Northumbria Research Link

My Dear Handbags: Materiality and Networked Constellations of Consumption Collections

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to go beyond the market-consumer intersection and investigate consumer collecting as a network constellation, which includes a range of material and human actants.

Design/methodology/approach – This research adopts a qualitative research process that includes non-participatory netnography and semi-structured online interviews to collect both textual and visual data. To analyse the visual data, researchers drew from the field of visual anthropology. In addition, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report the patterns within textual data.

Findings – Findings of this research reveals key agentic properties of collection constellations and explains how they contribute to the development of seriality and the experience of novelty by shaping curatorial practices within collection pursuits. From the time a collection has been assembled to its countless re-configurations, the network that is composed of a focal collector and a host of other actants interacting within a particular collecting ecology, plays an essential role in challenging the agency of the market and the individual collectors.

Research limitations/implications – Although this research investigated consumer collecting from a network perspective, it did not explore changes within those constellations and how such changes implicate collecting behaviour. Therefore, future research may benefit from investigating network transformations on consumer collecting, particularly on curatorial practices and how they shape the trajectory of consumer collections.

Practical implications – Understanding collecting as a relational and iterative 'network constellation' enables marketers to engage with their consumers in a more meaningful way. By actively seeking to utilise the network agentic properties, brands can aid avid handbag consumers and passionate collectors to keep their collections relevant and meaningful. It allows brands to play a role beyond the purchasing stage that characterises the market-consumer intersection and build comprehensive relationships with their consumers Particularly, by adopting a networked approach, brands can provide collectors with privileged and scientific brand knowledge to help them caretake and experience their cherished possessions.

Originality/value – The study goes beyond the market-consumer intersection and atomistic explanations of collecting phenomena in its investigation and theorises collecting as a relational and iterative "network constellation". It challenges the subject-oriented ontology of collections literature through explaining how such network interactions inspire collecting behaviours, help collectors maintain and celebrate their cherished collections, and change the trajectory of collections pursuits.

Keywords Consumption, Collections, Collecting, Network Constellations, Materiality, Curatorial Practices, Actor Network Theory, Luxury Consumption

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Consumer collecting is a materialistic (Belk, 1995b), yet passionate and expressive consumption behaviour (Saridakis and Angelidou, 2018) that brings a sense of pleasure (Belk, 1995b; Spaid, 2018) and social status to collectors (Cao *et al.*, 2017; Carey, 2008). It is referred to as an active and selective process of acquiring and possessing things (Belk, 1995a) where the sense of novelty plays a key role (Bianchi, 1997). The literature argues that the feeling of novelty (Bianchi, 2002; Burroughs and Mick, 2004) encountered by collectors when carrying out various curating activities (Graham and Cook, 2010) is integral to experiences of pleasure, joy, and satisfaction during collecting pursuits (Cross, 2017). It is through meticulously synthesised processes of creating meaningful interlinks between individual items that compose consumer collections, such sense of novelty is produced and experienced (Belk *et al.*, 1991). Bianchi (1997) terms these 'meaningful interlinks' as 'seriality' and goes on to emphasise the importance of curatorial practices in establishing these serial relationships.

Curatorial practices such as acquiring, organising, maintaining, using, disposing, displaying, interpreting, and disseminating (Graham and Cook, 2010; Hohn, 2008) enable individual collectors to anchor the assembling, dissembling, and re-assembling of collections (Coupland, 2005; McCracken, 1986; Scaraboto *et al.*, 2016; Tian and Belk, 2005). For example, collectors rely on various curatorial practices to bring new meanings to their collections and to help them replace meanings that are no longer compatible with their evolving identities (Scaraboto *et al.*, 2016). In doing so, they carefully avoid duplication (Danet and Katriel, 1994) and try to create a sense of order within their collections (Belk, 1995a). Therefore, it can be argued that seriality and sense of novelty are essential outcomes that rely on curatorial practices to start as well as to ensure continuity of consumer collecting.

Collections are theorised as material assemblages (Woodward and Greasley, 2017) that rely on interactions between objects, people, and cultural knowledge of collecting for sustenance (Schorch, 2015). In addition, curatorial practices that anchor collecting becomes effective and meaningful to collectors' sense of self, when those are constituted within relationships with others (Muensterberger, 1994). Belk (1995b) also argues that collecting can enrich as well as challenge the lives of others who are attached to a collector, whilst cultural knowledge of collecting can inspire collectors to develop meaningful serial links between their collection items (Bianchi, 1997). Therefore, collecting can be theorised as a social consumption practice (Cash, 2001) that goes beyond individual consumer pursuits whereas collections could be

viewed as constellations with agencies distributed among various human and non-human actants interacting within a particular environment.

There is evidence across literature indicating that consumers rely on various human and non-human actants of collections to evolve their collections (Schau *et al.*, 2009), however, current consumer collections research neglects these collective enterprises of collectors. Specifically, the various ways in which different network actants can influence curating practices and the meanings between collection items and their meaningfulness to collectors have been overlooked in current research. For example, how do family members and friends bring new meanings to collection objects or challenge passionate collectors to re-consider the continuity of some curatorial practices? How do various other collectors, brand representatives, spatial limitations, seasonal weather patterns, and collection objects interfere with the existing cleaning, displaying, wearing, and organising activities of collectors, thus, re-shaping serial meanings between collection items? And how do those renewed meanings inspired by various actors evolve collections, consequently bringing a sense of joy and pleasure to collectors? Current research does not explain how such complex interplays and the politics that exist between various material and non-material actants form and evolve consumer collections.

In response, the researchers adopt an Actor-Networking perspective (Callon, 1999; Latour, 2005), particularly, its focus on deconstructing interplays between various network actors and the network politics that define the agency of the network (Latour, 1996), to investigate the ways in which these highly fluid interactions between collectors and their networked environments influence curatorial practices and evolve consumer collections. Accordingly, this study goes beyond the current focus in the literature on individual collectors and their curatorial activities and considers collecting as a 'networked constellation' (Latour, 2005). A 'collection constellation' is a complex web of interactions and interplays that exist between human and non-human actants that include a focal collector (the person who owns the collection), other people (such as immediate family members, friends, salespeople, and various other collectors with a stake in a particular collection), and things (other collection items and material goods outside of the collection boundaries) that are also interwoven with the market and its cultural knowledge. Utilising an interpretive research process that combines non-participatory netnography (Kozinets, 2015) and semi-structured in-depth interviews, the research addresses three specific research questions. First, what key agentic properties do collection constellations have and how do they shape curatorial practices? Second, how do those agentic properties of the network bring seriality and a sense of novelty to collectors? Third, what politics between

network actants implicate agentic properties and the production of seriality and novelty in collection pursuits? The following is a review of the literature on consumer collecting across disciplines to ground this empirical study.

