experience, (5) relationships refer to relationships of people in the experience that influence interactions, and (6) blocking, or the choreography of people's location and movement.

Conceptual Framework

To describe an experience is to tell a story. The elements of a story should include the characters, setting, and plot. This study uses a conceptual framework based on the Disney delivery system (Kinni, 2011) and Rossman and Duerden's six elements of the experiencescape (Rossman & Duerden, 2019) to understand the collecting experience. Specifically, the study maps out the characters, setting, and plot of the experiences. Figure 1 synthesizes the questions that were asked to identify the elements of the collecting experience.
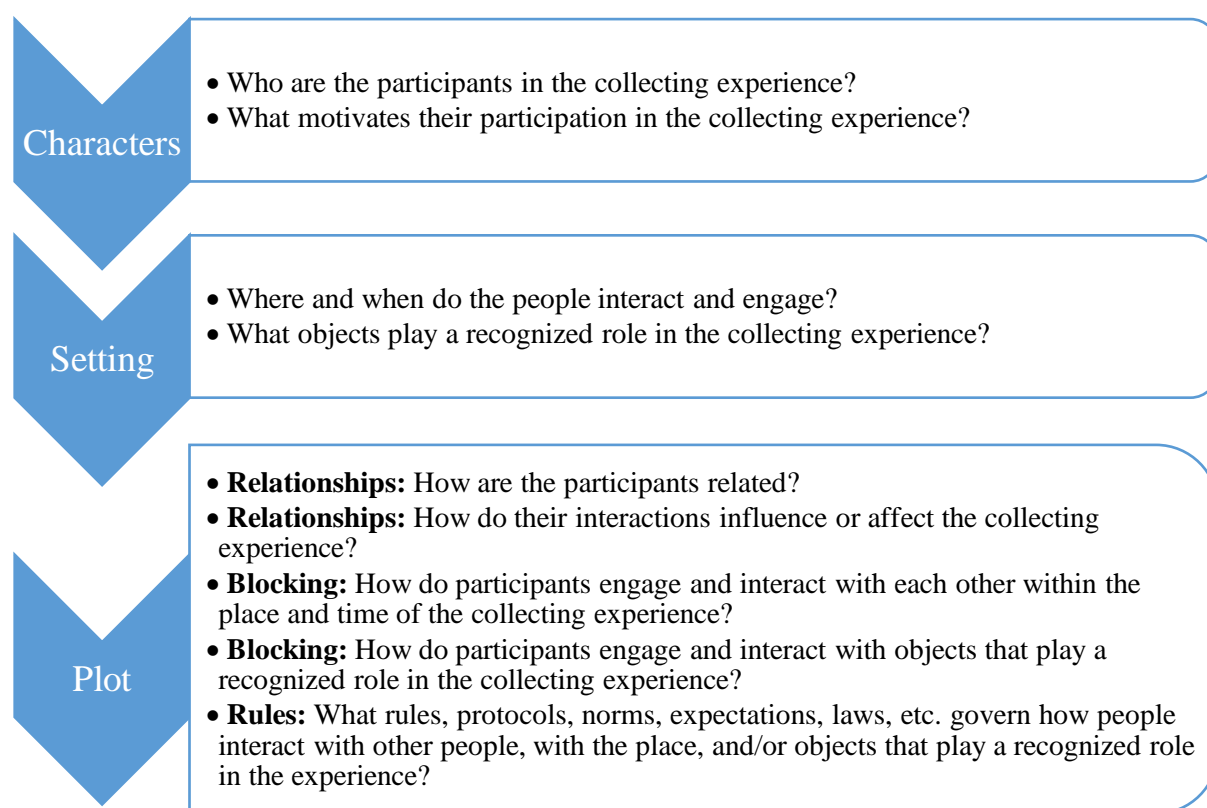
Characters
- Who are the participants in the collecting experience?
- What motivates their participation in the collecting experience?

Setting
- Where and when do the people interact and engage?
- What objects play a recognized role in the collecting experience?

