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Researching Multisensory Experiences through an Artist's Eye

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Author's Note:

This work would not be possible without the families who shared their experiences, often reliving their untimely loss. To them we are grateful and trust that they find this work honors them and the lives of their loved ones. Further, the authors extend gratitude and appreciation to Bella Woodfield for being our dedicated artist and inspiring interdisciplinary collaborator in developing a sensitive and deeply felt understanding of and insights from these experiences. We gratefully thank the Donor Family Network, Share Your Wishes, and Believe for their support and generosity in connecting us with so many families, without which the present research could not have been completed.

Abstract

Individuals encounter a range of experiences in the marketplace, some of them entailing inarticulable multisensory consumption contexts. Current marketing and consumer research data collection tools and theoretical representations may not adequately reflect the complexity of such experiences. Thus, we developed an interdisciplinary approach to identifying multisensory consumption experiences that occur in contexts where feelings are ‘unsayable’ Through a study of families who donated the organs of a deceased loved one, we develop an art-centric methodology to uncover thoughts, experiences, and feelings that may not be accessible for individuals as they attempt to describe these profound multisensory experiences or their implications in lived experience. We conclude with implications for market and consumer research.

Summary Statement of Contribution

We contribute an art-centric approach to better understand and examine multisensory experiences that occur most often in consumption contexts where feelings are ineffable. For this purpose, marketing research methods have been expanded to include various visual forms that expose a broader range of consumption phenomena. This interdisciplinary methodology uncovers perspectives, behaviors, and feelings that may be inaccessible for individuals as they attempt to describe these profound experiences or implications in their lived experience.

Keywords: Art; ethnography; multisensory experiences; interdisciplinary consumer research; marketing

Introduction

Marketing research is populated with data that is readily packaged for journal publication. Yet, little guidance exists for researchers on ways to access and represent the kind of multisensory data found in the rich, nuanced, and ‘unsayable’ lived experiences of consumers (Sherry Jr & Schouten, 2002). This is true particularly as multisensory consumption experiences in the marketplace have grown exponentially (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014; Krishna, 2012; Vom Lehn, 2006). Prior consumer research studies have lacked the kinds of nuanced consumer insights that encompass some combination of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste, and their absence is significant with respect to the verisimilitude and usefulness of research insights (Sherry 2000).

Multisensory experiences are investigated by disciplines as diverse as anthropology, geography, information systems, and medicine (Scott & Uncles, 2018). We contend that exploring multisensory marketplace and consumption experiences could also benefit from interdisciplinary partnerships beyond those in academia. To that end, we take inspiration from Strathern’s (2006) definition of interdisciplinary knowledge creation to define interdisciplinary collaborations (IC) as the practice of cross-disciplinary engagement across canons to address issues that cannot be addressed by one approach alone. Marketing, as a research discipline and business function, is well suited for such research partnerships.

Marketing scholars examine a variety of multisensory phenomena. We believe that research of multisensory experiences can benefit from ICs where investigative teams would weave together their respective knowledge and methods while synthesizing approaches (Strathern, 2006). For example, multisensory market-based phenomena are found in field sites where consumers are vulnerable (Chow et al., 2019), face pain (Tarr et al., 2018), or stigma

(Sandikci & Ger, 2009), as well as where research is enmeshed within complex contexts (Duncan, 2003). For such phenomena, words may be insufficient to convey consumer experiences. Thus, ICs could, for example, inspire a scholar to partner with a physical therapist in research settings where complex tactile sensations, such as pain, are salient. Similarly, scholars could partner with an elite chef or sommelier to examine the impact of sight, taste, and smell in experiences where ingestion is prominent. Unlike multidisciplinary approaches, where each silo crafts solutions to problems independently, an interdisciplinary approach builds bridges and connects the silos to craft integrated solutions.

How should IC insights best be incorporated into our research practices to generate theoretical and practical insights? To address this challenge, our study contributes an interdisciplinary approach to examining multisensory consumption contexts through an investigation of deceased organ donor families (DDF). This is accomplished with an arts-based methodology—a consumption experience falling within the ambit of the ‘death industry’ (Dobscha, 2015)—to collect multisensory data, represent findings, and support reflexive knowledge dissemination for practitioner, policy, and scholarly audiences.

Specifically, we partnered with a highly specialized, professional fine arts painter to demonstrate visually how an interdisciplinary research approach can allow for a deeper multisensory understanding of how individuals manage loss. For example, where a bereaved family is missing a loved one’s physical presence and longing to see them, photographs can provide visual comfort. The familiar sound of a loved one’s voice is another salient loss: ‘I am home,’ or ‘How was your day?’ Silence is another void to fill; a familiar song can bring waves of grief crashing back. Remembering the smell of a loved one’s favourite scent, cooking, or

clothing can incite simultaneous grief and closeness. The inability to still physically embrace a loved one can be one of the most challenging aspects of bereavement.

Fine art is a well-established, influential, and versatile medium that transfers well across our intended audience of industry experts, policy makers, and scholars. By working with a fine artist to create paintings that embody the felt encounter of death, we sought to draw out the ‘unsayable’ multisensory experiences of those who participated in our study. Further, we identify how to employ diverse data to generate reflexive, theoretical, and practical insights. We develop our research program inclusive of an IC that allowed us to access, interpret and disseminate ‘unsayable’ phenomena. We codify the resulting methodological approach of employing such interdisciplinary collaborations. The criticality of such an approach is growing as complex personal consumption experiences are more frequently intertwined with market actors and places which may contribute to how individuals process their reactions to such experiences. In response, we propose an additional tool for market researchers to investigate such phenomena.