Conceptual Background

Consumer collecting is an organised process of selective acquisition and the possession of non-identical but interrelated objects (Belk, 1995a; Belk *et al*., 1991; Spaid, 2018). It is a passionate, inquisitive, and expressive behaviour (Saridakis and Angelidou, 2018) that elevates objects from being ordinary to extraordinary (Hughes and Hogg, 2006). Collecting is distinguished from other similar consumption practices such as hoarding, accumulating, and investing due to the nonidentical uniqueness of objects that form a collection (Belk, 1995a). In addition, it is accompanied with strong feelings of possessiveness, which makes it different to investing where the actual objects of investment are devoid of meaning to the investor (Belk, 1995a). On the contrary, the collection set is considered a source of prestige, uniqueness, social status, and pleasure to its owner (Cao *et al*., 2017; Carey, 2008; Spaid, 2018).

Consistent with the flickering (Borgerson, 2013) and fragmented (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) nature of postmodern identity pursuits, collecting is driven by motivations (Saridakis and Angelidou, 2018) such as ownership, self-expression, sociability, financial gains, sense of personal continuity, and even addiction (Belk *et al.,* 1991; Formanek, 1994). Thus, collecting is an identity crafting and expressing endeavour that brings a sense of accomplishment, progress, purpose, and self-worth to collectors (Baekeland, 1981; Belk *et al.,* 1988; 1995a). Regardless of these motivations, collecting is a vital sense making process (Belk *et al*., 1991; Smith and Apter, 1977). The meaning-rich collections and the consumption objects that make up collections are deeply embedded in mundane acts of construction, maintenance, and manifestation of the identity of collectors (Belk *et al.*, 1988; 1995a; Spaid, 2018). For example, research shows that some collectors try to alleviate childhood insecurities by continuing to carry out collecting-related practices, which are integral to their sense of past (Benjamin, 1968; Muensterberger, 1994). Therefore, such mundane curatorial practices (Scaraboto *et al*., 2016) make collecting a meaningful pursuit to collectors.

Curating the collection set

Collecting includes a range of other non-acquisitive 'curatorial practices' (Scaraboto *et al*., 2016). Such practices are deeply embedded in everyday reality (Ahuvia, 2005; Epp and Price, 2010) and enable collectors to change and evolve their collections over time, thus making those

more meaningful to them (Bianchi, 1997). For example, the literature on museum studies details activities such as searching, interpreting, displaying, managing, and preserving collection objects (Dudley, 2013), whilst contemporary consumer research cites a range of other activities that include buying, gifting, organising, labelling, cleaning, re-organising, interpreting, exchanging, and sharing as fundamental to maintaining the value and position of collection items (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009; Fournier, 1998; Richins, 1994). These seemingly mundane curatorial activities are largely hidden from the public yet anchor the assembling, dissembling, and re-assembling of collection sets (Coupland, 2005; McCracken, 1986; Scaraboto *et al*., 2016; Tian and Belk, 2005). Consumer collections such as those include wearable consumer goods, demand constant interaction with their curators to sustain meaning and continuity (Albisson and Perera, 2009; Cherrier, 2009), whilst ritualistic curatorial activities associated with singularised or sacralised collections are imperative to maintaining the non-ordinary status of those collections (Belk *et al*., 1988; Saridakis and Angelidou, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that it is the curatorial practices that help collectors legitimise their collections (Belk *et al*., 1988; Belk and Wallendorf, 1994), 'search for self-meaning' (Belk *et al.,* 1991), and represent their sense of self (Belk, 2003).

Seriality and emerging novelty

Research has indicated that curatorial practices propel identity endeavours through facilitating seriality and novelty, two key features of consumer collections (Bianchi, 1997). Seriality is a set of interlinks between objects in a collection and novelty is the discovery of these new relationships that lead to the evolution of collections over time (Bianchi, 1997). The concept of novelty is about seeking out novel information – a pursuit activated within an individual through some internal drive or motivating force (Acker and McReynolds, 1967; Cattell, 1975; Farley and Farley, 1967). The first aspect of novelty is about seeking new and potentially inconsistent information whilst the second aspect involves seeking variety through rotating known stimuli to reduce boredom (Hirschman, 1980). Hirschman (1980) divides novelty seeking into two components: inherent novelty seeking (i.e., an individual's desire to seek out novel stimuli) and actualised novelty seeking (i.e., an individual's actual behaviour in acquiring novel stimuli). Also, consumption research has revealed that novelty may challenge consumers to re-construct their existing relationships with consumption objects (Jones and Sasser, 1995) and they may choose less preferred consumption experiences if they benefit from pursuing novelty (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982; Trijp *et al*., 1996).

Consumer research has also argued that consumers are active producers who organise their consumption routines (Bianchi, 2006; Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Therefore, novelty in the consumption context involves working out a new use for a product, altering the product's form and changing its performance, and combining products in a nonstandard manner (Burroughs and Mick, 2004). Bianchi (2002) distinguishes between the functionality of products and their functional properties as sources of novelty. He argues that the source of novelty for consumers goes beyond the goods' functional properties and entails possible connections with other goods through their formal attributes embedded in their design features. This explains why some consumers choose the same good in different variants. Novelty is also embedded in a collection, where the collected items are assembled based on their similarity and interrelationships to produce knowledge and beauty (Belk *et al.*, 1991). Therefore, collecting can be considered a creative act which brings something new into existence through selectively assembling particular things (Belk *et al.*, 1991).

Consumer collecting as a networked constellation

So far, what the current literature suggests is that items in a collection are not isolated, single-purpose units. Rather, they hold multiple meanings and relationships with other actants in the collection (Belk, 1995a; Bianchi, 1997). The value of a collection is neither in the aggregate monitory value of the items that it comprises, nor it is limited to the functionality and aesthetic features of those objects (Belk *et al.*, 1991). On the contrary, the predominant value of collections originates from the concept of the seriality (Bianchi, 1997) of collections and these meaningful relationships can emerge from interactions with various other actors who are part of the collecting process (Durost, 1932).

