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Young Adults' Compact Disc Usage Experiences in 2020

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Abstract

While compact disc sales have been decreasing for the past several years, the format is not without its adherents. Millions of new units are still sold each year and although streaming services are heavily utilized by young adults—many of whom were raised on file-based music formats—a portion of this demographic still purchases and plays CDs. This study offers a view of 52 young adults' (ages 18 to 26) recent new CD purchase and usage experiences via a survey featuring qualitative and quantitative responses. Results indicated that young adults purchase and use CDs for myriad reasons, including to support favorite artists, as additions to collections, for playback in vehicles, and because the CD was bundled with artists' merchandise or tickets. Using Innovation Diffusion Theory as a lens, this segment of users are not technological laggards in adopting newer playback technology, but rather complement their streamed music service usage with CDs. Some of these young adults remain interested in collecting physical music, are sometimes feeling nostalgic, and are using CDs for practical reasons.

Keywords: physical music media, compact disc, CDs, digital music, recorded music, music industry

Introduction

A March 2018 article published by the *Los Angeles Times* ran with the headline, “The compact disc era may finally be entering its hospice stage.” The author cited Nielsen Music figures, which indicated that CD unit sales had fallen nearly ninety percent from 2001 to 2017, and highlighted how major retailers were phasing out sales of the compact disc (Roberts 2018). Other news articles have declared the CD's death, including two featuring the headlines of “R.I.P. CD” (Farber 2014; Cridlin 2018). An article by *BBC News* questioned whether music ownership would continue via phys-

ical media such as CDs and vinyl records (Savage 2019). However, signs of the CD's dwindling popularity were already published in media reports years earlier. In May 2010, the *New York Times* examined how various retailers had sought to diversify their offerings, reimagining their stores' physical layouts to accommodate floor space for other products to offset the lack of new music sales, primarily CDs (Plambeck 2010). Recently, an RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) 2020 Mid-Year report noted CD album unit sales slid more than 45% from the previous year (Friedlander 2020). This decline actually began two decades earlier, after reaching a peak sales year in 2000 (Guidolin and Guseo 2015).

Additional signs of diminishing compact disc playback support became apparent when Apple introduced the MacBook Air in 2008, the first in a now-longstanding series of laptop computers that did not ship with an internal optical disc drive (Lowensohn 2013). In 2020, none of Apple's computers provided an option to install an internal optical disc drive. Consumer demand fading for new CDs—coupled with a decreased availability of CD players—has hastened the format's exit, which once held a formidable reign as the primary medium of recorded music for many years.

Sales of new music CDs have also faced technological competition over the past two decades. With the 1990s introduction of the recordable CD-R drive becoming commonplace in consumer desktop and laptop computers, home users could duplicate compact discs, making digital replicas of music initially purchased from retailers. High-speed residential internet access in the early 2000s brought downloadable music—legal or pirated—to homes across the world, mainly via the MP3 file, reducing sales of new CDs. Furthermore, the most recent popular playback technologies, streaming via subscription services such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Pandora, have given end users near-limitless popular music libraries for a monthly access fee, which they could play from devices in purses or pockets.

Digital delivery popularity is evident in revenue figures. Using the RIAA's 2020 Mid-Year Music Revenue Statistics, the total physical value in the first half of the year was \$375.5 million, with CDs generating \$129.9 million, or 35% of that total (Friedlander 2020). With a combined physical and digital value of \$5.65 billion (Friedlander), CD album sales represent a scant 2.3% of overall recorded music revenue. As CD playback options are phased out of consumers' reach with the reduction of available players, it seems likely that younger adults—typically substantial music consumers—may have found fewer reasons or opportunities to engage in

the format. It may not be surprising given that some of these young adults were born in the early 2000s. This was an era in which the compact disc had already seen its first competitor in the downloaded MP3 file. Some may have been raised in a mostly file-based playback environment, as the compact disc might not have been a primary format of music consumption for those whose introduction and engagement with recorded music began years after the 2001 introduction of the Apple iPod.