Next, we establish the theoretical context for this study, which addresses current methodological challenges of access and representation in marketing research. Then we describe the interdisciplinary research method employed, and set forth the particulars of our study and how it employs the method. We close with a discussion of the method as our contribution, the implications for marketing and consumer researchers, and conclusions.

Literature Review

Challenges of Knowing and Understanding

Sherry (2000, p. 273) argues that ‘we must resolve the crisis of representation that limits our ability to express the insights we achieve in our research into consumer behavior’ (p. 273).

Various tools for data collection and analysis in marketing research are well established, reflecting an extensive body of methodological knowledge that brings nuanced consumption phenomena to life (Belk, 2006; Canniford et al., 2017). Some ways of knowing and understanding include sentence completion (McGrath et al., 1993), Thematic Appreciation Tests (Murray, 1943), videography (Belk et al., 2018), photoelicitation (Heisley & Levy, 1991), and photovoice (Holbrook & Kuwahara, 1998). For example, photography is used extensively as an important platform for understanding issues relating to representation of consumer stories (Schroeder 1998). Similarly, projective tasking is found to provide consumers with an opportunity to give voice to previously unarticulated thoughts and feelings (Heisley & Levy, 1991). Accordingly, projective techniques, when used in conjunction with ethnographic methods, can be purposeful in conveying the sensitive and emotive topic of gift exchange (McGrath et al., 1993). These techniques provide access to consumers' previously untapped or underexpressed understandings, desires, feelings, and values. Furthermore, much research has taken a multisensory approach to revealing the personal aspects of an experience in the context of consumers' embodied experiences (Stevens et al., 2019). While those techniques prove fruitful in a wide range of experiences, interdisciplinary collaborations allow for a greater investigatory tool kit which can address complex consumption phenomena in the marketplace that cannot be brought to light by one approach alone (Strathern, 2006).

We thus turn our attention to the realm of art. Consumer research has long emphasized visual storytelling using such projective techniques as figure and gesture drawing as a means of helping participants unearth inarticulable consumption experiences (Pace, 2008). The visual tradition of research representation is now well established in photography (Mencarelli & Pulh, 2012) and videography (Petr et al., 2015). For example, Goulding et al. (2018) gathered various

types of data employing an arts-based methodology following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami to explain the strength of disadvantaged human stakeholders as well as to understand resilience building. Specifically, art workshops featuring doll-making and knitting were employed for survivor-participants to communicate the ‘unspeakable’ within a safe ‘liminal’ space. Poetry has also become an important tool in therapeutic practices for accessing consumers’ emotional and embodied experiences for the purpose of improving patients’ well-being and encouraging behavioral change (Canniford, 2012). Visual representations of a future state can reveal to participants what is possible beyond grief and thus elicits a state of altered feelings. The inclusion of such a resource in research can operate to break one’s assumptions and encourage the reflexive development of concepts and theories, thus allowing for more open dialogues.

Tools to Access and Represent the ‘Unsayable’

Marketing and consumer scholars employ various techniques to access sentiments that are difficult to convey. As noted above, scholars have found various visual representation tools to be valuable in research and representation (Belk et al., 2018; Heisley & Levy, 1991). Throughout the course of humanity, the visual language of art has provided people an outlet for expression (Mansfield, 2014). Yet art does not exist in isolation; it connects storytellers (e.g., artists/influencers) to audiences (e.g., consumers/participants), helping people understand their inner and outer worlds (van Laer, Visconti, & Feiereisen, 2018). As a narrative is visually played out, these worlds function to communicate meaning and draw people in, serving to document personal experience, portray individual behaviors and intentions, increase self-efficacy, and

strengthen self-worth (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Narratives also support the understanding of established cultural meanings through a heuristic process (Thompson, 1997).

Chow et al. (2019) describe Arts-Based Research (ABR) as an iterative process that uniquely engages consumers in research inquiry, opening up transformative dialogues around issues of empathy that might not have been unpacked by other means. ABR can be used in problem-centered contexts by encouraging the use of new and interdisciplinary techniques to bring about wider societal changes (Leavy, 2015). Chow et al. (2019) highlight the need for future research to make ABR more influential and activate more interdisciplinary conversations. Goulding et al. (2018) have also been successful in putting arts-based methodologies center stage in an approach they term ‘Cultural Animation.’ The exponential growth in the multisensory marketplace thus provides opportunities to pursue creative expertise for inspiration in the development of new visual methods of inquiry.

Roles for art in the generation of academic knowledge is not new. Artists and researchers work within distinct but related fields such as participatory arts, critical arts practice, relational aesthetics, and community-engaged art. Facer and Enright (2016) discuss how digital art portraying motifs of neighborhood architecture can provide a visual representation of community spirit and place. Art has thus served to provide immersive, abstract, and visceral insights into the nature of human experience. Coessens and her colleagues (2009) stress the need to interrogate both artistic and academic research paradigms, while Bishop (2012) argues that a relationship with the canon requires that artists undertake research by engaging in years of discursive interviews, arguments, and conversations. In this study, we argue that the visual narrative, reflected by and conveyed through art and coupled with ethnographic methods, uncovers nuance and amplifies a participant’s story through a visceral medium.

In summary, there is an opportunity to develop a method where insights from practitioners who work in a variety of disciplines, such as art, may be systematically integrated into marketing and consumer multisensory research. Through art, multisensory understandings of human experience can be made affective and accessible, allowing for a richer understanding of grief to reconcile the past. Art inspired by participant experience necessitates a shift through the sensory (e.g., the painting) and towards a discursive exchange (e.g., between artist, participant, and researcher), which can help to maintain the experiential integrity of lived experience that otherwise may be difficult to convey. Promoting interdisciplinarity collaborations provides a level of reflexivity, leading to new avenues of communication that connect senses to feelings and materials.

