

Inside the Information Behaviour of Hobby Record Collectors

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Abstract

An ethnographic study of the information behavior of hobby record collectors. The Information Horizon Interview method is used alongside an interview guide as an aide during the interview of convenience and snowball sample subjects. The findings show that emotion, money, and resources are three major themes that intersect in interesting ways. They are found to influence hobby collector's information seeking practices and their collection maintenance. The implication of this finding is that perception of value can be both communal and individual. However, because motivations and goals vary, which resources are used and in what ways is dependent on the individual and the context. The practice of librarianship can benefit from this understanding by using the reference interview as a way to connect these individual motivations and goals with applicable resources.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this research paper holds a special place in my heart. I grew up accompanying my father on record hunting missions, listening to them play on his turn table, and learning about them from his conversations. This is why given a chance to explore information behavior I chose to research the information behavior of hobby record collectors. I knew that I wanted to look at this population of the collector community and explore what resources they accessed in order to make decisions about their collections.

The following paper shows the reader not only what resources are used, but what influences the decision to use them or not. Additionally, it looks at what kinds of things are important when making a decision about maintaining a collection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When looking at the literature within the Library and Information Sciences field there is gap that needs to be filled. If looking at literature on music collecting the focus is on music collections and music reference services. An example of this is the article by Elizabeth Morris (2012) that describes a process of collection electronic music, and gives recommendations and resources for purchasing said music.

If one then turns to the literature on hobby collecting there are articles that deal with collecting items and collecting in general, but there is nothing on hobby music collections let alone vinyl. Lee & Trace (2009), Hartel (2010), and Case (2009) all deal with serious collection as leisure and apply it to the study of hobby collections. All three refer to the

serious leisure principle and define it as, "tak[ing] three main forms: serious, casual, and project-based, each containing numerous sub-types. Serious leisure is free-time activity centered upon the acquisition of specialized skills, knowledge, or experience (Stebbins, 2001); hobbies are the most prevalent sub-type of serious leisure" (Hartel, 2010, p. 6).

Lee & Trace (2009) write that Hartel extended this definition into the LIS sphere (p. 622). They themselves look at the role of information in hobby collecting and conclude that, "The primary role of information in collecting is to help build interpersonal connections and to help with the acquisition of objects that bring pleasure and joy" (Lee & Trace, 2009, p. 634).

The study by Wright (2008) is oriented in the world of pop culture. His article explores the effect of digitization on the comic book collecting hobby and the comics industry. Most notably he talks about the material and physical nature of comic books which can lead to "years of visits to flea markets, garage sales, used bookstores, comic conventions, and comic book stores, among other places, in order to find all the issues of the series one is collecting" (Wright, 2008, p. 2). This study of hobby record collectors is also oriented within pop culture and builds upon exploring the affect connected with and the variety of goals and motivations involved in hobby collecting.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data gathering methods involve a researcher created interview guide (Appendix 1) and the use of both convenience sampling and snowball sampling in order to

acquire interviewees. Sir is a 30-year-old man living in Toronto and the first of the subjects to be interviewed. He has sold records professionally in the past, but currently considers himself a hobby collector. Charlie is a 60-year-old man also living in Toronto. The second person to be interviewed, he owned his first record in 1963 and has always thought of himself as a hobby collector. Herban is a 32-year-old man living in Toronto. He has been collecting records for the past 10-12 years.

Other methods used in this research include both an analog tape recorder and a voice recorder app on a phone to record the interviews. Along with the recordings, field notes were taken and an information horizon map was drawn during the interviews. Upon return home, the interviews are then transcribed. Pseudonyms were chosen by the interviewees and the recordings destroyed within the week to ensure identity protection.

Some sensitizing concepts for this research includes knowledge already known by the researcher on the topic in question. This knowledge includes ideas about self-knowledge through experience, record stores, garage sales, and online resources as sites that inform record collecting behavior.

Cutting points are also considered in this research. The first one deals with new record collectors. More experienced records collectors are preferential due to the larger amount of knowledge the researcher believes comes from experience. A second cutting point is specialized collections because that suggests specific knowledge about a niche area instead of generalized knowledge, which is what this study is interested in.

