

The impact of information via audio guides on visitors' satisfaction in museums. An empirical study at the exhibition "Images of Jesus Christ".

Carola Viehöver

Scientific assistant at the economic department, University of Cologne
viehoever@wiso.uni-koeln.de

1 Introduction

Understanding the process of customer satisfaction formation is seen to be one major key to success in the business world. Customer satisfaction is important because satisfied customer are loyal to the company and will generate more customers through positive word-of-mouth communication.¹ This is also true for Non-profit-Organisations like museums and to a certain extent it is also true for the church.² In museums visitors' satisfaction is a function of many variables, first of all of the works of art which are exhibited, of the way they are presented, the service etc.³ The following study focusses on the information, the description of the exhibited works of art delivered to the visitors via audio guides.⁴ The main postulate of the study is that the information received via audio guide in museums plays an important role in the overall visitors' satisfaction. In order to determine the impact of the audio guide with regard to the overall satisfaction, visitors of the exhibition "Images of Jesus Christ" which was held at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum on occasion of the World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne, were asked to fill out a questionnaire about that subject. Since the description of the audio guide has been rather religious in nature than art historian the audio tour had a catechetical character as well.

Three questions will be answered in this paper: First, to what extent does the audio guide influence the visitors' overall satisfaction? Second, how do the audio guides' intellectual stimulations influence overall visitor satisfaction in comparison to the guide's emotional influences? The affective versus cognitive influence on overall satisfaction is to determine. The last question focuses on implication for the communication of the church.

The theoretical basis, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, comes from the consumer behaviour research and is explained in chapter two. The results of the empirical study are shown in part three. The last part summarizes the results and gives implications for the communication of the church.

2 Theoretical background

The Elaboration Likelihood Model provides the basis of the theoretical background.⁵ It is a theory of persuasion and attitude change and was often used in advertising research. Since attitude and satisfaction are very similar variables this attitude model is used for the study. The basic assumption of the model is that people in general want to hold opinions and come to judgements that are

¹ William O. BEARDEN/Jesse E. TEEL, „Selected Determinants of Consumer Satisfaction and Complaint Reports“, in: *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 20 (1983), pp. 21-28.

² Unlike a company who offers products based on fashion and on the wishes of their customer the church is not going to adopt its "product" to the general contemporary view and fashion. The question is rather how can the church present their "product". The World Youth Day for example can be seen as a great new way to communicate the catholic faith and to bring young people together to strength their faith.

³ Paul HARRISON/Robin SHAW, "Consumer Satisfaction and Post-purchase Intentions: An Exploratory Study of Museum Visitors, in: *International Journal of Arts Managements*, Vol. 6 (2004), pp. 23-32.

⁴ The study is part of the doctoral thesis of Carola VIEHÖVER which will be published in 2007.

⁵ Richard E. PETTY/John T. CACIOPPO/David SCHUMANN, "Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement, in: *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10 (1983), pp. 135-146.

correct.⁶ Correctness of an attitude is a subjective assessment and can be based on a wide variety of „evidence“. People for example look of the opinions of others as a means of judging the correctness of their own attitudes. This social comparison process is a relatively simple and easy way of judging correctness. Some people ignore the opinion of others and effortfully seek out and evaluate all of the relevant information on their own. Others can consider both or use different strategies on different occasions. For example people who do not enjoy reflecting can simply accept what expert and trustworthy sources say. Finally the opinions of others might influence the extent or direction of the person’s own scrutiny. The greater the number of people who endorse an issue the more an individual might choose to think about that issue.