Methods

Empirical Context

The empirical context for this study is deceased organ donation, a phenomenon encompassing profound experiences of life and death. The initial purpose of the research was to understand how DDFs experience the loss of a loved one and the donation of their organs. We quickly realized that these experiences were multisensory in nature; thus, interviews and participant observation were insufficient to capture the nuance embedded within those experiences. The experiences of DDFs thus provided a unique opportunity to consider interdisciplinary research partnerships. First, the experiences of DDFs, situated as they are at the interface between life and death, provide a unique insight into a multisensory (e.g., sight, touch, sound, taste, smell) consumption phenomena where researchers may need support in making sense of nuanced and complex experiences. Second, this is an intensively felt experience where

individuals are often able to articulate the facts of their experience yet struggle to convey the accompanying feelings. Thus, this phenomenon provides an opportunity to clearly demonstrate the role of an IC, in this case a professional artist, to add another layer of insight into how traumatic experiences are recast into future expectations and actualizations. We acknowledge that our participant families self-selected to be DDFs; thus, we do not propose that this sample is fully representative of all families of the deceased, particularly those who declined to become donors.

While there are various ICs who could be integrated within a research endeavour, it is important to ascertain which senses may be prominent. Thus, while alternative ICs could have been selected for this venture, such as a songwriter to represent the sounds of loss or an aromatherapist to represent the smell and feel of loss, we specifically selected a fine arts painter. This selection was based on our preliminary data, which consistently indicated how the visual aesthetic of the deceased—a perfectly fit, beautiful body—is perceived in the eyes of the DDFs as being salvaged through the donation process. Bodily aesthetics is prominent in the narratives of our DDFs. To more deeply examine the anatomical and sensory contours of the aesthetic experience (Venkatesh et al., 2010), we therefore believe that experiences of repurposing the utility of the body through its parts is most saliently captured in the medium of fine arts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data that underpins this study begins with eight semi-structured interviews with DDFs residing in the UK (see Table 1). Participants were recruited through ‘The Donor Family Network’ (a leading DDF charity), ‘Believe’ (a charity supporting organ donation and transplantation (ODT)) and ‘Share your Wishes’ (transplant recipients encouraging people

to share their ODT wishes). Interviews were audio recorded and varied in length from 80 to 120 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participant, such as a private home or local coffee shop. Each interview was transcribed and pseudonyms were employed to protect the DDF's anonymity. In addition to interviews, field notes were captured at the Transplant Games in Birmingham UK, whereby transplant recipients compete in a medley of sporting events to raise awareness of ODT.

The first author began interviews by eliciting from the DDFs a chronological perspective of their organ donation experience. These accounts were then probed with emic terms to facilitate interview continuity to more fully understand the unique aspects of each experience and to ascertain in what areas participants were challenged to fully express themselves. Thus, participants were invited to express their stories through their own artwork (e.g., colored pencils), to which they expressed discomfort.

INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Interview transcripts and field notes provide the basis for our analysis and interpretation. Data analysis began with the delineation of the donation process as recounted in interviews. Codes were identified from the literature and emic terms from the initial analysis of the transcripts. Each transcript was then coded individually as well as across phases in the deceased donation experience. Thus, diachronic and synchronic analyses were performed (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Based upon our initial analysis of

the interview data, it became evident that one of the challenges for the participants was the articulation of the embodied, felt encounter of death, which is conceptually vital for this research. At this stage we went back to the literature and found that Arts-Based Research provides an avenue to communicate between the worlds of experience and the spoken word. Participants were then asked and consented to participating in the art project.

Interdisciplinary Data Collection and Analysis

Before the study commenced, an organ donation and transplantation (ODT) medical team collaborated with the researchers to identify the phenomenological realities of ODT. A nephrologist then introduced the lead researcher to their partner ODT charity, The Donor Family Network. These institutional stakeholders later become the advisory board for the study, which facilitated investigator triangulation. This allowed for different perspectives on the context, adding breadth to the phenomena of interest (Denzin, 1978).

Following our initial data collection, we sought to address perceived gaps in the interview data by entering into a multidisciplinary IC with a professional artist. The artist's remit was to [listen to the interviews] and then create paintings (which we paid for and own the rights to) that sought to evoke the [hard-to-capture] multisensory emotions of participants. Our quest to elicit deeper insights in this way is supported by prior research, which finds that art may allow individuals to interpret and express pain in various ways (Radley, 2010). Notably, our offer of the artwork to our participants was declined, as participants felt that owning and viewing the work would bring back painful feelings present at the time of the interview.

Candidates were solicited via a creative brief posted within a Facebook group of local artisans. Interested parties were invited to apply if they were willing to listen to DDF interviews

and interpret what was conveyed through them. The creative brief was informed by our most salient preliminary data insight: organ donation provides DDFs with comfort from their grief. Interested artists responded with their CVs along with examples of related works (most often via Instagram). A short listing of artists was developed based on the narrative qualities evident in their works, such as corporeal aesthetic, color use, and composition.

From our preliminary analysis of the dataset, we identified three sensory elements: (1) the notion of the dark (e.g., death, grief) and the light (e.g., pride, legacy), (2) a sensory-laden anatomical story made possible through medical intervention, and (3) the emotive and active nature of organ donation expressed in the stories of our participants, which, when conveyed through the medium of art, could inspire individuals to become new donors. We thus suggested to the artist that these components be represented in their interpretation of the interviews.