Plot
- **Relationships:** How are the participants related?
- **Relationships:** How do their interactions influence or affect the collecting experience?
- **Blocking:** How do participants engage and interact with each other within the place and time of the collecting experience?
- **Blocking:** How do participants engage and interact with objects that play a recognized role in the collecting experience?
- **Rules:** What rules, protocols, norms, expectations, laws, etc. govern how people interact with other people, with the place, and/or objects that play a recognized role in the experience?

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methods

Given the nature of the research questions, this study employed a qualitative case-based approach to explore and examine the collecting experience. As prescribed (Yin, 2014), data was gathered from primary and secondary sources.

The initial phase involved intensive desk research to gather secondary data from multiple sources: official online resources of Funko, including its website and social media channels; the Funko Fanatic Philippines Facebook Group page; online news and magazine articles; filmed documentaries such as Netflix's Making Fun: The Story of Funko; and other related videos and vlogs from self-proclaimed Funko Funatics. Information from these primary sources was used to structure and enhance the questions to gather primary data.

Primary data was gathered in two phases. The initial exploratory phase involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with respondents who consider themselves as Funko Pop collectors. These yielded a total of 9 individual interviews.

The second phase involved an online survey questionnaire. The information gathered from secondary sources and responses from the in-depth interviews were used to create, structure, and enhance the survey questionnaire. A total of 320 individuals responded to the online survey, but only 226 responses were accepted for this study. Of the accepted responses, 70% considered themselves as Funko Pop collectors.

Survey respondents were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of collecting, motivations, and behavior. Their answers were coded based on themes found in extant literature and guided by this study's conceptual framework.

Respondents were also asked to rate a series of statements based on a 5-point Likert scale. In analyzing the ratings provided by the respondents, the study used a data analysis strategy employed by at least one market research agency in the Philippines, which focused only on extreme answers: Strongly Agree or Strongly Disagree. This minimizes the effect of courtesy bias, or the tendency to provide answers they think interviewers want to hear rather than their honest opinion. The rationale lies in what is considered a Filipino trait when

answering surveys: Filipino respondents are typically polite and are more likely to respond in the positive spectrum (Agree) than provide a neutral (Unsure) or negative (Disagree) response (M. Salazar, personal communication, October 19, 2019). Extreme answers, on the other hand, are relatively more accurate reflections of respondent sentiment. The study mainly focused on the positive extreme (Strongly Agree) as the statements were expressed in the positive but noted if the extreme negative responses exceeded 5% of responses. Thus, data analysis focused on the frequency of the extreme responses rather than weighted averages of responses to understand perceptions and attitudes.

While the assumptions of this study are anchored on current literature, the study remained open to themes that emerged from responses from the interviews and the survey. It was also sensitive to patterns that revealed themselves during data analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness of research and rigor in analysis, the study combined Guba and Lincoln's quality framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) with Yin's quality design tests (Yin, 2014), and operationalized by Patton (Patton, 2002) and Beverland and Lindgreen (Gao et al., 2014). Table 2 summarizes the strategies this study employed to ensure the validity of the inquiry.

Table 2. Quality tests for validity of inquiry

Quality tests	Case study tactic, identify at each phase of research
Credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) Internal Validity (Yin, 2014)	Data collection: multiple sources of evidence and data triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002; Gao et al., 2014)
	Tactic: Discussion includes analysis from 9 interviews and 260 survey responses
Transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994); External Validity (Yin, 2014)	Data collection, analysis and report composition: Thick descriptions of cases to provide context (Guba & Lincoln, 1981)
	Tactic: Discussion includes verbatim responses from informants
Dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994); Internal Validity (Yin, 2014)	Conceptual framework: Constructs well defined and grounded in extant literature (Gao et al., 2014).
	Tactic: Conceptual Framework synthesizes constructs from collecting and experience literature
Objectivity / Authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); Construct Validity (Yin, 2014)	Data collection: Triangulation using multiple sources of data and perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 2002; Gao et al., 2014)
	Tactic: Survey respondents were provided copies of their responses.