FINDINGS

When analyzing the data from the interviews a mix of two different strategies was used. The analysis began by quantifying similar information resources and behaviours into tables. This approach was chosen due to the numerous times certain resources and behaviours were mentioned throughout the interviews. The second strategy used is an inductive thematic analysis. Due to the recurring commonalities across all of the interviews it was reasonable to create themes and elaborate on them based on grouping found in the table.

Emotion

In his interview horizon map (Figure 1.) Sir wrote the word “emotions” to encapsulate everything he had added to his information horizon map beforehand. As he put it, “emotions can happen whenever”.

This statement rings true across all interviews, although not in the same terms. Emotions are weaved throughout all the stages of record collecting. It appears in the browsing, seeking, and buying stage in the form of pleasure,

excitement, and sentimentality. It appears in feelings about ownership, liking or disliking the music, the handling and physicality of the record, and forming an attachment with it. It is also involved with selling.

Emotions can go beyond feelings that are considered when deciding whether to sell. In some cases, it can extend to hoping that the new owner will get some happiness in their own ownership. A significant way that emotion influences behavior is the feelings regarding one’s collection. All three interviewees mention feeling good about their collection. If they do not feel good about their collection then there is a need to fill that gap in order to reach some sort of satisfaction or happiness. Emotions are therefore a significant motivator and influencer for hobby record collectors when making decisions about their collections.

Money

Given the amount of times it is talked about (Table 1, Appendix 3) money is the number one thing that influences the information behaviours of hobby record collectors. Given that in order to own and therefore collect a record one usually has to buy it that is not too surprising. Money influences both buying and selling in different ways. One has money so one can buy, or there is a need for money so then records have to be sold.

Money also ties into the reason why one might choose to buy or sell an item. Although a lot of music choice comes down to taste there is a knowledge that collectors have about value that is built up over the years. When looking for a particular record if a valuable record catches the eye, and it is not too costly, it will be bought. So therefore, one buys with the knowledge that it can be sold. Lastly, an overarching influence of money correlates with emotion. In this case one does not sell a record because there is sentimental value instead of monetary.

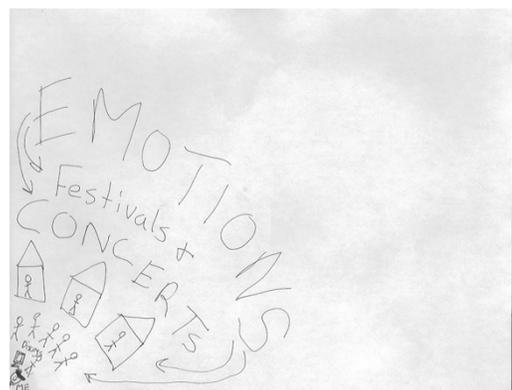


Figure 1. Sir’s Information Horizon Map

Resources

Resources is an important theme because it can stand alone in telling a story of where one would go to research, buy, or

sell a record. However, it also ties in with the preceding two themes as well as other influencers found in Table 1 (Appendix 3).

Table 2 (Appendix 3) is based on the number of times a resource is mentioned throughout an interview despite whether it is used by the interviewee or not. For example, garage sales are mentioned in all three of the interviews. However, only in interview three is it still used by the subject. For the first two interviews both Sir (Appendix 2) and Charlie make comments about it being a waste of time for them. All three know of it being a resource and have used or considered using it in the past.

The comments made about garage sales is part of a pattern that appears throughout most of the resources mentioned. There is common knowledge about what resources are out there throughout the record collecting community. The individual will decide to use or not to use them based on different influencers such as time, taste, rarity, and price (Table 1, Appendix 3).

DISCUSSION

All three main themes combine to create an overarching theme of value and value assessment. This is central to discussing record hobby collectors because it influences behavior as well as the use of resources in different ways. Perceptions and assessments of value is the basis for the management of record collections, and there are both communal and individual ways of determining it.

Online resources are typically used by these collectors when seeking information regarding comparative price, rarity, or information about the production of the record itself. It is acknowledged that a price of a record is set by certain standards such as rarity, issue number, quality, and condition. Furthermore, the online resources used are generally places where the collecting community places records for sale with information regarding these standards available for potential buyers to see. Potential buyers are then able to determine what the average sale price is online. Therefore, that aspect of determining value is very collective.

The communal space is where object rarity is important information. This is due to the standards produced by authorities that govern when a record is deemed rare and therefore inform value. The use of resources for researching production information about the record itself lends itself to the individualistic perception of value. The information being sought after is related to personal taste and interest and is usually research into an artist, producer, session artists, or genre of music.