The artist selected signed a nondisclosure agreement to protect participant anonymity and was provided a more detailed research brief than was presented in the advertisement. The expanded brief explained our reasons for seeking to collaborate with an artist and provided education on deceased organ donation and transplantation. Once invited to trial, and after completing two pieces, it became clear that we did not share the same vision as the artist, as the resulting pieces did not capture from the interviews such intricacies as the multifaceted experience of loss or the anatomical nature of the experience. The screening protocol was resumed, with potential candidates interviewed via phone and asked to provide preliminary sketches. From this process, a new artist was chosen based on her ability to capture nuances in the interviews.

Given that this project is part of a larger study on deceased organ donation, we agreed with the artist to focus on a subset of study participants, a time frame for completion, artwork

dimensions, and payment terms. We also requested that the artist write a statement explaining her inspiration for each painting and her interpretation of the interviews. We subsequently interviewed the artist for one hour to gain insight into her creative process, including how she transformed audible data into a visual, tactile, and material representation. She explained that artists are more creative when they listen to music: “You get the feelings...you get into a rhythm while you’re painting.” The artist shared how she “cried a lot listening to the interviews” and she describes how “you could feel this person.” She expressed how she tried to convey two hours of audible feelings into a painting that is felt with a single glance. In closing, she reveals her profound empathy for the sensory experience: “When I look back at the sketches, I can hear the person speaking.”

The resulting paintings, drawn from eight interviews representing seven families and nine deceased donors, tangibly accessed and visually represented participant experiences which were either inaccessible or difficult to communicate and translate into verbal language (e.g., grief, loss, shock). Note that the aim of grounding our data in an art-based representation was not to create an ‘accurate’ depiction of the donation experience but to illuminate those aspects of the DDFs’ experiences that were less verbally communicable, making them less accessible.

Over a period of six months, the artist produced and framed eight A2-sized acrylic paintings. Images of the paintings were shared with the DDFs in preparation for follow-up interviews during which there was an opportunity to triangulate data reflecting their experience. These follow-up interviews, lasting approximately forty minutes, focused on participants’ impressions and sensory responses to the artwork. Particular attention was paid to surfacing any thoughts and feelings, spoken and unspoken, expressed in addition to those offered in the first interview. We probed participants’ sensory readings with questions such as ‘If the art had a

sound, what would it sound like?’ and questioned them regarding the degree to which they felt the artwork depicted their experience. For many of those we interviewed, the art added visual depth to what they felt at the time or illuminated feelings they had not previously expressed.

The artwork highlighted feelings that were salient in the context of the narrative (e.g., sentiment, tone of voice) but had been introspectively neglected by the participant and the researchers. By surfacing those feelings, the paintings brought together the DDF member, the artist, and the researchers to collaboratively oscillate between expressing, seeing, and understanding to more fully interrogate the experience. This enabled forms of reflexive discovery to be acknowledged and problematized, which contributed to a broader account of death and donation and the multisensory experiences surrounding it. At a stimulus-response level the artwork provided a visual rhetoric to express consumer lifestyles, daily rituals, interactions, and meanings that transcended textual interpretation (Chow et al., 2019).

One intention of this approach is to generate alternative representations that may be accessible for academic and non-academic audiences. For example, the resultant art pieces could be displayed in high-impact public spaces such as art galleries, exhibition centers, airports, and retail centers. To that end, we presented these pieces at an art center in the UK as part of a series on the collective benefits of organ donation. Postcards were included in the art exhibition for the purpose of allowing attendees to respond to the work. This approach to multisensory research is generalized for use by scholars exploring multisensory phenomena (Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Our exploration into DDFs' experiences of death and organ donation through multisensory collaborations provides an opportunity to (1) access participants' previously untapped and underexpressed thoughts and feelings; (2) depict multisensory inconsistencies and illogicalities within the experience; and (3) uncover additional areas of inquiry.

Experiences of Deceased Organ Donation

Unlike living organ donation, where the donator themselves controls the experience and can articulate emerging meanings (Bradford, 2019), deceased donation is experienced by surviving loved ones. Immediately following a sudden and traumatic event, the deceased's loved ones are striving to make sense of their profound loss and contemplating a future that can no longer be shared with the deceased. Though trauma survivors may find it difficult to imagine their future (Herman, 2015), our artist renderings represent how DDFs experience trauma and recast expectations for their future in the face of their immense loss. Alongside our artist, we identified how such expectations arise from DDFs' experiences, described by the artist as "heart-wrenching accounts."

Next, we present three themes captured within the artwork: ethereal and tangible; endings and beginnings; and loss and reclamation. Within each theme we detail (1) the multisensory experience evident in the DDF's first interview, (2) the artist's rendering of that experience, (3) the new insights deduced from the DDF in response to the art, and (4) the knowledge and understanding that the fine art approach provided the researchers.

Ethereal and Tangible

Death provides opportunities for individuals to contemplate the material and immaterial manifestations of loss. Marketing and consumer research on experiences of death focus on consumption objects and their role in sustaining identity (Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Gentry et al., 1995; Nations et al., 2017). Notably, those studies acknowledge the lifelessness of the deceased in contrast with the vitality of the bereaved. While the deceased is in fact lifeless, DDFs have a liminal experience of death through their loved one. This is the case because even as their loved one is pronounced brain-dead, their body is kept alive through machinery in order that organ donation remains a possibility.