Still, some young adults are using CDs in the present to varying degrees. Some are avid consumers and collectors, while others might be more casual listeners seeking discs only sporadically. Despite the level of engagement, it is of interest to understand why those in an age range that is so frequently dependent on wireless technologies and immediate delivery remain consumers of physical media at all—especially the compact disc. With recent upswings in vinyl and cassette sales attributed to characteristics such as collectability and a penchant for tactile media, does the CD hold this same desirability quotient?

This study seeks to examine the current compact disc purchase and usage experiences of young adults ages 18 to 26. This population, comprised of Millennials and Generation Z cohorts, are sometimes referred to as “digital natives” (Fernandez and Beverland 2019; Zeng 2011). Two research questions are presented, as follows:

- RQ1: Why do young adults currently purchase and use new music CDs?
- RQ2: Do these young adults foresee themselves purchasing and using more new CDs in the future?

Background

While home and mobile access to media has changed over the past few decades, the CD has been almost entirely unchanged in the retail marketplace since its introduction. Except for some disc-based variants—SACD (Super Audio CD), DualDisc, Enhanced CD (Wikström and Burnett 2009)—the standard music CD of 2020 is quite similar to the product that was introduced nearly forty years earlier. The CD would go on to surpass vinyl record sales in 1988 (Straebel 2009), though that trend began to reverse in 2020, with vinyl LP and EP revenues besting the CD, according to the RIAA’s 2020 Mid-Year report (Friedlander 2020). And while CD unit sales are higher than vinyl (Friedlander), just over 46 mil-

lion CD shipments in the United States were reported in 2019, a fraction of the nearly one billion CD shipment peak in 2000 (Watson 2020). Overall album sales fell by nearly 19% in 2019 (Eggertsen 2020).

CDs are still in demand in Japan, with physical recordings comprising almost 70% of the music sales market (Imahashi 2020). However, even Japan has seen signs of streaming becoming commonplace with more J-pop artists adding releases to subscription services (St. Michel 2019). In recent years, the CD has faced increasingly stiffer competition in tandem with its falling sales revenue. Automobiles, a longtime personal audio playback environment, had been equipped with CD players in nearly every model for many years. These in-car CD players initially arrived in 1985 (Pryor 2017), usually as an optional upgrade in higher-end marques, but later were installed as standard equipment in some basic models. More recently, major auto companies such as Fiat Chrysler and Honda have abandoned the standard installation of compact disc players in favor of audio streaming technologies via touchscreen inputs and phone-integration interfaces (Kubota and Bennett 2016).

Complicating matters for physical album sales is the practice of bundling recorded media, such as CDs or vinyl, with other artist merchandise or concert tickets. This practice can help sell additional units, increasing sales figures and chart positions (Eggertsen 2020). This action was addressed by *Billboard*, published on July 13, 2020, in which the company is instituting a series of rules changes to better ensure that bundled albums would no longer count towards album and song sales chart performance unless the album is promoted and sold as a separate, add-on purchase (Eggertsen). Given the recency of *Billboard's* announcement, the effects of the rules change on CD album sales is yet to be determined.

As the first popular digital audio format, the compact disc provided distinct advantages over its predecessors. Its audio reproduction capability was a primary characteristic that exceeded the typical consumer analog options of the early 1980s, which included the vinyl record, cassette tape, and eight-track cartridge. Downes (2010) notes that some audiophiles resisted the CD and instead held their vinyl records in high regard for myriad reasons, including the CD's sound and a lack of interactivity with the medium. Used vinyl record retailers actually benefitted from listeners who had switched formats to the compact disc, offloading their entire record collections (Shuker 2016).

In an interview, Mervis (2018) quotes a record store owner, who said, “I can’t remember the last time a person under 40 bought a CD in this store.” The owner adds that most CD consumers are middle-aged males and that younger customers are streaming music or purchasing vinyl. Still, some record store employees interviewed by Mervis (2018) and Cridlin (2018) predicted that the compact disc will either sustain itself in the marketplace or a resurgence may occur due to a nostalgic demand. CD nostalgia was even noted in a newspaper article by Nyman (2012), in which memories of the format’s usage is discussed.