A significant concept in the study of hobby collection is articulated by Lee & Trace (2009). They find that when

looking at the role of information in collecting there are various general goals, motivations, and intensity levels found within the collector community of a certain domain (p. 635). This is visible when looking at the finding of this study as well. The findings show that influencers such as money and emotions are similar, but the extent and the purpose can vary. For example, Herban's motivation comes from growing up in a sports centered family, and so collecting records is a way for him to explore music and its history. Charlie on the other hand grew up with vinyl, so his motivation stems from a dislike of the sound of more modern music formats such as CDs and mp3s. This meant returning to records as the primary way he listens to music he is interested in.

Interestingly, all subjects mention having a good base collection. However, what they consider to be such a collection differs by the individual. The need to have a rare version of a record is not significantly present. Instead there is a focus on owning something that is good quality and is in good condition. Quality and condition are important factors when maintaining record collections across the board. What is intriguing is that there is an equally high value placed on individual influencers such as emotion, taste, and finances, and these guides when, what, and how resources are used.

There is an attention to rarity of as well, but this is only a side note for these collectors. If they happen to come across something they think might be worth something and it is decently priced they will pick it. The priority for them however is to create and maintain a collection that is pleasurable for them in terms of enjoying their engagement with it. This shows that intrinsic values and motivations are significant considerations that inform the information behavior of hobby record collectors and the maintenance of their collections.

An interesting next step in the study of hobby collectors would be to do longitudinal research. All three subjects in this study discuss the changes in attitude towards collecting over time. The general theme connects with having that base collection. When first starting out they are almost obsessive about going out and seeking records to fill the gaps in their collection. Once the base collection starts to be filled this commitment starts to diminish. It would be worthwhile to look at changes in resource use and community involvement over time.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

I really enjoyed using the Information Horizon Interview technique for this interview. The semi-structured aspect of it allowed flexibility within the interview itself. It also allowed for more flexibility with the drawing portion. This was important as the drawing portion was a bit confusing for some of the interviewees. I found I had to give examples and provide some guiding questions during this part to help keep

the drawing and the conversation going. Despite the difficulty in understanding the concept it still did a good job of getting extremely useful information regarding information behaviors and resources.

In some cases, I struggled with getting the map to be more than just an assortment of words written down. I found I had to really push in some interviews to get some sort of interlinking between words. I was trying to ensure that future observers could be able to see the connection without the interview transcription as explanation.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to examine the information behavior of hobby record collectors and how it informs their collection maintenance. This leads to three themes that intersect interestingly in the way that they influence the collector's information seeking habits and the maintenance of their collection. Emotion and sentimentality can and do happen throughout all of the stages of record collecting. They are significant when making a decision to buy or sell a record. They are also a big motivator due to the thrill of the hunt which each collector experiences in their hobby. Money is the biggest part of record collecting since it lets one buy or forces one to sell. It is also an important reason for the use of resources. The resources themselves are also an important theme because there are various reasons and contexts for why they are used.

There is a communal knowledge as to what resources are out there that the individual may choose to or choose not to use. This decision to use a resource or not can also change over time as the example of garage sales shows. At any time, a collector can decide to use or not to use a resource. The practice of librarianship might benefit from exploring a relationship between the reference interview and the kinds of resources a collector might be interested in using depending on their goals and motivations.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario Kenya Hewitt is a Masters student in the Library and Information Sciences program at the University of Toronto iSchool. She received a bachelor's degree in book and media studies, english literature, and sociology at the University of Toronto. Her interests are wide ranging and include the relationships formed between people and music, information literacy, and the history of and decimation of fake news.

APPENDIX 1

The Interview Guide used for this research includes the following questions:

How did you get into record collecting? Would you be able to tell me about a recent time when you made a choice about maintaining your collection? Can you tell me about finding a record? Can you tell me about buying and/or selling a record? Can you tell me about criteria you may have for the maintenance of your collection?

APPENDIX 2

Me: *In the past what have you considered in terms of maintaining your collection?*

Sir: Those decisions again are usually reactive... if I feel good about a collection but maybe I only add to it because I'm at a concert and they have the record there. It honestly changes so much, but I always want to be buying records. If money weren't an option and shelving weren't an option...

