

## Interdisciplinary concept development as a path to impact: “Vicarious sensory engagement” and YouTube food videos

Researchers have established that interdisciplinarity can increase academic impact (Larivière & Gringas, 2010; Larivière, Haustein, & Börner, 2015; Wang, Thijs, & Glänzel, 2015). To explore the impact-interdisciplinarity relationship, researchers, such as those cited here, commonly take citation count as a proxy for impact, and then analyze bibliometric datasets, such as Web of Science, to identify connections between journals’ disciplinary categories and authors’ citation practices. The question of what makes interdisciplinary research impactful is complex: more interdisciplinarity does not necessarily mean more impact (Larivière & Gringas, 2010). However, as information behaviour researchers strategize around increasing impact, working interdisciplinarily is an important potential strategy.

In information science, where disciplinary boundaries are an enduring preoccupation (Madsen, 2016), researchers can benefit from opportunities to discuss how interdisciplinary work can happen, and what difference this work can make. This visual presentation contributes to such a discussion, by describing an interdisciplinary project rooted in information behaviour research. Specifically, the presentation details the development of the concept of “vicarious sensory engagement.” The concept was developed through an arts-based reanalysis of YouTube-related data from a larger qualitative study. The presentation will share analytical techniques, as well as visual data, including participant “walking tour” videos, and YouTube food videos.

YouTube is a popular place to learn about food today. It is cited by participants as an important source in the author’s study of everyday food information practices (citation withheld). Participant Megan, for example, describes her affection for the channel [Binging with Babish](#), by explaining that YouTube has enabled her to reclaim cultural knowledge, such as recipes, which her parents withheld from her while she was growing up.

An important factor in YouTube’s position as a compelling food information source is “vicarious sensory engagement,” which was identified through reanalysis of existing study data, plus new narrative and visual analysis of YouTube videos (Riessman, 2008; Ball & Smith, 2011). Vicarious sensory engagement is the process of responding to a video’s diegetic sensory features, such as how food tastes or smells, as mediated by the

people appearing in the video. The most popular YouTube food videos exhibit a powerful combination of three elements: enjoyable “food porn” aesthetics (McDonnell, 2016), educational and utilitarian information, and narrative drive. Crucially, it is the sensory experiences of the people appearing in the videos—experiences vicariously engaged with by viewers—that underpin these three elements, positioning YouTube videos as memorable information sources.

The work shared in this visual presentation is interdisciplinary in that it brings information behaviour research into conversation with narrative concepts such as catharsis and gaze (Mulvey, 1975). By enabling better understanding of people’s engagements with YouTube, this work can have impacts such as improving how food information is communicated, and informing responses to YouTube’s notorious reams of bigoted and pseudoscientific content (Tufekci, 2018). By illustrating an information behaviour contribution to broader concept development, this visual presentation exemplifies the potential for information behaviour to become more “heterogeneous, permeable, and hospitable,” and from there, to have a larger impact (Madsen, 2016, p. 2699).

[497 words]

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