



An exploration of the qualities and features of art apps for art therapy



Sunjin “Nancy” Choe, MFA, MA *

Los Angeles, CA, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 21 January 2014

Keywords:

Digital art making
Digital art materials
Digital media in art therapy
Art apps
iPad in art therapy

ABSTRACT

Using a participatory design (PD) approach, this study explored the qualifying features and qualities of digital art materials, specifically art apps on iPads, for art therapy use. The qualitative study included a questionnaire survey of 4 art therapists using iPads with clients in therapy and four separate focus groups with 15 art therapist participants. The focus group participants engaged in art directives with nine art making apps identified as potentially useful in art therapy. The results revealed that while no single commercial art app satisfied the needs of all art therapists and potential clients, three distinct qualities and six concrete features of an “ideal” art app for art therapy emerged. These desirable criteria of an art app can be used in the future development of a customized art app for art therapy. In addition, these findings may expand the parameters of art therapy’s art making practice and artistic vocabulary by illustrating the potential therapeutic and expressive use of digital art media. While the findings reveal unlimited possibilities for the meaningful use of digital art media in art therapy, they also acknowledge how the unique characteristics of digital art media will require carefully considered limitations and restrictions.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

When *Newsweek* art critic Blake Gopnik (2011) chose his “10 Most Important Artists of Today,” it was notable that none of the artists on the list created traditional paintings or sculptures. In fact, many of them had also utilized digital hardware or software to create their highly revered works of art. Even David Hockney, one of the most influential painters of our time, recently showcased his iPad paintings at the Royal Academy (Lloyd, 2012). Another living master painter, Gerhard Richter, also ventured into digital imaging at age 80 (Rosenberg, 2012). As practitioners of art, education, and science are increasingly exploring and developing new technological devices and programs to enhance their services in this digital age, art therapy scholars such as Thong (2007), Orr (2006), Orr (2010), and Moon (2010) have suggested that the future of art therapy depends on opening up to new areas of image making and new creative tools. Nevertheless, research and development is significantly lacking with regard to the use of digital technology in art therapy.

The portability and highly functional capability of computer tablets have made digital media convenient, practical, and dynamic for artists and art therapists to explore and use. The expanding number of art-making mobile applications, commonly called “art apps,” provides promising opportunities for art therapists, since many art apps are sophisticated enough to be used as art-making tools for artists at all levels. Still, most consumer grade art apps

appear to lack therapeutic and qualifying features needed for art therapy. By thoroughly investigating the qualities and features of digital art media, specifically art apps on an iPad, in the context of art therapy, this article may uncover design parameters needed for developing an art app appropriate for art therapy.

Literature review

In art therapy, art materials become an extension of the holding environment for the client and register as part of the creative process and therapeutic change (Robbins & Goffia-Girasek, 2000). Art materials and media are the elements through which creativity and meaning are made, as “they are intermediaries between private ideas, thoughts, feelings, and concepts, and their external manifestation in tangible, sensual form” (Moon, 2010, p. xv). Thus, the inherent qualities and effects of art materials and media play a central role in art therapy and have been discussed throughout art therapy history, albeit in a limited fashion (Moon, 2010). Landgarten (1987) used the terms *least controlled* and *more controlled* to describe art materials in relation to the client’s conscious command over them and influence on the art process. Kagin and Lusebrink (1978) proposed media dimension variables as a guide to categorize art materials and media by three levels: fluid/resistive, simple/complex, and structured/unstructured. This was later expanded into expressive therapies continuum (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978), a comprehensive analysis of processes and responses to diverse art media and materials. Orr (2010) discussed how the client’s and therapist’s personal histories and associations with the medium impact the perceived qualities of the medium.

* Correspondence to: 530 South Lake Avenue #748, Pasadena, CA 91101, United States. Tel.: +1 626 737 1727.

E-mail address: nancychoe@hotmail.com

The history of art therapy illustrates the need to be attuned to the various effects of art materials and media, and the ongoing consideration for the potential impact of materials is the responsibility of the art therapist (Moon, 2010, Chapter 1). Yet, art therapy has mostly limited its practice, theory, and pedagogy to drawing, collage, painting, photography, and clay sculpture (Moon, 2010, p. xvi). While digital art mediums do not conform to the descriptive inherent qualities of traditional art materials, it offers “some distinctly different relational, tactile, and sensory experiences in contrast to traditional art materials” (Malchiodi, 2011, p. 34). Artist and filmmaker Scott Ligon (2010) discussed digital technology’s reconceptualization of the creative process by examining how it: (1) blurs the boundaries between mediums to the point of irrelevance, (2) possesses potential for endless experimentation and variation, (3) allows for infinite duplication with no loss of quality, (4) is able to reach large audiences directly with no middleman, and (5) contains no inherent esthetic or technical limitations (Ligon, 2010, p. 13).