Further, collections begin to evolve and become more pleasurable to collectors when new serial relations are identified between collection objects and other entities (Bianchi, 1997). The literature indicates that the novelty of consumer collections is deeply entwined in the interactions of collection objects with multiple other actants in collections constellations (Bianchi, 1997; Mardon and Belk, 2018; Rogan, 1998). Social identity theory (Hogg, 2006; Stets and Burke, 2000) suggests that even personally carried out curating activities, such as organising, displaying, and appreciating collections (Spaid, 2018), are constituted within and in response to engagements with others who come across collections. Collectors find meaning, knowledge, and sense of self when their collection pursuits are anchored in meaningful interactions with other people (Muensterberger, 1994), such as their friends and family (Miller, 2008). Collections may have either accidental or incidental beginnings (Belk *et al.*, 1988;

Johnston and Beddow, 1986); however, the growing of a collection is a highly selective and networked process of acquisition, possession, and disposition that relies on continuous and seemingly mundane interactions between various actants (Dannefer, 1980). Thus, it can be argued that collecting relies on a networked structure for support and continuity (Christ, 1965; Dannefer, 1980; DiMaggio, 1987). The contention is that the value of a collection is constructed beyond the interactions between individual collectors and their possessions and around on-going and fluid interactions that exist between collectors and various other actants that construct the social world of collecting (Geraghty, 2014; Shuker, 2017). This appreciation of interactions within a set of interrelated actants is a key facet of consumption collections (Steward, 1984), although the current literature focuses on collectors as agent of change and has failed to explore collecting as a network constellation. In this light, this research considers collecting to be a constellation that decomposes objects from their original relations and recomposes them into a network, patterned by the interactions between the members within that network in an innovative way. Current research indicates that from initial motivations that inspire the start of a collecting pursuit (Saridakis and Angelidou, 2018) to countless other attempts to establish meaningful relationships between collection items (Belk, 1995a), consumer collections depend on network interactions. Yet, research does not consider that these complex interplays contribute to the evolution of consumption collections over time.

Research Context and Methods

Collecting designer handbags is a ubiquitous consumption practice. Women who collect handbags usually have a strong presence on technology-driven platforms, such as on social media and user generated forums. These networked communities of collectors are composed of both amateur and professional collectors, marketplace resources (e.g., brands and handbags), and practices (e.g., curatorial activities). By forming active online handbag communities, collectors are able to not only reveal their collections to the rest of the world but to interact with other collectors to inform and evolve their collecting practice. For example, handbag collectors often produce YouTube videos to present their collections on their channels. These videos explain and teach various layers of curatorial practices to others. In addition, there are numerous other online handbag communities such as The Purse Forum and The Fashion Spot where handbag enthusiasts interact, share experiences, exchange information, and celebrate their handbag collections online. Therefore, focusing on handbag communities, particularly those that rely on technological platforms, provides understanding of the ways in which various network actants come together to shape meanings between individual collection objects.

Focusing on the interactions between network actants who come together in these communities brings useful insight into the complex politics between those actants and how such discourses indicate the construction of seriality and emergence of novelty. In response to the research questions, this study employed a qualitative methodology that combines non-participatory netnography and semi-structured online interviews. Collecting is a socially embedded and multifaceted phenomenon (Belk, 1995b). With the increased popularity of social media and other online platforms on which to communicate and share cultural knowledge (Whiting and Williams, 2013), private aspects of the consumption practices of collecting, such as the range of curatorial activities that occur in the privacy of collectors' homes, have become more accessible to research. For example, there are numerous online communities centred on designer handbags where their members socialise, share their emotions, lifestyle, and explain their curatorial practices. In this regard, netnography is a flexible research approach to explore the lived experiences (Rokka, 2010) of rich cultural phenomena in their local contexts (Kozinets *et al*., 2014) in an unobtrusive manner (Kozinets, 2007). This research chose non-participatory netnography (see, Burgess and Jones, 2020; Hewer and Brownlie, 2007), an approach that allows researchers to explore online communities without actively participating in community members' discussions and practices. A non-participatory approach is naturalistic and reduces the undesirable influence of the outsider (i.e., researchers) on the group (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003).

The researchers observed the Purse Forum, a prominent online community for handbag collectors, to examine the network constellations of curatorial practices and their influence on the evolution of consumption collections. The first author has been a member of the Purse Forum for five years and has a clear understanding of the community norms and culture. The Purse Forum has more than one million members who exhibit their collections and share their experiences of labelling, storing, maintaining, and disposing of handbags. The content of this community is publicly available to all internet users and does not require registration to access the content. Therefore, the researchers treated the Purse Forum community as a public sphere. Upon receiving ethical clearance, the researchers collected publicly available data without participating in or commenting on ongoing discussions between community members.

The researchers observed the Purse Forum community for more than a year to explore how collectors reveal their lived experiences of collecting, whilst influencing each other. The ongoing interactions between the community users were essential to understand how collectors influence each other and how their collections are influenced by various human as well as non-

human actants. The forum has over 50,000 discussion threads, out of which the researchers identified 36 related to curating and collecting handbags. Terms such as 'my handbag collection', 'looking after my handbag collection', 'storing and displaying my collection set', and 'adding to and disposing from my handbag collection' were used to identify discussion threads which were about starting, maintaining, celebrating, and evolving collections. Initially, the researchers identified 157 related discussion threads, but narrowed them down to 36 discussion threads based on the depth of the conversation generated the number of comments, and the number of community members who participated in order to capture rich and descriptive data. In total, 5600 comments on 245 single-spaced pages were collected that contributed to the sense-making and interpretation building process. In addition to the comments, the researchers collected 189 photographs from the discussion threads uploaded by the collectors with the aim of sharing their collection set and various aspects of their curatorial practices with others.

The researchers triangulated the sources of data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the collecting phenomenon (Patton, 1999). In so doing, they conducted online unstructured interviews with handbag collectors and used YouTube as a platform to capture collectors' experiences over time. Some of the handbag collectors regularly produce and post YouTube videos of their collections. The researchers used the search function of YouTube to identify videos related to collecting and curating women handbags. Key terms such as 'my handbag collection', 'reviewing my entire bag collection', and 'organising my handbag collection' were used to identify related videos.