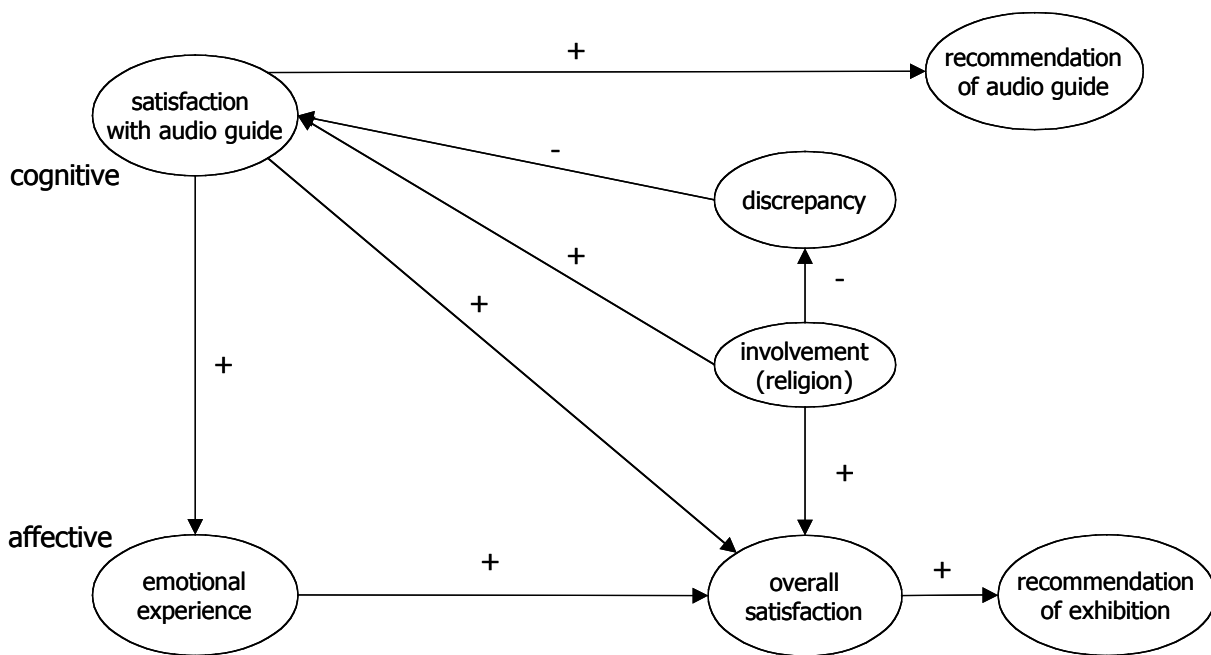
The key prediction of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is that there are two different ways in the processes mediating persuasion effect during message exposure. It suggests that high involvement and high motivation leads to a “central route” of persuasion. In that, the recipients carefully examine the information and process those message elements that they believe to be central to a meaningful and logic evaluation of the information. By contrast low involvement and low motivation induces a “peripheral route” to persuasion whereby recipients evaluate the information based on superficial analysis of readily available and salient cues. In the case of low motivation emotional cues play an important role to catch attention. Whereas the central route ends up with a strong attitude the peripheral route leads to a weak attitude which will change more quickly. It depends on various variables how far someone is not only involved and motivated but also able to elaborate the information carefully. Variables mentioned by Petty/Cacioppo in their model like the need for cognition, which describes how much someone enjoys thinking, the knowledge about the topic, how much someone is distracted from attention and how often the message is repeated are not examined in the following but the aspect of discrepancy is further examined. If people are confronted with information which stands in contrast to their own attitudes they may not be motivated to elaborate them. In the proposed model it is postulated, that the greater the discrepancy (that the information delivered with the audio guide stands in contrast to the visitors’ own attitude to religion) the less satisfied they are with the audio guide.⁷ The higher the involvement with religion is, the greater is the satisfaction with the information received via audio guide and with the overall visit.

Now it is to examine how the overall satisfaction with the visit is influenced. Beside the rather cognitive variable of satisfaction with the audio guide, the affective aspect, the emotional experience, how much joy and pleasure the people felt due to their visit, is also taken into consideration. It is assumed that the satisfaction with the audio guide has not only an impact on the overall satisfaction with the visit but also influences the emotional experience positively. It is further postulated the more the visitors felt joy and pleasure the more they are satisfied in total. The variable involvement is considered as well. From the economical point of view it is interesting how the satisfaction influences the recommendation to generate more visitors. The following figure 1 shows the proposed model of hypotheses.