Part of this study takes into consideration the adoption of audio technologies by this younger cohort. Looking to Rogers’s (2003) Innovation Diffusion Theory as a guide, which details the various categories in which technologies are adopted (from innovators, to early adopters, to early majority, then late majority, and lastly, laggards), raises another question: are these young adult CD users considered the laggards—described by Miller (2015) as tending to be “traditionalists” (268)—in the music media marketplace? Or are they merely being pragmatic about using an available technology that is both proven and ubiquitous?

Methods

This study utilized an online survey administered via Qualtrics consisting of several qualitative and quantitative questions. Participant qualifications were within the age range of 18 to 26 years, to effectively capture the segment equivalents of the Millennial cohort’s tail end with a sizable population from Generation Z (Dimock 2019). Participants were also required to have purchased and played a new compact disc within the last year. All participants had to agree to the informed consent before taking the survey.

An email invitation was sent to primarily undergraduate students at a large university in the western United States. Depending on the skip logic function, participants were asked to answer eleven to thirteen questions, three to four of which required open-ended qualitative answers in an essay response box, plus a couple of demographic questions. A total of 57 participants responded to the survey questions from May 2020 to June 2020, however five participants only partially completed the survey, therefore 52 participants completed all questions presented to them. The average age of the participants was 21.5 years. After reaching a satisfactory level of

data saturation, responses were themed by the author as presented in the Discussion section of this article.

Results

The earliest reported new CD purchase was made in May 2019, with the most recent purchase in June 2020. May 2019 was the most frequent month/year of recent purchases by the participants (n=15), followed by March 2020 (n=7) and June 2020 (n=7). Target was the most popular source of new CD purchases (n=17), followed by the artist's official on-line store (n=10) and Amazon (n=7). Other notable sources of new CD purchases included unspecified online retailers, ticketing agencies, Best Buy, concert venues, and Walmart.

Participants owned an average of 28.98 CDs, with a range of 1 CD to over 100 CDs reported. While all participants were required to have purchased a new CD in the last year, 73% reported they had not purchased a used CD in the last year. Of the participants who had also purchased used CDs in the past year, it was on average about 41% of their total CD purchases. A multiple-choice question asked if the participants foresaw themselves continuing to purchase new CDs in the near future, with selections including "definitely yes," "probably yes," "not sure/neutral," "probably not," or "definitely not." The most popular response was "definitely yes," as selected by 42.3% of participants, followed by "probably yes" at 30.8% and "not sure/neutral" at 13.5% of participants.

Most participants played their CDs in the car (n=26), followed by at home (n=15), with ten noting that they play CDs both in the car and at home. Two participants indicated that although they keep their CDs at home, they do not play them. Devices used for playback varied, but it was commensurate with the majority listening to CDs in the car, as exclusive use of the car stereo was the most popular device, followed by the computer (laptop or desktop), portable stereo ("boombox") and home stereo. Several participants reported using multiple devices for playback, including varied combinations of car stereo, home stereo, DVD player, and computer. Four participants used a portable personal device for CD playback (e.g., "Discman"). One participant noted using a video gaming console (Xbox), and another used a karaoke machine for CD playback.

Participants were also provided a list of eleven compact disc characteristics from which they could choose their current CD usage reasons or preferences. Participants could select as many characteristics as they

felt applied to their CD use preferences. In order of most selected to least selected, participants chose artwork (n=35), part of a music collection (n=33), lyrics (n=24), interaction with tangible recording (n=20), lasts a long time (durable) (n=16), affordable (n=15), sound quality (n=14), still own CD player(s) (n=13), easy to use (n=12), compact size (n=9), and plenty of CDs available for sale (n=9). The option to include an additional characteristic (“other”) was available with an attached qualitative response. Four responses included, “If I run out of data or if [my] phone has a low battery,” “I only use them because I already had them from the past,” “bonus tracks,” and, “in the past, I’ve enjoyed taking them to shows to have them signed.”

