How Does the Museum Shop Come Across? The Analysis of Museum Shop Visitors' Behaviour and Attitudes

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In the spirit of New Public Management, a "neo-liberal, market-oriented economic philosophy combined with managerial thinking that draws on the private sector as a role model and turns the citizen into a client or customer" (Hammerschmid/Meyer 2005:711), museums have faced reform processes that aim at the implementation of a contract culture based on performance measures (e.g. Goulding 2000) and an increasing pressure to push up their financial revenues without jeopardizing the academic and educational mission of the museum. Hence, the importance of museum stores regarding their contribution to the museums' success increased (Mottner 2007; Addison 1993; Yorke and Jones 1984; Goulding 2000; for the German literature see e.g. Klein 2007; Hütter and Schulenburg 2004; John 2000).

Museums are expected to acquire and complete, preserve, research, communicate and exhibit the collections for the purposes of education and study to reach for a broader audience. To contribute to an education experience (McLean 1997) and to extend the visitors' relationship with the museum (Kotler et al. 2008; Theobald 2000), the shops marketing has to consider particular demands. According to Kotler et al. (2008), Mottner and Ford (2005) and Theobald (2000), a museum shop should be seen as an integrative component of the museum and support the achievement of the museum's educative aims and enable visitors to take away information about the collections and the museum; additionally it has to consider its visitors' expectations, address its activities to the broad public and last but not least contribute financially to the museum. Fulfilling this task requires a comprehensive marketing strategy based on an empirically grounded understanding of visitors' and customers' expectations regarding the shop as well as the museum as a whole.

Being part of the public domain, European museum shops mostly are not subject to the same market forces as retail stores. Public funding and sponsorship alleviate the market forces and shape a specific marketing environment which defines the management’s room for maneuver and influence a museum’s shop marketing strategy essentially. Furthermore, relationships with other stakeholder groups and changes in consumer behavior in general have to be considered (Mottner 2007; Slater 2007; Awoniyi 2001; Guintcheva and Passebois 2009; Thyne 2001). In any case, the definition of a museum’s marketing strategy has to be based on a comprehensive knowledge of its current visitiorship.

In our empirical study, we aim to gain insight into the perceptions and expectations of the visitors of the Austrian KHM shop. The KHM is Austria's most important art museum (1,298,572 visitors in 2007; 619,318 in the main building; bmukk 2007), holds eight collections with its affiliated institutions and was listed 29th in The Art Newspaper’s annual ranking of museums (Morris et al. 2008).

In the course of a mixed-methodology research design, two sets of data were collected: observation data and interview data. By means of non-participant observation of visitors (n=749) it was primarily aimed to identify behavioural patterns of museum store visitors. In the tradition of spatial tracking, on a rough floor plan of the museum shop the movements of the visitors and their activities in the shop were manually recorded (e.g. length of stay, number of physical contacts with products, interaction rate between a visitor and a salesperson, buying acts). The results of a first round of analysis show that while being a rather homogenous
group on the whole (which is consistent with e.g. Kotler 2008), differences in the customer's interaction with the shop and its products are in some aspects significantly different subject to gender or age (Buber/Knassmüller 2009).

The analysis of the interview data (n=581) by means of content analysis as well as hermeneutic methods aims at (1) gaining insight into the interviewees’ attitudes towards the shop atmosphere, assortment, sales personnel as well as the museum as a whole by reconstructing the underlying structures of their perceptions and expectations to get a deeper understanding of the visitors' behaviour and actions; (2) linking these results to the mission of the museum and the museum's store as outlined above to support the development of a costumer-centered marketing strategy for the museum and its shop. (3) As there is a high likelihood that the costumer is not seperating the store experience from the museum collection experience (Mottner and Ford 2005), the study will also aim at learning about their possible interplay.

References