Discussion
Characters in the collecting experience
(1) Who are the participants in the collecting experience?

Funko Pop collectors are the main characters of the collecting experience. The supporting characters are members of the Funko Pop collecting community. The collecting community is made up of the following: (1) fellow Funko Pop collectors, (2) Funko Funatic Philippines (FFP), (3) Funko Trading Philippines (FTP), (4) Funko and its brand representatives, and (5) Funko retailers. The FFP is a fan-organized Funko collecting community that was first established as a Facebook Group in July 2013. On the other hand, the FTP is the official trading group of FFP and was established in response to the need of collectors to buy, sell, and

trade with each other. FFP maintains close relationships with Funko through its representatives as well as with Funko's official Philippine distributors and retailers.

Collections often begin spontaneously (Belk et al., 1988; Gao et al., 2014). While many collectors claim that they purchased their first Funko Pop because of its aesthetic appeal and symbolic value ("I am a fan of the character"), some acquired their first collectible as a gift. Their fascination with and strong interest in the first collectible led to the purchase of their second collectible, at which point, collectors consider their two acquisitions a collection. Some respondents in the survey assessed themselves as Funko collectors, even with just a collection of two Funko Pop figures. Therefore, the tipping point of collecting behavior is possessing two similar items (Gao et al., 2014).

(2) What motivates their participation in the collecting experience?

When respondents were asked why they collect, a majority of their responses fell under the following three categories: (1) psychological security: "It makes me happy" / "It brings joy" / "It relieves my stress"; (2) in relation to self: "It reminds me of what I love" / "They bring back memories" / "It represents the things I am interested in or a fan of"; and (3) aesthethic quality of the toy: "It's cute!" / "It's fun to look at". Psychological security comes from an emotional need being addressed (Muensterberger, 2014) and through the affirmation of a person's sense of self (Belk et al., 1988). Survey responses imply that while psychological security explains the benefits they derive from collecting, their psychological and emotional need to affirm their identity explains why they collect. Funko Pop figures are tangible reminders of what they love and are extensions of the collector's self (Belk et al., 1988), affirming that collecting "in relation to self" (Formanek, 2012).

There are four categories of self-identification, which explains how collectors decide which Funko Pop figures to collect: who they are (self-verification), whom they want others to see (identity signaling), whom they aspire to

be (uniqueness), and who they were (nostalgia) (Sichtmann et al., 2019). Collectors select figures that remind them of particular facets of their personality and figures that represent their favorite film, television, or literary characters. Many collectors collect Funko Pop collectibles that remind them of their childhood.

Respondents of the study acknowledge the financial costs of collecting, which is why some collectors trade and/or sell Funko Pop figures to offset come costs. A few respondents have indicated that they are motivated to purchase certain collectibles for financial gain and see collecting as a form of financial investment collectibles earn value over time (Formanek, 2012). Some collectors seek out limited edition or exclusive collectibles that they know will increase in value in the future, particularly figures they know serious collectors will acquire.

Setting of the collecting experience
(1) Where and when do the people interact and engage?

Collectors engage with the collecting community in various in-person events: some are fan-sponsored, such as the annual FFP Christmas Party. In contrast, others are brand-sponsored, such as the annual Funko Fundays. Collectors also attend annual pop culture conventions, such as the San Diego Comic Convention (SDCC) and the New York Comic Convention (NYCC), where Funko is an exhibition partner. Funko also built two brick-and-mortar locations to provide a themed retail experience. Respondents of this study acknowledge that serious Funko collectors attend events and visit the flagship stores and consider these as part of the collecting experience.

Most collectors will engage with the collecting community online through fan-organized or brand-organized community forums. Funko actively engages with fans and collectors through various online channels: website, mobile apps, virtual events, and various social media platforms where they share photos, videos, and information with the collecting community. These brand-sponsored platforms are also venues for collectors to engage with each other.

(2) What objects play a recognized role in the collecting experience?