Another multiple-selection question sought the genres of music recently purchased on compact disc by young adults. A list of fifteen popular music genres in the United States was presented, also with an “other” selection for any not listed. As in the earlier question, participants could select as many genres as they felt applied to their CD listening routines. Pop was the most selected genre (n=36), followed by rock (n=21), hip-hop (n=19), R&B (n=13), soundtracks (n=11), classical and Latin (n=6 each), EDM and religious (n=4 each). Six participants selected the “other” classification. Three of these responses noted K-pop as a genre listened to on CD. Some of the other responses included “indie,” “show tunes,” “alternative,” “metal,” and “pop-punk/emo.”

In terms of other audio format playback preferences, nearly all participants used streaming services (n=51 of 52 respondents) via audio/visual channels such as Spotify, YouTube, Pandora or Apple Music. Vinyl records were also a popular selection (n=22), as were MP3 files (n=20). Two participants selected cassettes and one had indicated FLAC files as an “other” selection.

Qualitative responses to open-ended questions elicited a variety of insightful answers. The first question, which asked participants why they purchased a new CD (or CDs) in the last year, offered a host of interesting responses. The top reason was to support particular artists. Examples included, “I purchased new CDs to support some of my favorite bands during their latest album cycles,” and, “I got it [from] one of my favorite artists that came out with his second album.” The next most popular reason was for collections or display purposes. These examples included responses such as, “I like to purchase CDs of artists that I like. I like to support them, but I also like to have a physical copy I can look at to add to my

collection,” and more simply, “I wanted to start a CD collection.” Other similar responses included, “The CD is an album of my favorite artist, IU. It’s a K-pop album, and I’ve been collecting my favorite artist albums for my dream music room to display,” and, “I collect them. A lot of my favorite bands, I own at least one CD. Some bands I own every album on CD.”

Other reasons for recent CD purchases included gifts for others or themselves, (“I purchased it because I wanted to get my cousin a gift;” “It was a gift for a friend who likes using her old Walkman”) and because the CD was bundled as part of a package that included concert tickets or other merchandise (“The CD came with a concert ticket that I purchased;” “I am a big fan of The Weeknd. I didn’t purchase a CD but the concert tickets that I bought came with a CD”). More reasons included the extra content on the CD (“I wanted to get some bonus tracks which were only on the CD version”), signings (“My favorite artist had a deal to where you bought a CD of hers and she would autograph it for you and mail it on release day”), and playback in automobiles (“My car is able to use CDs, so I buy them to play in my car;” “My car doesn’t have Bluetooth and the aux sounds weird;” “At the time I didn’t have unlimited data on my phone and would run out of data so I would oftentimes [resort] to CDs I had in my car”).

An open-ended question asked all participants to explain why they currently owned and played CDs. This question also produced a variety of responses, with some listing multiple reasons. Perhaps not surprisingly, these responses echoed or offered further detail in response to the previous question. The most popular reasons included car playback, either due to a lack of phone connection (“I like to listen to certain music while in my car, and since I don’t have a way of connecting my phone to my radio, I use CDs”), or due to in-car convenience (“Sometimes I don’t feel like setting up my phone to [use] Spotify in my car. I have a bunch of CDs so I can listen to whatever I want and have it right there for me to choose in person;” “I just like having them in my car to play sometimes”). Another popular response was due to nostalgia, as some participants recalled using them earlier in their lives. Responses included, “Some of the CDs I have are packed with memories,” “It feels nostalgic, it really takes me back to the early 2000s when CDs ruled,” “I grew up with them, I still have several dozen CDs from my childhood and a few from movies like *Frozen*, *Tangled* or classic Disney music collections,” and, “I like to support the artists I like. Playing CDs and records give me a good nostalgic feeling so I tend to like playing those than listening to Spotify sometimes.”

