

# Libraries Pop Up: Where LIS and Pop Culture Intersect

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**T**ikTok dance crazes, the Pantone color of the year, that TV series you binge watch, the photo card of your K-idol, the next drag superstar.

Pop culture is an inescapable and integral part of the human experience. Forms and elements of pop culture surround us from the moment we wake up to our return to sleep. It greatly influences the styles of clothing we wear, the music we listen to, our daily parlance and expressions, and even the food we eat. How pop culture shapes our lives and how we perceive the world significantly plays in what Fedorak (2009) refers to as the culture of everyday life. What's prevalent at a particular time is considered part of pop culture, including popular literature (e.g., comic books, magazines, etc.); mainstream music, television programs, and movies; advertisements; fashion; food; games, hobbies, and similar leisurely activities.

People are saturated with popular styles and trends at particular times, though traditional and purist thinkers might distinguish “high” and “low culture.” But whether it is high or low culture, or it might be seen as something ordinary, trivial, or superficial, pop culture is an aspect of human life that deserves careful attention and examination, or at least some

consideration, especially in information, memory and cultural institutions such as galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMs). GLAMs have a long history and responsibility for providing access to information, promoting various literacies, and preserving and disseminating cultural heritage. Since pop culture plays a significant role in the lives of the individuals and communities we serve and interact with, it is only apt to include it in the institutional agenda for practices and services.

In this editorial, we argue that contemporary libraries have a significant influence on pop culture by embracing three roles: (1) as repositories, (2) as spaces, and (3) as agents. As we expound these roles, we provide possibilities for reframing our views of the role of libraries in their respective communities and how they fulfill their mission and goals in consonance with prevailing pop culture.

## **LIBRARIES AS REPOSITORIES OF POP CULTURE**

The most evident intersection between pop culture and libraries is through the collecting function of the latter. Libraries can collect, curate, and display ephemeral materials for public use and consumption. As with other cultural forms, pop culture manifests itself

through physical objects or material culture, one of which is ephemeral objects.

Ephemeral materials, or simply “ephemera,” are defined as “the printed materials of everyday life” (Reitz, 2004, p. 252). These objects, such as show tickets, flyers, postage stamps, and stickers, are mass-produced and not usually collected intentionally. However, one may argue that these are still culturally valuable due to their artistic merits, informative content, and historical/socio-cultural context.

It is acceptable for libraries, archives, and similar information institutions to collect ephemeral materials as part of their collections. As part of the archives, museum collections, or special collections in libraries, ephemeral materials are gathered for education, research, and enjoyment. Like any other informative object, these materials show prevailing cultural trends at their moment of creation and use.

### **LIBRARIES AS SPACES FOR POP CULTURE**

However, there are possibilities for community engagement beyond developing and managing information resource collections. Amid the convenience of having online information sources and software applications, libraries nowadays are being inventive to reclaim their title as community spaces where people can gather for their information-related pursuits.

Libraries are stepping up to bridge the gap resulting from the closure of brick-and-mortar bookstores (Cullotta, 2012). More than this, libraries could also fill other gaps that may exist in the community. Trends in library user services are moving towards adapting service models from other types of establishments. In the past decade, there has been a surge in adopting consumer-based services such as the bookstore model, where the genre is the major consideration for classifying resources (Woodward, 2005; Maker, 2008; Bucci et al, 2020 ), the café or coffee-shop model, integrating café service and allowing such food items within the library premises (Singh, 2002; Harris, 2007), and the rec center model, where

different recreational equipment and facilities are provided for users to enjoy. These models all embrace Oldenburg’s (1989) concept of the third place, which are the spaces and locations other than the home and the workplace, most usually dedicated to recreation and interaction.

The interaction among members of a group is integral in the formation of culture, specifically in establishing norms and familiarizing each other with what is acceptable or not. The synergy among people drives pop culture forward.

### **LIBRARIES AS AGENTS OF POP CULTURE**

Librarians might not be fully aware of it, but libraries can also become agents to influence popular culture within the communities they serve. The selection of materials for acquisition in itself is influenced by pop culture. Case in point: acquiring popular genres and forms of literature such as vampire lore and graphic novels.

Beyond collections and spaces, libraries are at the forefront of promoting and enriching intellectual and creative pursuits. For culture to flourish, relative freedom is given to members of the community to think, create, and share their creations and what they find likable (at the least) to those they deem useful and valuable.

Emerging paradigms in the 21st century embrace the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusivity. In response, libraries are encouraged to be more open to accepting the spectrum of pop culture manifestations and integrating them into library functions. Approaches in library marketing, such as cultural references and design considerations in promotional campaigns, are usually influenced by pop culture. We can further promote the study and practice through pop culture prompts as anchors or marketing hooks. For example, in the Rizal Library of Ateneo de Manila University, Sagun (2013) saw the effectiveness of Internet memes in driving marketing messages and the eventual increase in library usage. The Main Library of the University of the Philippines Diliman also staged unique and out-of-the-box strategies to invite patrons to visit Gonzalez Hall. Sporting events

such as UAAP and NBA games are shown on its lobby television screen (Dar Juan, 2016). Pop culture can even be integrated into the design of physical spaces, as in the case of the Sotero H. Laurel Academic Resource Center of the Lyceum of the Philippines University in Manila being inspired by the Korean drama “Start Up” (Noriega, 2022). Aiming to have an appealing library interior, it was hailed by one of its University officials as “inclusive, modern, and young” (Noriega, 2022, para. 4).

Gone are the days when book clubs, storytelling sessions, and reading camps are just the major types of activities in library programs. Not that reading is insignificant—we assert that reading comprehension and the culture of reading are important to be cultivated, regardless of age. Libraries can also be shaped as spaces where special interest groups beyond reading and literature, such as anime fans, gastronomists, and home gardening enthusiasts, or the so-called “plantitos” and “plantitas.” More than reading, libraries could also consider hosting other information-related, and cultural activities promoting discourse, such as theatrical performances of all forms (including stand-up and drag), exhibitions and conventions (including fashion, interior design, and cosplay meets), and conferences, seminars, and lectures sharing best practices (e.g., pet care, handicrafts, and cooking). Cassell and Hiremath (2018) even devoted a portion of their chapter discussing the importance of having community experts as part of reference programming.

With the rise of the netizens as sources of opinion and also targets of persuasion (Hauben, 1996), libraries have to be more creative and proactive in reaching out to them. Being “in the loop” can help us identify ways to persuade them better and invite them to come to our spaces and listen to the messages we need to convey. It is also important for them to feel safe and properly heard in the GLAM spaces. Hence, we should be continuously inventive in framing our position as a community space where pop culture, history, and social facts converge.

If libraries would like to persuade more viewers and communities to come to their spaces and listen to their agenda and messages, then we should know how we can frame our position as a community space where pop culture, history, and collective knowledge intersect and interact. Libraries should assert their place in their communities as **centers of culture**, promoting inclusive acceptance of different forms of culture for all ages and all backgrounds.

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The PhJLIS is published by the School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman. ISSN 2719-0471 (Online)