Prior to conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews, the archive function of YouTube enabled the researchers to identify 10 handbag collectors who had been active in producing and posting YouTube videos of their collections. These collectors were chosen based on the depth and details that were captured in their collecting videos. For example, these collectors had recorded various aspects of their curatorial practices, narrated their journey of becoming a collector, and shared their collection experiences over time. The archive function of YouTube enabled researchers to access the videos that were produced by these handbag collectors over time. Overall, the researchers identified 126 videos produced and posted by these handbag collectors. The oldest video in the database was produced 17 years ago and the latest one was produced in April 2020. Video length varied from 16 to 55 minutes. Being able to observe how a handbag collection set and the related curatorial practices of these handbag collectors had changed over the years added to the depth and richness of the collected data. To further unpack

collecting and curating experiences, the researchers pursued and recruited eight of these collectors for the online in-depth interview stage of the study. The eight collectors were all female, aged between 24 and 55 years. The researchers conducted online interviews using Skype to gain more specific and deeper insight into their collection practices and changes in their collection set. The interviews were audio recorded and a total of 310 minutes of interviews were transcribed.

Data were collected in both textual (interview transcripts and Purse Forum comments) and visual (YouTube videos and discussion thread photographs) formats. The researchers first analysed the textual data using the thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Together, they coded the data, and identified, analysed, and documented the patterns appearing within the textual data. After defining and naming themes that emerged from the textual data, the researchers followed Collier's (2001) approach to analysing the visual data, drawing from the field of visual anthropology. The selected YouTube videos were watched by both researchers to discover repeating patterns and concepts. To be consistent in analysis and coding, the videos were transcribed to text and the visual aspects of the creators' behaviour, including their interactions with collection objects and curatorial activities, were noted. Codes that were generated from the visual data were constantly compared against the codes identified from the preliminary data analysis stage. The researchers discussed their insights and impressions while analysing the data and using a hermeneutic approach (Thompson *et al.*, 1994). Both researchers engaged in the sense-making process whilst continuously revising their interpretations through an iterative back-and-forth process of developing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Consequently, the researchers gradually broadened their interpretive context as they identified common patterns and emergent themes across the data.

Findings and Discussion

The first and second research questions aim to understand the key agentic properties of collection constellations and explore how those contribute to the development of seriality and the experience of novelty by shaping curatorial practices within collections pursuits. In response, the study first presents three agentic properties of the network: initiating, educating, and destabilising. The study then discusses how those implicate curatorial practices and contribute to the production of seriality and novelty. In response to the third research question, the study discusses how these agentic properties are often intertwined in the mediatory politics of network actant interplays. Figure 1 is used as the framework to present the findings and to shape the rest of the discussion.
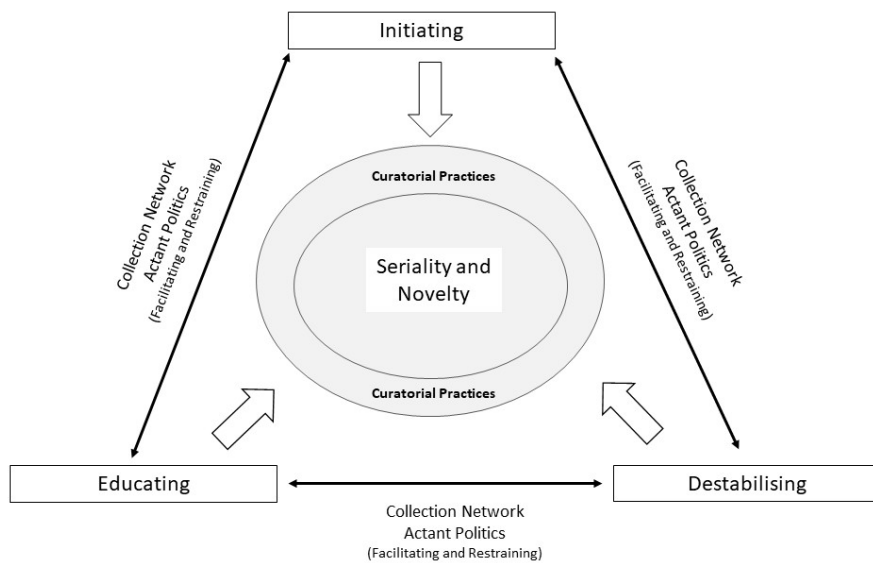
Figure 1: Framework of network iterations in construction of seriality and novelty in consumer collections

The agentic properties under discussion are not exhaustive, but unique to particular constellations that provided insight into our study. Although they can depend on the nature of the collection constellations under investigation, our findings reveal that they have the capacity to construct, alter, sustain, and dissolve curatorial practices during any stage of collecting. By doing so, these properties contribute to the construction, strengthening/weakening, and disintegration of meaningful serial relationships between collection objects. In addition, although they are depicted individually in Figure 1 for ease of graphical illustration, these properties overlap, work together, and depend on each other. Also, while some of these properties may be more prominent during certain stages of collecting, their overarching agency impact curatorial practices at any stage of the collection journey. Therefore, the agentic properties of the network introduced in this study must be understood as contextual and often interwoven and interdependent properties that encompass the entirety of collecting pursuits rather than a particular stage of collecting. For example, initiating property could encourage collectors to embark on new collecting pursuits and may introduce various acquisition practices to them. It can also bring new symbolic directions to existing collections during later stages by instigating various other curatorial activities, such as organising, displaying, and cleaning practices. However, initiating may not materialise in any curatorial practices if it is not contextualised within the informative and socialising functions that the educating property of the network endows. Similarly, destabilising potential of the network may weaken some

curatorial practices and change the importance of existing serial links between collection items, therefore, causing collectors to rotate emotion-laden collection items. Such curatorial activities may result as a consequence of learning new market trends that the educating property of the network brings. The following introduces each of these agentic properties followed by the discussion on how they shape curatorial practices and contribute to the emergence of seriality and novelty.