Orr (2010) similarly highlighted digital art media’s infinite possibilities for easy manipulation and transformation of various art forms with their unique ability to combine image, sound, and movement. As digital media “can also collage time, distance, sound, two-dimensional (2-D) with three-dimensional (3-D), and movement with stillness” (Orr, 2010, p. 99), expressions are no longer limited by the qualities of materials and media. Malchiodi (2011) also pointed out the social networking aspect of digital media, where communication and personal expression can happen in real-time with a mass audience, and where boundaries and understandings of the private and public are blurred.

As citizens of different cultures communicate, interact, collaborate, and co-construct in new cultural sites of the digital world, two concepts have emerged as important in art education: *multiliteracy* and *multimodality* (Duncum, 2004). According to Duncum, multiliteracy requires interaction between two or more discrete cultural sign systems, and multimodality illustrates the many different types of communication modes used by our current digital culture; these two concepts are imperative in helping students learn art. Peppler (2010) similarly argued that digital arts “can be conceptualized as being fundamentally connected to the development of new literacies” (p. 6) and “the ability to make connections between multiple modalities” (p. 28) distinguishes the digital arts from conventional arts and crafts learned in classrooms. The concepts of *multiliteracy* and *multimodality* emphasized in art education relate to increased calls to understand the properties and clinical considerations of digital art media by art therapists (i.e., Malchiodi, 2011; Orr, 2010; Thong, 2007).

However, current art therapy literature lacks in-depth research and education in digital materiality and even illustrates concern and resistance to the use of digital media in art therapy (Klorer, 2009; Potash, 2009). Art therapists’ own emotional factors such as anxiety and fear (Asawa, 2009) and biases against technology have proven to be barriers to the adoption of technology (Orr, 2005, 2006; Peterson, Stovall, Elkins, & Parker-Bell, 2005). Recent studies, however, such as those of Austin (2010), Malchiodi (2011), Moon (2010), Orr (2006, 2010), and Thong (2007) provide valid reasons to legitimately include digital media in art therapy’s clinical and pedagogical practice as digital-based art tools are becoming culturally, socially, and artistically more relevant than ever. The concurring meta-message in these studies has been to acknowledge the significant changes in communication styles and processes of art expressions in *digital natives* (a generation born in the 1980s, Prensky, 2001a, 2001b) and the *iGeneration* (born in the 1990s and beyond, Rosen, 2011). In addition, a large part of technology-based interventions involved empowering and strengthening the ego of children and adolescents through choice and focused willingness to master the techniques (e.g., Austin, 2010; Thong, 2007).

Although Gussak and Nyce (1999) proposed, more than a decade ago, for art therapists to work with developers and designers to create art programs with art therapy clients in mind, only one study (Mihailidis et al., 2010) to date in the last decade has sought to develop a customized digital technological device and software (an ePAD) for art therapy, specifically for older adults with dementia. While Mihailidis et al. (2010) did not include an identifiable art therapist on their research team, they conducted a general survey of art therapists to help guide the structural and design needs of their prototype. The three prototypes produced by the team not only accommodated the client’s need for simple and efficient art materials but also fulfilled the art therapist’s need for customization, assessment, saving and reviewing work, and control over assigning appropriate art tasks in therapy.

Research approach

A participatory design (PD) approach was chosen to explore the qualifying features and qualities of an art app for art therapy. The research engaged stakeholders (art therapists) and was intended to find essential criteria for developing an art app that fits the needs of art therapy. PD draws upon different methods (surveys, focus groups, interviews, ethnographic research, etc.) for collecting feedback data from the intended users in an iterative process (Kuniavsky, 2003). Three main concepts of the PD approach conformed to the research objective: intended users participate in multiple feedback cycles throughout the design process (Kuniavsky, 2003); participants from different backgrounds are considered experts (Su, Chiu, & Wang, 2010); and the participants’ *tacit* knowledge is highly valued (Spinuzzi, 2005). The study investigated the following research questions:

- (1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using digital art media on an iPad in art therapy?
- (2) Which client population can benefit from using digital art media on an iPad?
- (3) What are the important qualifying features and qualities of an art app for art therapy?

Methods

Two types of qualitative research methods were used as part of the PD approach: (1) a survey (questionnaire) of four practicing art therapists who have had clients in therapy use digital technology, specifically, on an iPad; and (2) four separate focus groups consisting of 15 art therapists and art therapy trainees with clinical experience. The survey respondents’ experience and tacit knowledge in using app technology on an iPad in therapy provided a rich framework for the study. The idea of tapping into the respondents’ *tacit* knowledge (Spinuzzi, 2005) was an important operational concept in this research, because the art-making process and therapy in general rely on knowledge that is intuitive rather than trained, implicit rather than explicit, and holistic rather than bounded and systemized. The four focus groups, which were facilitated by the researcher, tapped into the *knowledge by doing* and reflected the participation of all participants in the discovery process (Su et al., 2010).

As illustrated in Fig. 1, this study consisted of four stages: (1) an initial exploration stage that used a questionnaire to gather information on the current use of digital media by practitioners of art therapy; (2) a discovery process stage where participants in two separate focus groups reflected on the data from the first stage as they explored art apps for art therapy use; (3) a second discovery process stage where the data from the first and second stages was reflected upon during the exploration of art apps for art

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/343645>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/343645>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)