Other response categorizations were similar to previous questions. These included display or collection purposes, as noted by the participant who said, "I like keeping them for my collection and I also enjoy having the physical copies of some of my favorite albums," and another participant who stated, "I think CDs are more like a collector's items now just like [vinyl] records are becoming a collector's piece." The discussion of collections was further evidenced by this response: "I'd say that I own CDs a lot more than I actually play them. In addition to truly liking the artists' entire discography enough to buy the album(s), I also collect the albums of certain artists each time they release new music, so that contributes to the increase in my CD collection."

The purchase of the CD provided an opportunity for some participants to support their favorite artist(s), as evidenced by these similar responses: "I own and play CDs because I love being able to support my favorite bands by buying their music and I prefer having physical copies of my favorite pieces of music," and, "I enjoy having a physical copy of my favorite artists' music and playing CDs in the car or stereo at home is more satisfying to me."

Depending on the response to whether or not participants predicted themselves continuing to purchase new CDs in the near future, the survey's skip logic would present one of three options, two of which were open-ended questions. For the participants who answered with "definitely yes" or "probably yes," the next question asked why they expected to purchase new CDs in the near future. This provided several predictions, many of which largely echoed the reasons why participants purchased a new compact disc in the last year. (One participant succinctly responded, "For the same reasons listed earlier!") The most popular response was artist support or artist preference. Examples included, "If I like an artist, there's a high possibility that I will buy their CD," and, "I like purchasing CDs from my favorite artists or albums that I like from start to finish." One participant even referenced the lack of live performances due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, stating, "Now more than ever, it's one of the best ways to support an artist, especially since tours are on hold, cancelled or postponed." Another popular response was to purchase CDs as part of a collection or display. Again, these responses were consistent with the previous category, including, "I want to collect all the CDs that my favorite artists put out," "For display purposes if it's from an artist I like," "I enjoy collecting CDs of my favorite artists. Also, it's a way for me to support

them with my purchase,” and, “I like collecting them and seeing them as memories in time when they are stacked up in my room after I switch them out.”

Other categories generated from responses to this question included the medium’s tangible and physical nature, as stated here, “All artists produce their albums digitally and physically. I like holding the physical copy of the book, it gives me joy looking at them, and I like supporting great artists. Also the small [stationery] items in it makes it very interesting!” A similar response was provided here, “I enjoy purchasing CDs and looking at the album artwork when listening to them for the first time.” And another participant noted, “I like the physical part of listening to music or movies.”

The opportunity to receive bonus tracks and added content was noted here via a K-pop purchase: “Unlike American CDs, the Korean industry provides additional incentives to buying albums. As I mentioned, photocards and a photobook are included, but they tend to have preorder specials as well that may come with limited edition photocards, or different CD styles and such. So it feels like I’m engaging in collecting multiple items.” And this response compared the portability and program length of CDs to vinyl records, stating, “I will probably buy more CDs in the future because [vinyl is] harder to bring around and CDs have bonus tracks.”

For those who responded with “probably not” or “definitely not,” the next question asked why they were not expecting to purchase new CDs in the near future. The responses from this question were far more limited in quantity. Just two categorizations could be formed from the responses, the first being that participants had opportunities to stream music instead: “I do not own any convenient devices that can play CDs. Plus, I really enjoy having easy access to music through Spotify and other streaming services. I would only buy CDs if it was part of a merch bundle or to get access to a CD signing.” And another participant echoed a similar reason, stating, “I use streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music or YouTube much more than CDs.”