Funko Pop is the core product of Funko. They are small vinyl figures designed to appeal to the mass market. With a few exceptions, most Funko Pop figures are licensed from partner brands that span a wide range of interests: movies, television, music, sports, anime, games, and brands, among many others. Funko Pops are available in major retailers in the United States and specialty hobby stores worldwide. They are also available in many online stores. To enhance retail partnerships, Funko releases collectibles exclusive to their partner stores. The brand also releases exclusive collectibles during events, such as the SDCC, NYCC, and Funko Fundays. Exclusive and limited edition collectibles bear unique stickers, which collectors call chase, indicating their uniqueness.

Collectors generate social media content that features Funko products. These include blogs, videos, and social media posts. Collectors seek out aftermarket accessories, particularly products that enhance storage and display.

Plot of the collecting experience
(1) Rules

Rules are rituals, protocols, norms, expectations, laws that govern collecting behavior. Collecting rules specific to Funko Pop influence how collectors acquire, possess, and dispose of their collections. In this study, the discussion focuses on acquisition and possession rituals, which many respondents acknowledged during interviews and in the survey.

(a) Acquisition rituals

Respondents of this study acknowledge that serious Funko collectors attend events and visit the flagship stores and consider these as part of the collecting experience. One respondent considers Funko collecting as more than collecting, "it is a lifestyle." He further explains that his travel plans revolve around Funko events. A significant motivation to attend these events is the opportunity to acquire exclusive collectibles. Respondents of the survey share this sentiment, claiming that they excitedly line up at local and international events and conventions to acquire exclusive Funko Pop figures.

Collectors in this study repeatedly claim that lining up or "going through hoops" to make an acquisition is a part of the experience. The acquisition story makes their collectible all the more valuable and unique. Several studies (Slater, 2001; Belk et al., 1988; Long & Schiffman, 1997; Slater, 2000) share similar themes, adding more weight to the claim that collectors enjoy the process of acquisition, or "the chase," as much as they find fulfillment in possessing collectibles.

(b) Possession rituals

Collectors value collectibles that are in mint condition (Long & Schiffman, 1997), which explains why many keep their collectibles unopened and in the original packaging. Many Funko Pop collectors continue this storage convention as many keep Funko Pop figures safely inside their boxes. While this convention is meant to keep the pristine quality of the collectible, Funko Pop collectors go a step further and prefer to keep even the packaging box pristine. Many respondents have expressed that the box is just as crucial as the collectible inside. It is common among collectors to express disappointment or regret when they find dents, creases, or tears on the boxes of their collectibles, even if these are minor cosmetic flaws. Collectors value the box because chase stickers, which indicate whether a collectible is an exclusive or a limited edition, are attached to the packaging.

Still, some collectors do not follow this convention. Some will display collectibles outside of the box. Such collectibles are referred to as OOB (out of the box). Some collectors will take photos of their collectibles out of the box and share them on personal social media. However, the box remains important even for collectors who display OOB collectibles. They will keep their original boxes and packaging in storage.

(2) Relationships

Relationships explain how collectors are related to each other. In this section, the discussion focuses on how relationships and interactions within collecting communities influence the collecting experience.

Social media has influenced collectors' engagement and interaction with fellow collectors, retailers, and brands. It has contributed to

the rise and growth of collecting communities by providing a space for collectors to share information and celebrate collecting. Nikko Lim, a founder of FFP, shared that community members actively engage in the group forum. Collectors will seek expert information about exclusive and limited edition collectibles, share their new acquisitions and acquisition stories, and provide tips on keeping, displaying, or storing collectibles within community-accepted collecting rules.

Collecting communities have brought official Funko retailers closer to their customers. Owners and representatives of these specialty and hobby shops may provide exclusive Funko information. Forums become venues to announce new releases and where collectors learn about collectible waitlists and acquisition procedures for exclusives and limited editions.

Collecting communities become safe spaces for collectors to celebrate their collections with like-minded people, which they may find difficult or not want to do with non-collectors. This is the primary reason the founder of FFP established the community—he wanted to create a space to gather collectors to celebrate their shared interests and passion.