The initial interviews revealed that when parents are facing the loss of their child, there is often a desire to retain a sensory representation of that child. One participant, Grace, lost her son, Louis, in a car accident. She describes her son as fit and healthy prior to an accident that left him hospitalized. Louis's condition deteriorated quickly and he was pronounced brain-dead soon after admission. Even so, his body housed healthy organs. The mother acknowledged that despite their initial shock, upon learning Louis carried a donor card, organ donation became a 'natural choice' for the family. Grace described the early experiences of sensory loss in the hospital:

I picked up his [iPod], and the first song that came on was Avril Lavigne, *Don't Fall to Pieces*. I thought, just spooky! So, we had that song at his funeral ... Now, if I hear songs like that, obviously they make me cry. Initially it was *his* songs, but then I just smile.

Two weeks after the family donated his organs, Grace and her husband received letters from three organ recipients expressing their deepest gratitude for the gift of life. They learned of one recipient of a kidney who also had a son the same age as Louis. Grace recounted how another recipient, who received a liver, was able to give birth to three children following the transplant. Grace described feeling pleased that the vital organs would provide long life to her

“extended family” and comforted knowing that “out of something bad, there’s something good.”

Even so, it was evident that the sensory loss experienced by the family was difficult:

It was extremely important that I had lots of photos in the house when he first went... To have that was just so important to me.

Grace described as best she could that having photographic evidence of Louis’s life was important, yet she was unable to fully articulate in the first interview how those photographs helped.

The artist’s interpretation of the transformative experience within this family is akin to chrysalis, in that the beauty of a butterfly emerges from a cocoon that appears as if life has departed. Here, the deceased once was integral to the life of the family and is no longer. The transformation that families like Grace’s undergo reflects their desire to extend the tangible experiences (e.g., sense of touch) they once had of their loved one.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The second interview provided additional insights into DDF experiences of donation. In these interviews, participants were asked to share their perceptual and sensory reflections or reactions to the painting as inspired by their experience of organ donation. Upon reviewing the artwork, Grace observed:

Excitement of butterflies flapping about - the wings. I feel, in the background, classical joyous music containing feelings of happiness and calm. Orchestral, but very light, modern, classical, and flowing music.

When probed to discuss her interpretation of the painting, Grace variously described her auditory experience of organ donation as feeling “joy,” “excitement,” and “calmness.” In comparison to the first interview, interviewees’ reflections on a painting generated a more complex version of sensory storytelling. For example, Grace adds further depth to her first interview narrative by explaining how butterflies are a “symbol of new life and hope.” Further, by stimulating the visual sense in the painting she links the ‘red color of the heart’ to the belief that donation is an act of “love.” None of these perspectives were present in her first interview. Yet, these insights are important as they illustrate how talking about difficult experiences through the medium of a personalised painting delimits the behavioral constraints which can be imposed on participants during traditional interviews.

Where prior consumer research explores the efforts involved in individuals’ personal transformations (Bradford et al., 2017; Hemetsberger et al., 2019), we find that bringing another medium into the conversation with the participant and researcher generates new insights. In particular, we are able to understand that these family members initiate a transformation to achieve tangible connections to their deceased loved ones through various senses even as they are not actually present in their lives. Akin to such effortful transformations (Miles, 2009), the artist interpretation captures the transformation of heart-wrenching death experiences into hope as possibilities for renewed life emerges (Figure 2). In Grace’s case, the artist depicts butterflies, which are viewed by cultures including Greek, Roman, and Native Americans as symbols of soul. Notably, the butterflies form the body representing the lost child, which go forward to provide renewed life to others.

Endings and Beginnings

Death marks the end of life, yet organ donation provides opportunities for new beginnings for both the bereaved and the recipients of the deceased's organs. While organ donation cannot replace a loved one, it does provide an opportunity for the bereaved to contemplate alternative futures.

Consider James, whose son Daniel died doing what he loved: skydiving. Though the family understood there were risks in skydiving, they did not anticipate receiving a call that their son had been hospitalized. Upon learning of his brain death, James said in his initial interview, "The last thing I'd want is someone like this surviving and being incredibly disabled...I remember feeling that I'd rather him die if that's how it's going to be." Though deeply heartbroken by their loss, the parents had a sense of hope knowing "[h]e's not just dead. Parts of him are still alive...You hang onto that and it is useful in my point of view to the whole grieving process." Thus, Daniel's death marked the end of his life, yet organ donation created an imagined future of 'parts' of their son to enjoy continued life. In his initial interview, James did not elaborate on how his sensory experience of death, loss, and grief materialized.

When translating the family's experience into art, the artist sought to capture the positive energy related by the parents as to the way their son lived his life and how he loved skydiving (Figure 3). The artist's depiction of the deceased floating in the air provides an opportunity to reflect how he died, what he loved, and where they imagine him to be. Further, there is the depiction of an imagined connection between the deceased and those who received his organs. Finally, the artist describes her attempt to capture the selfless and loving way Daniel's family and friends still approach their remembrance of him and to demonstrate the far-reaching and positive nature of organ donation.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

In his second interview, in which he responds to the artist's painting, James articulates the visceral sensations he imagines his son would have felt seconds before his death:

When he died our feelings were of nothingness. Everything else around us was blotted out. Our first couple weeks of grieving we turned off the radio, we didn't talk to many people, no television, had no input at all, and just cutting off all outside senses. And I image that's what he would have experienced. The last sound he would have heard would have been the air rushing past him until it all finished.

James further describes how the painting triggers feelings of inner sorrow:

I don't like [the painting], but having thought about it, I understand why I don't like it. And I think I don't like it because it reflects very well what my feelings and emotions were...In that respect, I think the artist has done an incredible job in bringing out those feelings and emotions. It's painful in that respect.

Neither of the insights were accessible during our initial interview, a phenomenon that reinforces the artwork's contribution. Thus, employing ICs to access additional perspectives of an experience has important consequences for how researchers can access unspeakable senses and feelings.