Me: *You mentioned garage sales earlier, do you have any relationship with that at all?*

Sir: Kind of? Not really, there's usually garbage at garage sales, I mean it depends on your taste. Maybe in the future I'll go to garage sales when my generation is selling their collections. I've written down another thing here, emotions,

because emotions make you crave different styles of music and that's when you look for something you don't have

Me: *Can you tell me about a recent time when you made a choice about your collection?*

Charlie: Yes, that would be yesterday. I mean let me tell you broadly about how I collect. First of all, just my taste, and that's subdivided into the listening pleasure you get from it, you can say in that category there's genres, artists, and overall artistic effect of the records –the pleasure you get from how good they are- that interests me.

Me: *That leads me to my next question actually, I wanted to know if you could tell me about finding a record.*

Charlie: I'm a record picker for myself but I also do record sales and I'll sell them because while I'm looking for records for myself I'll find records that I know are valuable or my taste... when I go to a record sale I find that the taste I have are good for selling records.

Me: *Would you be able to tell me about a recent time where you made a choice about maintaining your collection?*

Herban: Mostly to ease the pressure of buying records, I was running out of space and not listening to a lot of things, and I was spending a lot of money on records. So, I sort of needed to ease some pressure on my bank account and my one bedroom apartment so I started selling some records here or there and then I would use that money to buy more records. I would sell 3 or 4 records at a reasonable price and then use that money to buy one record that I was interested in.

Me: *That makes sense. That was my next question. I wanted to ask you about buying a record.*

Herban: I read the papers I know when there's records sales. For a while I had a Craigslist app and anytime anyone posted a record or records for sale I would get a notification so I would have my finger on the pulse of vinyl in the city because there's a huge community in Toronto. There's a record store in every neighbourhood and the community is tight nit and everybody sort of knows each other. It's like second nature, I'll see a bin and I'll gravitate towards it.