Initiating

Initiating is the inspirational potential of the network interrelations that trigger various curatorial actions and introduce new meaningful connections between collection items throughout the collecting. As one of the study participants, Creda, explained, it was her husband who "*proposed to buy a really good luxury handbag when on honeymoon in Paris*". Prior to that, she "*has never been interested or simply hasn't paid much attention to spend on expensive handbags*". She also revealed how other collectors in online communities helped her to add new bags and to identify meaningful relationships between those bags by reaffirming such potentially guilt-generating (Ki *et al.,* 2017) lavish purchases:

"*After the trip, I wanted to know more about my bag, and stumbled upon this forum. And down the rabbit hole I went, been hooked ever since…. I ordered a midi Theia in the first week of March. Inspired by this post, it is a colour blocked version with Hera handles too…. It is exactly how I envisioned.... I actually used @dinati* [Another collector in the handbag forum] *bag as my template to show @Marco* [an Italian handbag maker and designer] *what I wanted." – (Creda)*

First, the symbolism of Creda's relationship state combined with the romanticism of the occasion to create an impulsive environment, which had led to the purchase of her first luxury handbag. Her husband also had played a key role as a mediatory actant who inspired this acquisition. However, other network actants such as "@dinati" and "@Marco" were also integral to the expansion of her collection set and transforming this incidental beginning to a lifelong quest of collecting. In addition, initiating property can also trigger many other curatorial practices such as removing, displaying, cleaning, and rotating practices, therefore, affecting the role, status, and meanings of collection items within collection sets. Various combinations of network actants can come together to spark such action by introducing and reaffirming new curatorial practices and serial links between collection items to collectors. For example, as two of our participants Symari and Collin explained, their "*minimalist lifestyles, close family members, and [the] material aspects*" of the handbags introduced new meanings

to their collection items and encouraged them to adopt new ways of taking care of them. Therefore, initiating property does not limit to starting a collection, but as indicated by Symari and Collin, triggers changing, terminating, or adopting various curatorial practices throughout collecting pursuits. It has an overarching potential throughout the collection journey – from the prominent role it has during the starting of a collection to countless other interventions it can bring by triggering curatorial practices and serial links between collection items.

Educating

Educating is the informative and instructional potential of the network that teaches collectors about various curatorial practices and the relational meanings between their collection items. In doing so, educating contributes to the further development of previously initiated curatorial practices, such as best acquisition practices, most appropriate cleaning practices, and more practical organising methods by bringing constant adaptations to how these are carried out in practice. The following excerpt highlights how the network actants came to help Meena, a new collector, who sought to "*get advice on how to care for the delicate calf skin*" on her *"new 30 Montaigne bag in blush colour":*

"*When it gets scratched should I use a lotion or cream, any recommendations for which brand? Also, it came wrapped in felt fabric. When I store it, should I keep it wrapped in that or take it out and let it breathe (but keep in a dust bag)? Should I leave the felt inside the flap (like how some people keep Chanel Lambskin flap)? It looks beautiful now but I'm nervous about keeping it in good condition.*" – (Meena)

"*I suggest storing it with the felt, and with the stuffing that came inside. It will keep the bag pristine during storage…. Also, if it gets scratched, then you can use a microfiber cloth (i.e. the one for eyeglasses lenses) and gently rub the scratch in circular motions. It may remove or lessen the scratch. I do not suggest applying product on it because it can darken the leather. If you do use a product, then I suggest testing it on a spot under the flap or at the bottom of the bag that is less visible. Don't test it on the lining as it is a different leather.*" – (Joyee)

Therefore, educating property facilitates the sharing of scientific and cultural knowledge surrounding important collecting practices, ideologies, and norms, such as where handbags can be properly stored, how they can be taken care of, and the best ways to celebrate and present items in collections. For example, findings reveal that collectors often "*learn so much about*

how to stuff handbags properly with bubble wrap rather than stuffing with paper that they were purchased with" – *(Leila)*. Similarly, Phoebe, another passionate collector, recalled how she learned from a luxury handbag salesperson of the importance of handbag storage location in order to provide handbags with the ideal temperature and humidity to ensure their longevity. Such interactions with various network actants allowed collectors like Meena, Leila, and Phoebe to learn about the complex cultural as well as scientific knowledge that collecting involves. It educated them of the best practices and made them more proficient in carrying out curatorial practices that involved collecting, whilst acclimatising them to underlying collecting norms. Consequentially, it also helped them to rectify incompatible relationships between collection objects that could impact both the symbolic and monetary values of their collections. For example, meticulous caretaking practices involving *"gently rubbing"* scratches on valued handbags *"with a microfiber cloth in circular motions"* established new meaningful interactions between Joyee and her collection objects, evolving serial links in her collection. Therefore, the educating potential of the network gives shape and direction to collection constellations by binding collection items together through eventual mastery of curatorial practices.

Destabilising

Destabilising is the agency of the network to undermine or weaken existing curatorial practices. As the study participants revealed, various network actants often challenge how and why collectors add or remove items and how they maintain, display, and use those items. For example, Tess mentioned natural realities such as the "*rain temporarily ruins*" her handbags by "*turning the leather blue*". It "*scares*" her, making her "*not take those bags out that often, especially when the weather forecast is gloomy or rainy*". The environment within which Tess's collection was contextualised had the propensity to affect the symbolic and monetary value of her handbags and it challenged her to carefully consider key curating activities, such as displaying and wearing practices. As Latour (1996) emphasises, the network environment is critical to interrelations between network actants, and for an avid collector such as Tess, the environment could easily destabilise existing meanings of collection items. Therefore, paying careful attention to changes in the network including its natural environment is an important antecedent to carrying out various curating activities.

In addition, Mell explained how she "*kind of lost interest*" in collecting luxury handbags because she was *"going to college and doing crazy things"* and how those lifestyle changes made her decide to *"[go]to Walmart or Target and carry it until it falls apart"*. Similarly, Jules

explained how she bought a new handbag inspired by one of her friends and how it eventually destabilised meanings of an existing handbag:

"After I got my Birkin my Chanel needs change. It fits my needs more to have a Reissue 225 than my old 226. Sold my 226 and was very lucky that my dear friend would sell her brand new 225 to me." – (Jules)

What Mell, Tess, and Jules reveal is that a range of constituents of her collection constellation that include various family members, friends, other collectors, personal situations, and environmental changes have agency to alter and restrain curatorial practices and meanings of existing collection objects. As a result, how collectors add new objects to their collections, how they use those objects and display and celebrate their collections during everyday life, can change and evolve over time. As a result, destabilising curatorial practices also lead to redefinition of symbolic and functional meanings of collection items and changes the trajectory of collecting pursuits, and a range of network actants such as changes in weather, private spaces, personal relationships, financial situations, family members, and many other actants can contribute to this. Next, we discuss how these three agentic properties produce seriality and a sense of novelty during collecting by shaping curatorial practices.