The families in our study describe how they imagine the donation helping others. There is an awareness shared by all participants that donation allows family members to consider how to begin anew with a part of their family, and thus themselves, missing. Beyond feeling that there is an opportunity to repurpose the unexpected loss in a meaningful way, there is the sense that the donation process itself provides sensory support for grieving. Beyond an understanding of experiences of grief, we gained insight into how the medium of art can elicit storytelling that allows for accessing and articulating pain and suffering. James's account of how Daniel's

sensory deprivation in death was mirrored by his family's sensory deprivation in grief is similarly instructive.

Loss and Reclamation

We find that the organ donation experience provides an opportunity for the bereaved to reclaim part of what they feel was lost. Just as these families find new beginnings, those experiences allow them to reclaim the essence of their beloved through donation.

In her first interview, Tim's mother, Louise, describes her son as a vibrant hockey player who, unbeknownst to her, had registered as an organ donor when he started university. Learning this at a time when she was grappling with his untimely brain death confirmed the family's decision to donate his organs and provided them with the fortitude to donate all of his useful parts (e.g., tendons, valves, skin). Despite such confirmation, Louise describes her reticence at the thought of tarnishing her visual memory of Tim as a "handsome young man" when donating his skin for grafts:

I just stopped and said 'Hang on a minute. What's Tim going to look like?' Because in my mind, as a mum it also worried me ...what was he going to look like?' [The nurses] said, 'It's like using a cheese grater and using very fine scrapings of skin off Tim's back.' I said, 'Of course you can if it's off his back. We're not going to see it.'

Louise contrasts her experience with that of a friend who lost her son in a tragic car accident. The friend says she is jealous: "[We] weren't offered the opportunity...We would have done that. [Louise's family] got so much comfort. We would have done that and we couldn't."

The artist's interpretation represents the tension between comfort and reticence found in organ donation (Figure 4). Like all others in our study, this family experienced a degree of contentment knowing their loved one's senseless death would be helpful for someone else's life. In describing the rendering, the artist says, "The dark people in the background are the family

reluctantly giving his body away. Their hands hold on to him. He in turn comforts them with his hand on the center character as if to reassure them what they are doing is fine with him.”

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Evaluating the artwork in the second interview, Louise she felt it communicated “something really goose bumpy and really beautiful!” These reflections transcended the sensory insights collected initially, as the artwork elicited a memory of touch and corporeal sensation. Further, Louise now invoked the sense of sound when she described her experience of organ donation as “requiem” (e.g., a music composition honoring the deceased). Sharing how her husband’s last words to her were “Keep Tim’s memory alive,” Louise emphasizes the importance of the artwork in connecting feelings, thoughts, and expressions to kindle forgotten sensory memories of her son’s “beautiful, peaceful body”:

The fact that it has made me have all these feelings, I presume that’s what an artist wants somebody to do, wants somebody to look and think, and the more I look at it the more I think.

By including paintings as part of the data collection, we conceptualize the art as a living site for the articulation of organ donation, and it is possible to understand how art can facilitate sensory storytelling in ways that are empirically meaningful. Louise’s reading of the painting has helped us to consider the complex enmeshment of corporeal and symbolic expressions of organ donation in the construction of memory.

Discussion

This article set out to address the following questions: How do we get participants to articulate the embodied, felt encounter of death, and how do we investigate data representations from industry professionals to generate novel, theoretical, and practical insights? We identify a process that offers an interdisciplinary approach to better understand and examine multisensory experiences. These questions are answered across four illustrative stages (Figure 1). The context of the research was deceased organ donation. However, sensory loss is only one area in which a fine art methodology has potential. In the proceeding section we detail how the process allows us to access, uncover, and develop insights that support knowledge generation and facilitate its dissemination in post-representational research. Next, we present a four-stage approach for interdisciplinary research employing industry-based ICs, beginning with how this approach may be beneficial to scholars and how to apply it.

Stage 1. Interdisciplinary collaboration

An interdisciplinary collaboration can be of greatest value when research participants are unable to access the communication tools they require to tell their stories. The authors partnered with a fine arts painter as a methodological intervention when semi-structured interviews did not yield the ‘hard-to-reach’ sensorial data needed. Following careful consideration of their culture, expertise, and ability to produce alternative representations of reality, an IC can be of value in challenging marketing researchers to engage differently with data collection. In this exemplar, rather than codes, a fine art approach pushes one to focus on the sensual and bodily experience, making awareness of that experience more explicit to in order to generate a reflexive understanding of multisensory loss. As no one interdisciplinary collaboration works in every

situation, the form and nature of the alternative representation has to be adjusted according to the needs and challenges faced by the particular research team.

Stage 2. Phenomenon of interest

Based on the data gathered and an initial analysis of the findings, if the phenomena under study presents ‘unspeakable’ issues, ‘complex gestalts’ (Levy, 1996), or paradoxical and nuanced responses, it can be argued that the data set could be expanded with the help of a third-party expert. Complex phenomena that lends itself to an interdisciplinary collaboration include the paradoxical quality of individuals choosing consumption experiences that elicit physical pain (Scott et al., 2017), the tensions of extreme risk taking in order to comply with culturally prescribed beauty standards (Schouten, 1991), and the contradictions and dilemmas of deceleration to reach an alternative temporal logic. In sum, when the phenomena of interest yields data insights that are inexplicable to the informant, an IC can enable participants to reflect on experiential ways of knowing that were previously inaccessible.