Figure 1: The proposed model with the hypotheses of the study

⁶ Richard E. PETTY/Duane T. WEGENER, “The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Current Status and Controversies”, in: S. CHAIKEN/Y. TROPE: Dual-processing Theories in Social Psychology, Guilford Press, New York 1999, pp. 41-72.

⁷ It can be assumed that the satisfaction with the information received and the motivation to elaborate them are highly correlated.



3 Empirical Study

In September 2005, over 600 visitors of the exhibition „Images of Jesus Christ“ filled in the questionnaire. Two different audio tours were provided for the study based on the official audio guide of the museum. The visitors were randomly selected, one group listened to the audio guide which contained plain explanations. The audio tour of the second group had emotional features like additional background music and sound effects, e.g. organ or choral music. A pre-test supported the emotional effect of these features. The “emotional audio guide” was assessed to be more affective than the plain description.⁸ The content of the descriptions of the works of art was rather religious in nature than art historian. A third group went through the exhibition without an audio guide.

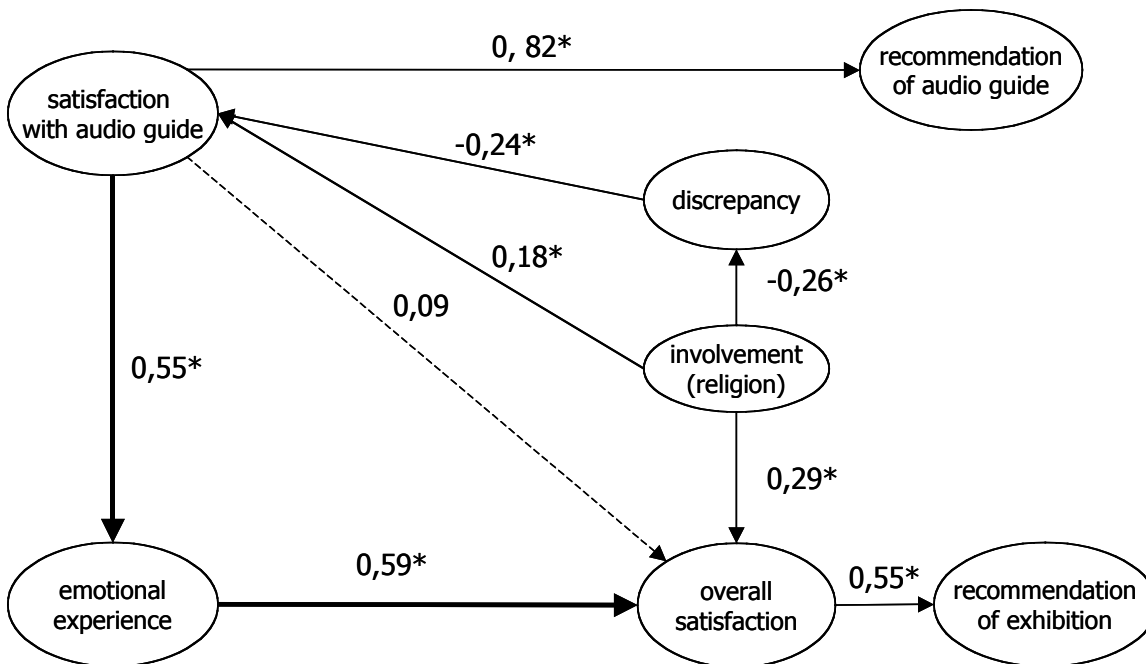
Demographic data indicated the sample was about 63% female. All kinds of ages from 8 to 84 years were represented. There was a peak of 17 and 18 years old pupils in the sample, they visited the exhibition with the school mostly with their teacher of religious education. Almost 90% of the visitors were Christians. 64% were Roman Catholic, 5% resigned, 4,5% did not belong to any denomination.