The second reason for not expecting future CD purchases was due to the playback method—in this case, the vehicle in which their CD player is located. Said one participant, “My plan is to get a new car soon, so I assume I won’t need CDs.” And another noted, “My car’s CD player recently broke so I have nothing to play the CD on, I’ve put all of my CDs in my sister’s car which I occasionally drive.” And lacking access to

Themes Based on Participant Responses	
Theme	Selected Responses
1. Supplementary Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I wanted to get bonus tracks that were only on the CD version” • “The visuals and booklet drove me to buy the CD, as I do not get the same experience from online music” • “[I] wanted to own a special artwork version of the soundtrack”
2. Reminiscent Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I grew up with them. I still have several dozen CDs from my childhood...” • “I used to love them as a kid. Now I just listen to them because of the nostalgia...” • “Some of the CDs that I have are packed with memories”
3. Pragmatic Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It also works in my car better than my aux since my car is old” • “They’re reliable on long car rides” • “For home stereo and surround sound”
4. Artist Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Now more than ever, it’s one of the best ways to support an artist, especially since tours are on hold, cancelled or postponed” • “I’ll buy the CD of my favorite artists no matter what it is, if it has their name I’ll buy it” • “I wanted to support the artist(s) that I listen to”
5. Purchase Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I had to buy merch off the Harry Styles website to get the presale code for the concert” • “Purchasing a CD came with a free shirt at the Jonas Brothers concert” • “I didn’t purchase a CD but the concert tickets that I bought came with a CD”

Table 1. Themes based on participant responses.

playback devices at home was stated here: “[Compact discs] are outdated, I personally don’t have a boom box nor does my computer have a CD-ROM [drive].”

Discussion

Five primary themes had emerged from the reviewed responses in answering RQ1 (Why do young adults currently purchase and use new music CDs?). Examples of responses relative to each theme are provided in Table 1. The first is *supplementary content*, in that the compact disc complements the young adult users’ current streaming music media experience. It fulfills and augments certain tangible functions that most streaming cannot accomplish, such as offering the ability to visually consume the complete artwork, photography, credits, and lyrics in a printed booklet. In some instances, the CD version contains tracks not available on other formats. Given that nearly every participant reported access to streaming music, and that the average participant had fewer than thirty compact discs in his or her collection, the CD may not be the primary conduit for music consumption. However, it does serve a purpose in providing tangible content that could not be delivered via a streaming service.

A second theme was *reminiscent qualities*. Participants may be young adults, but the nostalgia of their youth was a factor in CD usage. The act of merely playing a compact disc, coupled with the content which may represent a reference point of their earlier years, allows for reminiscing. Using terms and phrases in responses such as “memories,” “tradition,” “remind me of when I was younger,” and “cool physical relics,” these participants recall earlier periods of their lives through CD use.

The third theme was *pragmatic value*. The compact disc holds a practical purpose for some of these young adults. Due to the functionality of their players (primarily in the car), the participants are still able to utilize the CD format within their broader media realm. Playing CDs may be a function of not having other options while in the car, or because the CD is a more reliable source of audio, not susceptible to interference or intermittent connectivity. This pragmatism is evidenced by some of these participants’ responses. The automobile as a popular space and location of compact disc playback lends itself to questions about the future viability of the format’s support. As these vehicles’ stereos (or the vehicles themselves) malfunction and wear out, compact disc playback options diminish, as newer, replacement vehicles may be less likely to be equipped with

CD players, instead featuring technology such as smartphone integration and streaming audio playback. This situation is similar for the home stereo, boombox, or portable CD players. Given that such devices are reliant on mechanical operation, these mechanisms may wear out over time. Like the in-car or at-home eight-track stereo systems of the 1970s, support for the format may reduce as these vehicles and devices lessen in usability.

A fourth theme is *artist loyalty*, which suggests that participants engage in CD use and purchases simply out of support for the artist. Much like a concert T-shirt or poster, the compact disc provides another option for consumers in this study to enhance identification with their favorite artists. The CD helps to express approval of such artists by allowing participants to showcase their collection of products and memorabilia. In putting such physical media on display, the participant can further solidify their fan identities. Examples of such loyalty were especially apparent with K-pop listeners, who offered details about their CD collections.

The fifth and final theme is *purchase intention*. While some responses indicate that participants specifically sought an artist's music on the CD format, other participants were more or less obligated to make a purchase containing a CD often to obtain another item, such as a concert ticket or other merchandise. While these participants are also fans of the artists, the distinction is that their originally intended purchase was not always the CD itself. Instead, the CDs were included as part of a purchased bundle. As one participant noted, "the main reason why I have CDs is because of my concert ticket purchases. I don't actually play CDs—or even open them—because I have Spotify." As mentioned earlier, future bundling practices may be altered by the new *Billboard* requirements.