Network iterations of agentic properties and managing seriality in consumer collections

The three agentic properties introduced previously emerge within ongoing and complex iterative interactions between multiple human and non-human network actants. Therefore, an understanding of the specific intricacies of carrying out curatorial practices and becoming proficient at these emerges within a networked constellation. Such understanding and proficiency are essential to creating, strengthening, and evolving meaningful serial links between collection items. For example, there are fluid negotiations of interplays between collectors' identities, material and social biographies of collector items, involvement of social actants, and environmental conditions that shape initiating, educating, and destabilising properties. Adel explains how a range of human and non-human actants of her constellation implicate her acquisition practice and make expanding her handbag collection a complex, fluid, and collective process:

"*I consider things like the material (canvas or leather), the type of leather, size, colour, label, which is the brand, and of course the cost…. It is also about style of clothes and how I dress. I am very feminine in my style…. I also consider any upcoming occasions like anywhere I need to be…. I also like to research the history of the company, how long the bag is been around….*

I google it and I take notes…. First, I do extensive research, then I look at YouTube videos and user reviews to learn what other people are sayings…. I get onto those bag sites, and I start looking at what bags I want to research about and read about other people like me and their stories…. I also talk to a girlfriend online who is a bag lover. We got very different tastes and we do a lot of talking about how they fit and what we like and what is good or not good about the bags." – (Adel)

As Adel explained, evolving her handbag collection is an outcome of dynamic interactions between multiple interrelating network actants. First, as evident in the narration, initiating is more than simply introducing a marketplace object into a collection set filled with personal meanings. A collection constellation can have many competing self-relevant meanings, and initiating refines acquisition practices, prompting her to look for consistencies of meanings between collection objects based on their material properties (e.g. leather, size, colour, etc.), her personality and lifestyle, as well as her social environment. Second, the educating property also precipitated by multiple network actants and contribute to shaping of Adel's complex acquisition practice. Nora, another avid collector further explained this:

"*I was considering purchasing a Hermes maxi Double Sens in sikkim from a PF* [Purse Forum] *member. This bag (which is quite rare) has been in my radar for a while. The standard 45 DS didn't work for me: too heavy and kept slipping off my shoulder. I feel I am constantly on the lookout for a simple and capacious tote that has the functionality of the LV Neverfull but is very much not the LV Neverfull. I have tried so many to no avail. So, this seemed to make sense. So as I was thinking of this, I visited Loewe's flagship in Madrid to look at some shoes but ended up trying the new all leather Cushion Tote and buying it on the spot, which is very unlike me. I do think it has the potential of being the Neverfull-substitute I am seeking. We'll see." – (Nora)*

Researching involves multiple network actants and is a key curatorial practice that teaches Adel and Nora of what handbags that they need to add or remove in order to maintain meanings that are important to their current collections. Consequently, it leads to creating and maintaining of serial links between collection items and help Adel and Nora to evolve their collections. Therefore, seriality is produced through the active and passive participation of multiple network actants that include personal situations and sense of style, friends, other collectors on online bag sites, the brand, and technological platforms such as YouTube. In these instances involving Adel and Nora, internal features such as handbags' materiality (Ferreira and Scaraboto, 2016) and the external social interrelations with other objects (Belk *et al.,* 1988) converge to inform

initiating and educating properties of the network, therefore, implicating key curatorial practices of researching and acquiring and shaping serial relations between collection items.

Similarly, Delia explained how *"excessive lockdowns and change in sense of style"* caused her to add new bags to or remove existing ones from her collection; consequentially, she *"[fell] out of love with [the] ML Chanel"* handbag she had. Therefore, Delia's personal preferences and sense of style interplaying with market discourses that include cultural knowledge of brand heritage and the material properties of the object lead to destabilisation of her existing curatorial practices. Wearable luxuries such as designer handbags can also retain parts of their symbolic and material properties (Appadurai, 1988; Ferreira and Scaraboto, 2016) even after becoming valued additions to collections. Therefore, acquiring such objects impregnated with meanings and educating collectors of those new meanings in response to changes in her sense of style and practicalities implicate existing serial relations within the collection, yet help Delia to align the collection with her evolving sense of identity. Therefore, discovering the links between items of a collection set and achieving seriality is not an individual task carried out by a single collector as has been purported in prior research (Bianchi, 1997; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004); instead, it is a collective process of shaping a range of curating activities that emerges through ongoing network interactions of which the collector remains an interconnected nodal point.

Network constituted emergence of novelty and evolution of consumption collections

So far, the study has discussed multiple agentic properties of the network and how these contribute to the construction of meaningful serial relationships between collection items by shaping curatorial activities. Prior research has also indicated that the sense of novelty is essential to the continuity of collecting practice (Bianchi, 1997). The findings of this research suggest that reconfiguring serial relationships between collection items and creating an element of novelty depends on interplays between various network actants. For example, isolating collection items from their previously established links with other items and recomposing these links in different sequences to bring new meanings and relevance to the collector is often assisted by fellow collectors. Similarly, close family members or lack of domestic space to display collection items can inspire new cycles of exploring, discovering, and identifying serial links between collection items:

"I was one of those little girls who absolutely loved any kind of bag. I was born with a love for those, I just adore them. I have always wanted something real and leather, there is something

about the quality…. It just made me happy to carry it every day. I feel like my whole outfit was elevated by carrying it around, made me feel good inside. I like walking around with a good piece…. Now I don't really have the lifestyle to carry very glitzy glamourous bags…. I am mostly a housewife and I just kind of do the shopping and go to your average running errands places and visit my elderly parents…. My MS Birkin is definitely a glamourous bag but not to look at, if you don't know what it is then you don't really know it is a $11,000 bag…. So, I started to enjoy it so much. That works with me because it is a workhorse kind of a bag and that is what I am doing, I am running errands." – (*Eva*)

It is a transformative learning process that creates variations in serial relationships and adds to the complexity within consumption collections (Bianchi, 1997). For Eva, it had expanded over 25 years and has involved many changes to meanings of her collection. Triangulating data across her interviews and netnographic observations reveals that she was once an impulsive accumulator (Rook, 1987) who loved "*any kind of bag*". However, she had eventually grown to become a more selective collector who preferred quality and inconspicuous nature of handbags. Consequently, her collection evolved through an emotional and rational process of re-creating serial relationships between the objects in her collection and the collection remained consistent with the trajectory of her evolving identity. This discovery of new serial relationships within her collection relied on the network and its potential to destabilise as well as initiate new curatorial practices. For example, Eva's changing personal identity needs and everyday practicalities destabilised her existing relations with some of the collection items. It also initiated realignment of herself with new material biographies that are consistent with the symbolism of her evolving personal identity and practical needs. As a result, collection items that were previously considered "*boring*" or less "*trendy*" could become viewed as practical and durable, making those more consistent with the identity and the lifestyle of a collector, such as Eva's new lifestyle as a housewife. The data also reveal that collectors often rely on their wider social environment to educate themselves and create new serialities, allowing their collections to become more relevant and pleasing for them. This brings an important sense of novelty to collectors. For example, Eva further revealed that "*non-stop*" online conversations about the "*appeal of the luxurious feel of the leather and the durability of the zipper*" educated her of material subtleties of collection objects, therefore, proving her with motivation, direction, and affirmation as a collector. It allowed her to seek out new additions as well as to dispose some items that were no longer compatible with existing serial relationships within her collection.