Stage 3. Interrogation and interpretation of findings

The unique value of the interdisciplinary collaboration is triggered when the IC represents *ethnographic methods* (e.g., interview audio recordings) via a new medium (e.g., art, sculpture, music), in an iterative process of *reflexivity and interpretation*. The IC’s protocol of listening to the musicality (e.g., tempo, hesitation, pitch, emphasis, emoting, vocal embellishments, and rhythmic variations) of a participant’s voice in an interview recording, compared to the researcher’s sensorially flat reading of an interview transcript, can facilitate a deeper experiential way of knowing (Heron & Reason, 1997). In this study, a fine arts approach

helped DDFs establish a ‘third language’ to describe an experience that was creatively shaped through graphics, music, movement, atmospheres, and other aesthetic narratives. We thus theorize that a third-party line of inquiry can tap into a reflexive bodily understanding via a processual and relational epistemology.

Stage 4. Dissemination

An interdisciplinary approach can transcend the linguistic and cultural differences encountered between academics and the external audiences to whom they disseminate their findings (Goulding et al., 2018). For example, drawings sketched by product developers, figures from food scientists, and storyboards from filmmakers can be readily packed for journal consumption, conferences, and pedagogical content. But to broaden research impact, academics can make visible their solutions to complex societal problems by introducing their alternative representations in relevant outlets to influence participation (e.g., airports, libraries, and retail centers). Further, opportunities for observers of these alternative representations should be provided with options to share their reactions (e.g., tablets, post-it notes, postcards). Disseminating research findings across multiple platforms enables academic knowledge to become visible to diverse audiences through visceral realism to multisensory consumption phenomena.

This process, as exemplified in this paper, illustrates how an interdisciplinary partnership can be of value in accessing and representing a diverse range of evidence to support knowledge creation in marketing and consumer research. The scope of IC partnerships is limited only by researchers’ imaginations. For example, when exploring the complex multisensory experience of Asante death rituals in Ghana (Bonsu & Belk, 2003), academics could collaborate with Ghanaian

casket makers to gain an alternative understanding of how the deceased are sensorially represented by the characterisation of their casket (e.g., eagle, aircraft, chili pepper). Such collaborations may offer substantial insights for scholars seeking to understand the development of new and emerging experiential innovations in the marketplace, such as new forms of entertainment informed by artificial intelligence (Van Laer et al., 2013) or extended assemblages of unruly sensory phenomena (Canniford et al., 2017). Such collaborations offer opportunities to actualize optimal interdisciplinary research teams to explore diverse research phenomena.

Implications for consumer research data collection and representation

Theoretical insights provide the basis of four main implications for academics, managers, policymakers, and consumers.

Academics

This research illustrates how an interdisciplinary approach can be of value in facilitating access to and representation of a diverse range of material and active research findings to support marketing and consumer research. We deepen our understanding of an alternative mode of knowledge dissemination by leveraging an artistic approach to conceptualize ICs. Further, we provide insight into how multifaceted and paradoxical research phenomena can be accessed to create new opportunities for narrative discovery. For example, the marketplace is replete with encounters between the sacred and profane (Belk et al., 1989; Bradford, 2015) as they acquire, dispose or gift of possessions. We argue that such ICs will allow academics to become reflexive about previously unimaginable meanings and question assumptions that seem unquestionable.

Managers

Notable benefits exist for managers in applying an interdisciplinary approach to multisensory consumer experiences. Art can be infused by managers in a deeply embodied way within transformational service environments to support consumers navigating traumatic multisensory experiences. Meeting in a divorce lawyers office, waiting in abortion clinic and staging a funeral are all situations in which the aesthetic qualities of art can support people in overcoming loss. Furthermore, different art forms can be used by managers in the ‘death industry’ to assist them in expressing sensitive dialogues surrounding grief. Thus managers can build on the insights from healthcare that recognize the value of art in painful (Tarr et al., 2018) and healing contexts (Duncan, 2003) to initiate a heightened level of awareness, reflexivity and responsiveness to unheard or underrepresented customer voices.

Policymakers

Art, in its embrace of the interconnected and interactive elements of the perceptual, social, and spatial, is well suited to generating foresight that reaches policymakers. By displaying reflexive, expressive, and controversial market-based phenomena through artwork in public spaces—convention centers, art galleries and airports—art can instigate shifts in public opinion, and perhaps initiate social action. Consider, for instance, how Banksy, the anti-consumerist street artist, has engaged a young audience in communicating the absurdity of brand worship. Banksy’s work has inspired social activism and change (Chaffee, 1993), which has powerful implications for public policymakers in revealing political considerations, battles, and expressions. Thus, by leveraging art, policymakers can better elicit the types of behaviors sought in response to their actions.

Consumers

We present an approach to address methodological challenges that can be transformative when working with marginalized consumer communities (Chow et al., 2019). An artistic approach to multisensory experiences could be particularly useful for exploring the ways in which consumers interpret, negotiate, and embed art into their lived experiences. Exploring and unpacking consumer confrontation with art is one example of how additional narratives can emerge. For the consumer, an artist can contribute new forms of embodied identity and agency to the multisensory understanding of their experience. For example, an artwork can be used to visually document a discrete period in time—the interview—in which a participant is experiencing specific feelings. By revisiting the participant at another point in time, the artwork can visually facilitate longitudinal research as it provides insights into differences across time in the consumer experience. Consumer engagement with the art can enable examinations into other future research questions, such as: How does art affect the construction of embodied knowledge? How does art engage with participants' internal and external worlds? How will consumers make sense of the existential implications of art in a society that is increasingly driven by virtual reality, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence? And, how will consumers respond to visual storytelling that confronts invisible truths?