Structural equation modelling (AMOS) was used to analyse the data.⁹ In the following figure 2 the results of the sample with the two different audio guides are presented. The model fit was acceptable. Satisfaction with the audio guide is related only weakly directly to the overall satisfaction (0,09) but has a strong influence via the emotional experience (0,55). Less than the emotional experience but still significantly positive (0,29) the religion involvement is a predictor of the overall satisfaction. Also the hypothesis was supported that high religion involvement had a positive effect on the satisfaction with the audio guide and a negative effect on discrepancy. Visitors with high values of discrepancy were less satisfied with the audio guide. There was a strong connection between the satisfaction and the recommendation, for the audio guide and the exhibition alike.

⁸ The content of the two different audio guides was essentially identical.

⁹ Structural equation modelling allows to consider overall tests of model fit and regression weights for a complex structure of latent variables simultaneously, see e.g. Kenneth A. BOLLEN, “Structural Equation with Latent Variables”, Wiley, New York 1989.

Figure 2: Model with estimated values



* Significant path coefficients with $p = 0,05$.

To assess the importance of delivering information to the overall satisfaction the means of the three groups were compared. Subjects were asked to rate the overall satisfaction on a 7-point scales (1 = I liked the visit very much; 7 = I didn't like the visit at all). The means of these ratings show that the visitors with additional information liked the exhibition more than the visitors without any information:

$M_{\text{emotional audio guide}} = 2,23$; $M_{\text{plain audio guide}} = 2,37$; $M_{\text{no audio guide}} = 2,57$.

4 Key results and implication

The additional information, in this case the religious explanations of the works of art, had a positive impact on the overall satisfaction of the visit, although the satisfaction resulting from the descriptions didn't influence the overall satisfaction directly. It had an impact on the emotional experience, which was an important source of overall satisfaction. This can be an insight for church communication as well. A question for church communication is how much information does touch people emotionally? To catch attention and to reach a wide audience, especially low involved people, it is important to use also emotional arguments rather than to stress for example only on the doctrine of the Catholic faith. It should be taken into account that information has a great impact, if it touches people emotionally. The involvement of the topic (in this case the religion involvement) and the conformity of the information with the own values of the audience also had an impact on the overall satisfaction. Therefore it is important to consider carefully how a book, an article or any other topic of an event is titled. The headline or the topic respectively has a great impact on how many people will feel involved. The encyclica "Deus Caritas Est" for example reached a vast majority. Isn't everybody somehow involved in love? In our volatile and modern world there are many lost souls in a search for something to believe. Faith is a key to life of emotional fulfilment. As the exhibition "Images of Jesus Christ" showed the message of the church can be brought to people via art. This can be true for other cultural attractions and maybe not only during an exhibition which is only held on a special occasion like the World Youth Day.

Literature

BEARDEN, William O./ TEEL, Jesse E., „Selected Determinants of Consumer Satisfaction and Complaint Reports“, in: Journal of Marketing Research, Vol. 20 (1983), pp. 21-28.

BOLLEN, Kenneth A., “Structural Equation with Latent Variables”, Wiley, New York 1989.

HARRISON, Paul/SHAW, Robin, “Consumer Satisfaction and Post-purchase Intentions: An Exploratory Study of Museum Visitors, in: International Journal of Arts Managements, Vol. 6 (2004), pp. 23-32.

PETTY, Richard E./CACIOPPO, John T./SCHUMANN, David, “Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement, in: Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 10 (1983), pp. 135-146.

PETTY, Richard E. /WEGENER, Duane T., “The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Current Status and Controversies”, in: S. CHAIKEN/Y. TROPE: Dual-processing Theories in Social Psychology, Guilford Press, New York 1999, pp. 41-72.

VERSIONE PROVVISORIA
IN ATTESA DELLA
PUBBLICAZIONE DEGLI ATTI