In response to RQ2 (Do these young adults foresee themselves purchasing and using more new CDs in the future?), the young adults surveyed who currently purchase and play new CDs are more likely than not to purchase more new CDs in the near future. The combined affirmation of a "probably yes" or "definitely yes" by just under three-quarters of the respondents (as opposed to far less than a quarter combined for "probably not" or "definitely not") reveals a moderate adherence to the format. The inclusion of items such as special artwork and bonus tracks with the compact disc further buoys such purchase desire. Some cited bonus material on the CD as a factor in their purchase, especially if they are fans of a particular artist. This may be akin to Clement, Engh, and Thielmann's (2003) findings of fans' preference for the added value content included in the En-

hanced CD format, which was popularized in the early 2000s. However, for a minority, compact disc playback may not be of much concern. After all, these participants indicated that they purchase and use CDs for display purposes, artist signings, or because the CD was part of a more substantial purchase. To them, the CD—in all its un-played glory—could just as well be a photograph or other tangible object that exhibits their preference of a particular artist.

While there is a penchant for some to maintain a collection, the average number of CDs owned (under thirty) may be perceived as low, given the commonality and affordability of compact discs, especially used CDs. This is likely due to nearly every participant indicating that streaming—and its countless song or album selections—was another music playback option and they are not exclusive to compact discs. Pointing back to Rogers’s Innovation Diffusion Theory (2003), these findings suggest that the participant population are not laggards and that the CD supplements streaming service use. Some are being pragmatic by using CDs in vehicles already equipped with disc players, rather than streaming music in vehicles that may lack effective smartphone integration or incur substantial data use charges.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This study does not attempt to predict the CD format’s longevity and sustainability as it nears its fortieth year in the marketplace. However, it will be of interest to see if *Billboard*’s July 2020 policy change announcement in accounting for sales of albums bundled with other products (Eggertsen 2020) will alter the future course of CD sales. Still, some genres seem more conducive to being sold via the CD format, if not for the music, than for their fanbases who thrive on collectibles. As K-pop continues to become an increasingly notable presence as a popular music genre in the U.S., its influence on CD sales and usage could also be worth further examining. K-pop only comprised a few of the participants’ genre preferences, yet they appear dedicated to the genre’s artists and its associated products. As one participant said, “I tend to buy Korean Pop albums. My main collection is for BTS. In the K-pop culture, collecting albums is a very big deal. They contain the CD, photo album, photo cards, and other memorabilia.” Another participant offered similar sentiments on K-pop’s relationship with the compact disc, stating, “I do have CDs that are either rock or pop (these are VERY dated though), but with the genre of K-pop, it

is very common to purchase albums because of the detail and attention to them. Fans collect the albums, CDs, and goods included in new releases.” Reports in the media about the K-pop influence of current CD sales tend to support these participants’ purchase reasons (Rolli 2020; Kesvani 2019).

Following up this survey with in-depth interviews could offer greater detail and answer questions not addressed in the initial survey. Future research may include a better understanding of the appeal of displaying and collecting CDs, or if audio fidelity is considered in playback. Also, as this study specifically sought only those who had made a recent new CD purchase, it would be enlightening to understand why many young adults do not engage with CDs in the present, to get a sense of what portion of this same age segment has abandoned the format altogether.

Record labels, distributors, retailers and musicians may benefit in knowing what consumers want from new CD purchases and why they continue to engage with the format. The inclusion of bonus material and additional packaging items such as posters may find some consumers opting for the CD due to the added value. While sales of new compact discs have steadily declined, this study’s responses offer insight into why some who were raised in an era of file-based formats have found the disc appealing. Said one participant, reminiscing about the format, “I think it’s really beautiful how all those songs are on a slim disk, like so much talent on a paper thin disk. It blows my mind.”

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