Conclusions

This paper explores the nature of the connection between marketing research and art as a vehicle of representation to address how marketing research may be presented differently. Our decision to apply an interdisciplinary approach to our research stemmed from our desire to elicit

a deeper trove of participant feedback than seemed accessible through traditional marketing methodologies alone. Given that this approach enhanced our findings, we conclude that there is value in marketing and consumer researchers taking an interdisciplinary approach to research relating to multisensory consumption experiences, particularly when studying multisensory, embodied, and pre-reflexive phenomena (Blackman, 2012; Thrift, 2008). Interdisciplinary partnerships thus move scholarly inquiry from a purely academic, text-based medium of representation to visual, aesthetic, and reflexive representations of human experience.

We believe the present study demonstrates that an interdisciplinary approach to marketing and consumer research that explores the multisensory facets of the consumer experience can generate novel theoretical and practical insights. Collaborations with professionals who create forms of art designed to more deeply elicit consumers' reflections expands the possibilities for data access, representation, analysis, and dissemination. Importantly, we believe that an arts-based approach is just one of a kaleidoscope of interdisciplinary collaborations to be explored (Figure 1). Multisensory representation could be accessed by providing field notes to fashion designers, participant diaries to perfumers, or photographs to filmmakers. Although the crisis of representation remains, art, akin to organ donation, is a medium that offers much potential for aesthetic storytelling.

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Table 1: Outline of participants			
Family Member	Relationship to Donor	Cause of Brain Death	Art Piece Title
Amy	Mother of Finley	Both killed in car accident	Human scaffold
	Wife of Steve		Human scaffold
Keith	Father of Miles	Cyst in the brain	In the garden, when we see a butterfly, we know he's here
Amelia	Aunt of Miles		Even children can donate
Karina	Wife of Max	Spontaneous brain bleed	From one person
Louise	Mother of Tim	Blow to neck by hockey puck	From a dark place - if Tim's life helped someone
James	Father of Daniel	Skydiving fall	He flew too close to the ground
Danielle	Mother of Charles	Blow to the head	Those that are left behind are walking in the valley of the shadow of death
Grace	Mother of Louis	Car accident	I wouldn't want to walk down the street and see someone with his eyes

Figure 1. An Approach to Multisensory Research Employing an Interdisciplinary Collaborator

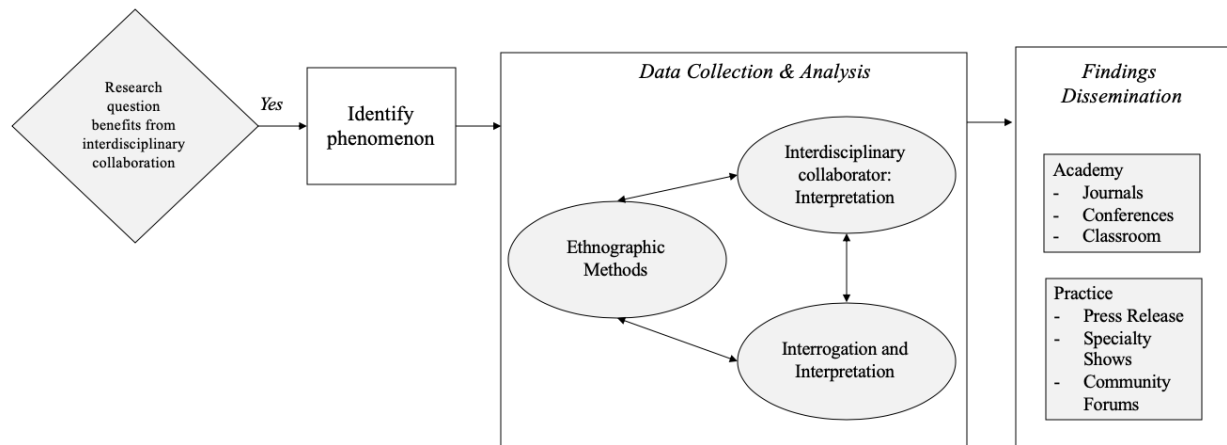


Figure 2. *'In the garden: When we see a butterfly, we know he's there'.*



Figure 3: He Flew Too Close to the Ground

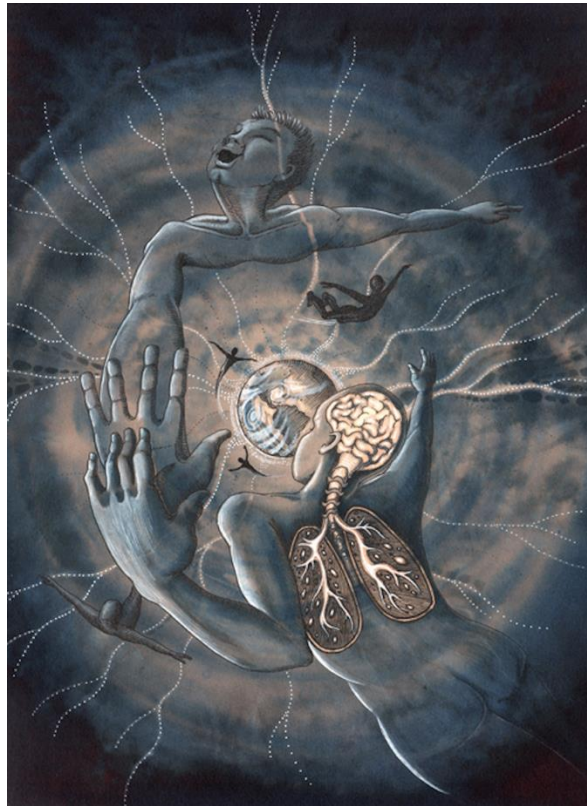


Figure 4. From A Dark Place: If Tom's Life Helped Someone