Rotating collection items and disposing of ones with ambiguous or diminished serialities is also important to managing a sense of novelty and evolving collections. It allows collectors to re-allocate their resources, fund the purchase of new items that are more consistent with their identities and cultural knowledge, and rejuvenate meanings of their collections. The data reveal that designer handbag collectors try to rotate their handbags, carry them on different occasions, and match them with different outfits. By regularly rotating their handbags, they ensure some of their collection items are not left idling for too long. Doing this helps collectors to bring the idling items back to life and add an element of surprise and spontaneity to their collections, which is essential to instilling a sense of novelty (Bianchi, 1997; 2002). However, the rotation of collection items is not merely a result of the interaction between collectors and their collection items, as informed in the following discussion threads:

"*I only have 6 bags right now, all Coach with another in transit.... I get a little thrill when I think about which bag will go with the outfit I plan to wear. I get bored if I use the same bag more than 3 days…. Part of the fun of having bags is deciding which bag am I going to use today? I like to daydream about that.*" – (Tess)

"*It will be great to rotate more than I have in the past. January can be tough because I live in a winter weather climate and often have to choose a bag based on weather, but it certainly makes me excited.*" – (Gill)

"*I am doing lot more rotating now and I have to admit it is lots of fun! I had forgotten how much I love some of the bags that I haven't used for a while*" – (Ria)

The mood of the collector may be an important factor and the material aspects (Dant, 2005) of a handbag, such as its colour, weight, style, fabric, functionality, as well as the brand and its cultural knowledge, may become essential determinants of the rotational process. However, environmental changes such as the weather and the season gain more agency in shaping rotational practices, as previously mentioned by Tess. Also, the research data reveal that interactions that take place in online platforms, such as on YouTube or Purse Forum, remind collectors of items in their collections that have been out of rotation and forgotten about for a while. Therefore, new varieties of hedonic experiences and meanings emerge within the network and motivate collectors to reincorporate old items back into the rotation. Though these experiences may originate around the same objects that are already in the collection, a collector's reconfigured serial relationships with other actants such as the weather, practicalities of the collector's life, and market trends, bring surprise, pleasure, and playfulness to the

collecting practice. This adds to sense of novelty experienced by collectors and evolves their collections over time.

Network politics in collection constellations and their impact on seriality and novelty

In response to the third research question investigating the mediatory politics that exist between actants in collection constellations, the research findings evidence that various network actants exert mediatory influences onto each other. Findings illustrate that such influences of network actants on each other shape agentic properties we introduced throughout the collecting journey in two keyways: facilitating or restraining (see Figure 1). Consequentially, they implicate the development of seriality and the experience of novelty in consumer collections. For example, handbag collectors with all levels of expertise come together on online communal platforms to advise, support, appreciate, and even rescue each other as evidenced in the following thread. However, their influence in shaping curatorial practices is a product of more complex relational politics that exist between those actors and focal collectors:

"I am a new member, and I was wondering how everyone stores and displays their bags." – (Destiny)

"I have three shelves in my coat closet (I'll soon boot my husband's stuff and use the 4th!) that I use for my bags. I keep each in their original sleeper – if I don't have one, I'll use another similar cloth cover. I photograph each bag, laminate the photo, and pin the photo to the outside of the sleeper. That way, I can put the bags on the shelf the 'thin way' and still know what is in each bag. Painful, yes. Effective, double-yes." – (Issy)

"I can't display mine on shelves or the like, then my hubby would know how many I have. If he knew... he might cut me off." – (Lara)

"The lady at the LV boutique gave me a good tip: don't store your good bags on the shelf at the top of the closet... it's warmer up there and the leather will dry out more quickly. So, I've migrated my good bags down to the bottom of my closet in their cloth storage bags." – (Phoebe)

"I've no shelving there! Until I get a closet devoted to bags, I'm stuck with them at the top of the closet. If they are in the bottom, they will all get tossed on top of each other and my kids will toss their wet snow boots on them as well! Yikes!" – (Issy)

Both serious as well as amateur collectors come together in these environments, inquiring about brands and collector items, informing each other, and celebrating each other's collections. Even though the network facilitates the ideal and the most scientific ways to display handbags, not

everyone can perform those. Specific situations within individualised network relations such as the availability of time and space, competing practices of family members, and financial resources could restrain agentic properties of the constellation such as initiating, destabilising, and educating capacities and enactments of idealised curatorial activities. Several network actants including partners, friends, other collectors, salespeople, and natural environment of collections intervene to inform the agentic properties discussed. Issy, for example, promoted a potentially ideal way of storing handbags, which was an illustration of educating capacity of the network. It was further facilitated by other network actants such the LV salesperson and the scientific knowledge she revealed about storing handbags. However, as Lara and Issy mentioned, their limited closet storage spaces, as well as the potential disapproval of their spouses or threats from the children, undermined the materialisation of the educating property by restraining how much of the "ideal" storing practice Destiny could adopt.

In addition, the findings indicate that these mediatory politics between network actants dilute the importance of physical or emotional proximity of a particular actor to a focal collector. As Issy explained, her most intimate family members, in this case her children, were restraining actants within her collection constellation. In contrast, actants in her macro environment, such as other collectors and salespeople she had never met in person, were useful facilitators of her collection pursuit. Therefore, although these social engagements were an integral part of the constellation informing participants about the best ways to maintain collections of designer handbags, actual enactment of such practices are deeply interwoven with multiple other actants of the collectors' social environment. Such mediatory network politics provide collectors with useful insights on how they can engage with meanings attached to their collection objects and how they can re-constitute some of these meanings not just to align collections with their evolving identities but also to keep these collections consistent with the social and cultural knowledge of collecting. In doing so, such mediatory politics of the network becomes essential determinants of establishment of serial relations and production of sense of novelty within collection constellations.

Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research

This study explored the role of network actants in evolving consumer collections. In doing so, it responded to three research questions that investigated key agentic properties of the network and the way they shape curatorial practices, how those curatorial practices contribute to the emergence of seriality and a sense of novelty to collectors, and how politics between network actants implicate agentic properties. In conclusion, responding to the first research question,

the study's Framework of network iterations in construction of seriality and novelty in consumer collections (Figure 1) introduced three agentic properties of the network: initiating, educating, and destabilising.

The findings also addressed the second research question by explaining how a range of iterations that exist between network actants contribute to the development of serial relationships between objects in consumer collections and how continuing re-configurations of such serial relationships lead to experiences of pleasure and joy within collecting pursuits. Collectors often rely on their social environment to provide advice, tips, and suggestions about caring for their collections (Shuker, 2017). In doing so, they also inspire others in similar ways, thus creating relational and dialogical discourses (Geraghty, 2014). Furthermore, the politics between network actants implicate agentic properties and the production of seriality and novelty in collection pursuits. The data show that a network is formed between network subjects (i.e., collectors, their social network, and other collectors) and objects (i.e., the material world) which facilitate and/or restrain influence of each, therefore determining the meaningful relationships between collection items for collectors. Such network politics are also integral to this "pleasure-generating process" (Bianchi, 1997) of creating novelty and the evolution of consumption collections. It is these interactions between various network actants that emphasise the inherent need of collections to grow by revealing the re-configuration of existing serialities. Consumer collections rely on these network constellations and the agency of actant interrelations to evolve into something that is more meaningful to collectors and their identities.

This unpacking of the involvement of various network actants that are interwoven within the mundanity of curatorial practices goes beyond atomistic explanations of individual collectors and the collecting and curating phenomena that are prevalent in prior research. In doing so, this paper theorises the emergence of seriality and novelty (Bianchi, 1997) in consumer collecting as a relational and iterative 'network constellation'. As a result, from the time a collection has been assembled to its countless re-configurations (Coupland, 2005; McCracken, 1986; Scaraboto *et al*., 2016; Tian and Belk, 2005), the network that is composed of a focal collector (the person who owns the collection), other people (such as immediate family members, friends, salespeople, and various other collectors who have a stake in a particular type of collection), and things (collection items and other material objects) plays an essential role in challenging the agency of individual collectors as well as other network actants. In addition, collectors may have monetary investments in and legal ownership of their collection items; however, they are not the exclusive initiators of meanings between objects in their collections

that lead to the expansion of their collections and feelings of pleasure. On the contrary, meaningful relations between collection items and the sense of novelty that emerges with the discovery of new serialities are often a result of changing interrelations of the network. In addition, individual items in a collection are not passive recipients of the curatorial agency of collectors. As much as the agency of collectors and other human subjects is imprinted on objects in a collection set, these material objects and their materiality also imprint on other human and non-human actants and shape the trajectory of the collection pursuit.

The research findings offer valuable insight to marketers and brand managers. Firstly, understanding collecting as a relational and iterative 'network constellation' enables marketers to engage with their brand collectors in a more meaningful way. For example, brands can be a key nodal point of the collection network by helping consumers identify new serial relationships and introducing them into emerging trends. Brands can inspire communities of collectors by actively seeking to utilise the network agentic properties discussed above, thus helping collectors to keep their collections relevant and meaningful. By knowing which key actants to target within a collection network, marketers can socialise new collectors into their brands and provide them with useful support throughout their collection journey. In doing so, brands can position as reliable and useful co-creators of meanings for consumer collectors by facilitating the formation of seriality and the emergence of novelty.

Secondly, considering consumer collecting as a networked activity demands attention be given to curating practices that involve maintaining and celebrating collections. Currently, much of the brand interest is at the market-consumer intersection, investigating the nature of collecting and its underpinning motivations. However, even privately carried out curatorial practices such as cleaning, organising, and rotating (Spaid, 2018) are implicated by the interactions with other collectors and the existence of other material objects. The findings reveal that brands are less forceful actants at this stage, although there is evidence that collectors do appreciate "reliable" brand-originated guidance. Instead, collectors rely on third parties to access this cultural knowledge about the brand. Therefore, there is a larger role collector brands can play beyond the purchasing stage that characterises the market-consumer intersection. Particularly, by adopting a networked approach, brands can provide collectors with privileged and scientific brand knowledge to help them caretake and experience their cherished possessions.

Finally, maintaining seriality as well as pursuing the novelty of collections brings tensions for collectors (Spaid, 2018) and the prior literature has suggested that marketers can creatively exploit such tensions by introducing ways by which collectors can address such tensions

(Carey, 2008). For example, the acquisition of new items that are consistent with existing serial relationships or the disposing of objects that are no longer appropriate, helps collectors alleviate such tensions (Long and Schiffman, 1997). Whereas prior research has predominantly considered individual collector's involvement in identifying meaningful relationships between collection objects (Bianchi, 1997; Coupland, 2005), the network constitution of seriality and novelty allows marketers to identify various actants who produce and implicate the emergence of such aesthetic or symbolic relatedness between collection items. In addition, prior research has shown that collector identity and motivations drive a range of curatorial activities and there are mediatory tensions that shape these (Carey, 2008; Long and Schiffman, 1997). By applying agentic properties, marketers can better understand the origins and mediatory constellation-oriented influences of such tensions and how they can contribute to addressing these.

The network view of consumer collecting also opens future research opportunities. A limitation of this study is the failure to specifically focus on each collectors' networks for every collector. The study proposes that each network is a unique constellation of various actants with subjective politics defining their interactions and agentic capacities. Therefore, future research might explore each collectors' networks individually and compare these fluid network effects of each collector in order to construct a sharper aspect of the evolution of consumption collections. Another limitation of the study is the lack of a longitudinal perspective in exploring the evolution of collection sets. According to Bryman (1988), the reality of everyday life is composed of a series of interconnecting events. So, to capture the reflection of these interlocking series of events in the collection process, it is necessary to investigate and interpret changes over time (Ruspini, 1999). However, this study's cross-sectional perspective did not capture the voice of other network agents and determine how they evolve consumer collections and contribute to seriality and novelty over time; therefore, to some extent, the lack of a longitudinal perspective hampered the explanatory power of the empirical analysis. In addition, exploring collectors' motivations as well as their various curatorial activities from a networked perspective would offer more meaningful insight to the consumer collecting literature. Although this research investigated consumer collecting from a network perspective, it did not explore how changes to those networks would implicate collecting behaviours. Therefore, future research could also advance knowledge by investigating the influence of network transformations on consumer collecting, such as on curatorial practices and how they shape the trajectory of consumer collections.

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