Collectors who prefer to engage in solitary collecting behaviors find value in joining collecting communities because of the information shared and passed among its members. Some collectors are content reading through forums without needing to engage and actively comment in threads. The value of being part of the community is finding crucial information, such as collectible release dates, exclusives, and limited edition acquisition procedures, and collecting tips and advice.

(3) Blocking

Blocking explores how collectors and members of the collecting community engage and interact with each other within the setting of the collecting experience. It also explores how collectors engage and interact with the objects that play a recognized role in the collecting experience.

Social collecting behavior

Collectors exhibit social acquisition behaviors, such as hunting, trading, and networking,

where collecting communities interact. Online channels enable the free exchange of exclusive and limited-edition collectibles in the secondary market. In an interview with CNN, Brian Mariotti narrates that certain Funko Pop collectibles exclusively released in the Philippines have found their way in other markets, such as the United States. These trades may occur in third-party channels like eBay or collector networks.

Online channels reduce the barriers that prevent collectors from different geographic locations from interacting and engaging with each other, including Funko itself. For example, one Philippine-based respondent explained how he reached out to the director of Funko to ask whether he could staff the Funko booth during the SDCC. He explained that he wanted to experience staffing the booth, a popular convention attraction. This casual exchange led him to meet fellow collectors during the event and to develop closer relations with them. He also nurtured a closer relationship with the brand and its representatives.

Many collectors consider attending pop culture conventions, brand-sponsored events, and fan-sponsored get-togethers as part of the Funko collecting experience, and these events as one of the elements that make the collecting experience fun and exciting. Attendance at these events is an opportunity to acquire event-exclusive and limited-edition collectibles. Attendees of these events put a premium on the event experience. Passionate Funko collectors value the collectibles and the experience.

Solitary collecting behavior

This study finds that interactions within the community influence individual collecting behavior. For example, researching and planning are considered solitary acquisition behaviors (Danet & Katriel, 1994; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Spaid, 2018). However, some respondents research and plan acquisitions in the company of fellow collectors. Collectors turn to others for tips and leads for collectibles they seek to acquire. An interview respondent shared that he has a "hunting partner" who helps him track collectibles, research prices, and plan out purchases. Many collectors turn to online forums to help plan out acquisitions of limited

edition or exclusive collectibles that involve lining up in retail outlets or attending events.

Displaying and admiring, considered solitary possession behaviors, (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Spaid, 2018; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), have also evolved into social behaviors. Respondents claim they share their collections' photos on their social media accounts. Members of FFP share photos of spaces and shelves of their Funko collectibles. Fellow collectors engage with these social media or forum posts: some express admiration for the collection and curation of the display. In contrast, others use these posts as opportunities for research by inquiring about specific collectibles found in the post.

Conclusion

Collecting is a personal pursuit. The collector's self-identification drives purchase and collection decisions. In the case of Funko collectors, they are motivated by a psychological and emotional need to affirm themselves, and this motivation is manifested in their collection selection criteria. They are also motivated by nostalgia. Specifically, Funko collectors purchase and collect Funko figures that remind them of aspects of who they are and of their childhood.

Collecting communities influence individual collecting behavior, such as researching, planning, displaying, and admiring. Collector interactions within collecting communities have made these behaviors more social. Collector engagement within collecting communities enhance the social collecting behavior, which results in collecting rituals that communities follow. Collecting rituals are informal collector agreements and work as social contracts that regulate collecting behavior. While general rules in collecting are accepted across different collecting communities, such as keeping collectibles in mint condition, collecting communities may impose more nuanced rules and rituals. In the case of the Funko collecting community, the collecting community agrees that the quality of the packaging box influences the value of a collectible.

Brands play an important role in the collecting community and may influence the collecting experience. In the case of Funko, they enhance the collecting experience by providing a venue or space for collectors to interact and engage and by engaging serious collectors. Brands may enhance the collecting experience by organizing events, get-togethers and providing in-person and online venues for collectors to engage and interact with each other.

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