APPENDIX 3

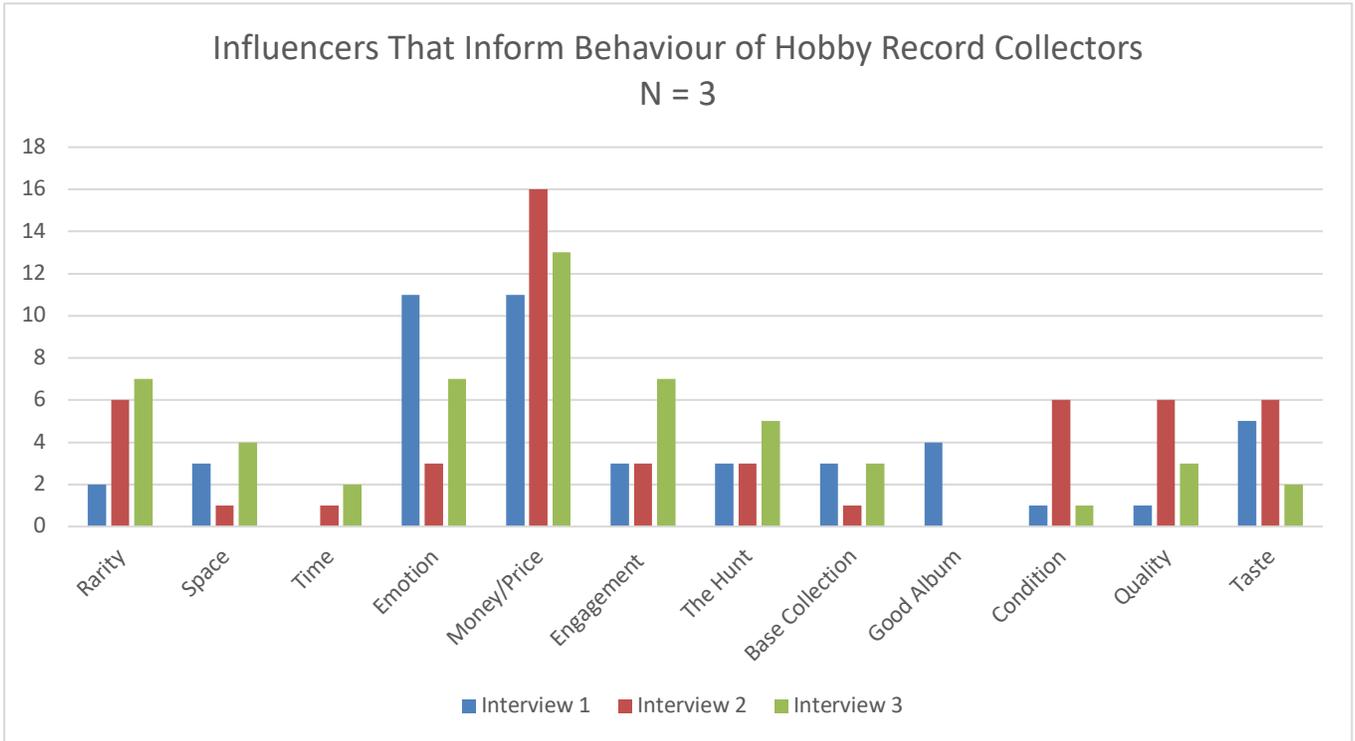


Table 1. Influencers that inform behavior of hobby record collectors.

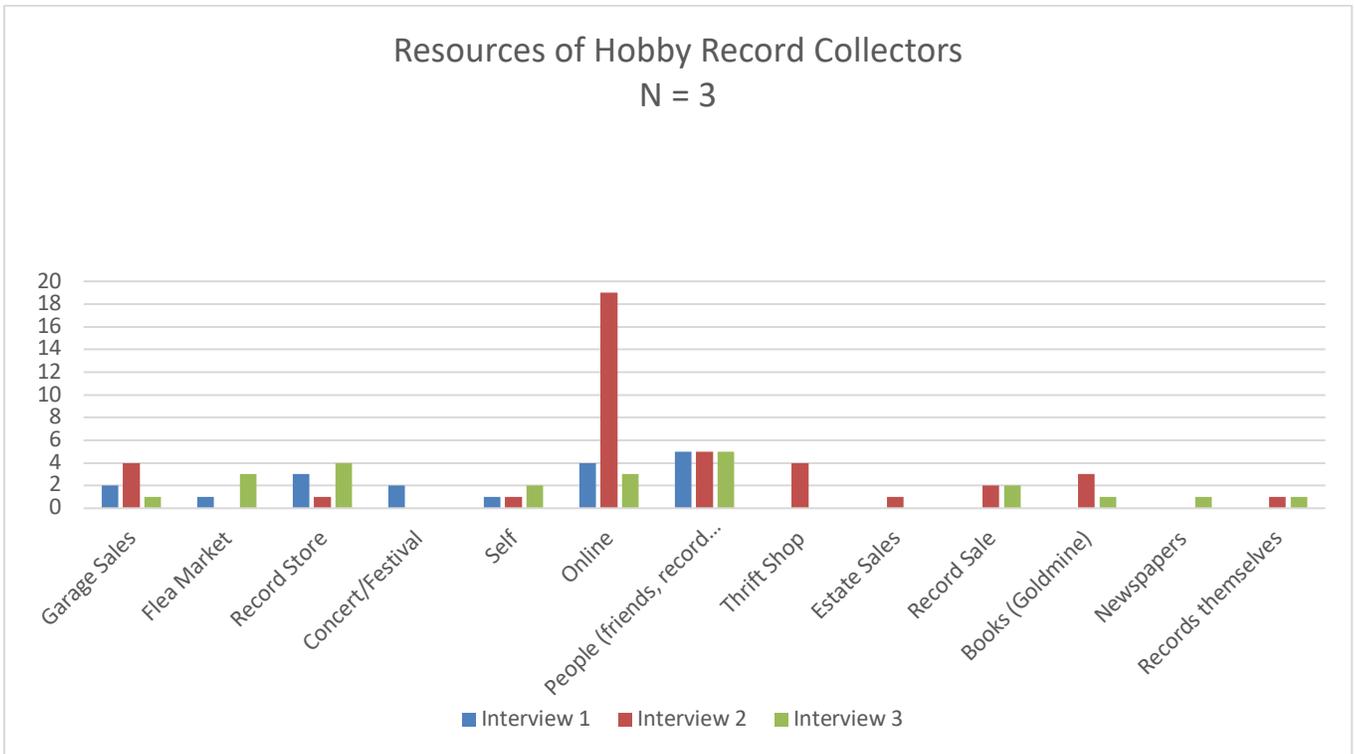


Table 2. Resources of hobby record collectors