

The impact of primary service and servicescape on customer satisfaction in a leisure service setting: an empirical investigation among theatregoers

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- *This paper investigates the effects of perceived primary service and perceived servicescape on customer satisfaction in theatres. According to a questionnaire study, among n = 2897 theatregoers in 12 German-speaking theatres, factors pertaining to the perceived primary service are most influential on customer satisfaction (in particular, the perceived artistic quality, followed by visitors' emotional and cognitive response to the performance). Contrariwise, factors pertaining to the perceived servicescape (i.e. seating and view; other customers' behaviour) are only of minor relevance for customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the influence of both perceived primary service quality and perceived servicescape quality on customer satisfaction is subject to moderating individual factors, such as visitors' theatrical competence and their motivation for attending a theatre performance.*

Introduction

'Recent thinking within the philosophy of art has favoured the view that the experience of the arts - and not the artifact itself - is the final criterion for artistic value' (Boorsma & Chiaravalloti, 2010, p. 303). This statement seems to be particularly valid in

the theatre context because the theatrical performance is explicitly accomplished in order to address and affect the audience (Martin & Sauter, 1995; Sauter, 2000). Hence, the visitor is an essential and constitutive element of every theatre performance (e.g. Eversmann, 2004).

Accordingly, research on theatre attendance has for long aimed at analysing and understanding the theatrical experience. In *audience research*, the focus is on the question of who attends a theatre performance. Results show that theatre visitors are

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more often female than male, highly educated, well-situated, and elderly people (e.g. Sargeant, 1997; Stafford & Tripp, 2001; Rössel, Hackenbroch, & Göllnitz, 2002; Föhl & Lutz, 2011; Kurzeja-Christinck, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2012). In *reception research*, the focus has been on the role of visitors' individual reaction to a theatre play for their overall evaluation of a performance. For example, Schoenmakers (1982) and Tan (1982) have presented complex models on visitors' response to a theatrical performance. Eversmann (2004) identified four dimensions of a visitor's overall evaluation of a theatrical event, that is, the perceptual, the cognitive, the emotional, and the communicative dimension. Recent empirical studies come to the conclusion that visitors' emotional response is the most important factor for their overall theatre experience (e.g. Boerner, Jobst, & Wiemann, 2010; Boerner & Jobst, 2013).

However, different visitors tend to evaluate their theatrical experience in a different manner (e.g. Sauter, 2002; Kotler & Scheff, 2007). As Freshwater (2009: 5 f.) puts it: 'The common tendency to refer to an audience as 'it' and, by extension, to think of this 'it' as a single entity, or a collective, risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context, and environment which condition an individual's interpretation of a particular performance event. A confident description of a singular audience reaction may do no justice at all to the variety of response among different members of that audience'. Therefore, visitors' personal characteristics such as gender, age, expertise, and motivation have been included in studies on the theatrical experience (e.g. Jobst, 2012).

Research on customer satisfaction has analyzed the role of service quality for visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre (e.g. Almstedt, 1999; Martin, 1999; Hill, O'Sullivan, & O'Sullivan, 2003; Schwerdtfeger, 2004; Hausmann, 2005; Kotler & Scheff, 2007). Thereby, the primary service (i.e. the performance) has been distinguished from the so-called servicescape. While the importance of the servicescape for customer satisfaction is well established in the literature (e.g. Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006; Kunz &

Hogreve, 2011), different conceptions of servicescape have been suggested. Whereas Bitner (1992, p. 58) defines servicescape as 'the built environment (i.e. the man-made, physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment)', others have claimed that all service settings also comprise stimuli that are subjective and, thus, uncontrollable by the organization (e.g. Edvardsson, Enquist, & Johnston, 2010; Zomerdijsk & Voss, 2010). Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011, p. 481) offer a new conceptualization of the servicescape term stating that 'a servicescape represents a consumption setting's built (i.e. manufactured, physical), social (i.e. human), socially symbolic, and natural (environments) dimensions that affect both consumers and employees in service organizations'. In the theatre context, different aspects have been analyzed as elements of the servicescape, such as catering, parking lots, or public rehearsals (Jobst, 2012).

However, empirical results concerning the relative impact of the primary service and the servicescape on overall customer satisfaction in theatre are scarce and contradictory. Whereas some studies identify the servicescape as a relevant determinant of overall customer satisfaction in theatre (e.g. Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Song & Cheung, 2010a), others fail to do so (e.g. Boerner, Moser, & Jobst, 2011; Jobst & Boerner, 2011). The same is true for aspects of the primary service that turned out to be significant in some studies (Garbarino & Johnson, 2001), while insignificant in others (Voss & Cova, 2006). In addition, the relative impact of primary service and servicescape on customer satisfaction has shown to be contingent on visitors' personal attributes, such as their motives for going to the theatre (Garbarino & Johnson, 2001), gender (Voss & Cova, 2006), and income (Song & Cheung, 2010a).

To sum it up, empirical knowledge about how and when the primary service and the servicescape affect theatre visitors' overall satisfaction is fragmented at best. Thus, generalized statements about the role of the servicescape in theatres cannot be made. Amongst other things, this lack may be because of methodological shortcomings of the existing studies,

such as small sample sizes, inconsistent selection of aspects representing service quality, and inconsistent choice of moderators. Against this background, the purpose of our study is to answer the following questions: (1) What is the impact of perceived primary service quality and perceived servicescape quality on visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre? (2) Which factors moderate the relationship between primary service and servicescape, respectively, and visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre? To this end, we conduct a field study on 2897 spectators of 44 performances in 12 German-speaking theatres.

Literature review and study outline

Service quality can be defined as a 'global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service' (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, p. 16). While there is broad agreement that both primary service and servicescape are relevant predictors of visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre (e.g. Almstedt, 1999; Martin, 1999; Hill *et al.*, 2003; Schwerdtfeger, 2004; Hausmann, 2005; Kotler & Scheff, 2007), empirical results on the relative impact of both facets of service quality on customer satisfaction are contradictory. Some studies exclusively focus on the servicescape in theatre (e.g. Bauer, Herrmann, & Huber, 1995, 1997; Haefs & Schmidt, 1999; Swanson & Davis, 2006), while neglecting the primary service. Others include both facets of service quality, yet without analyzing their impacts on visitors' satisfaction (e.g. Ngobo, 2005; Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2010).

Studies investigating the relative impact of both facets of service quality on customer satisfaction end up with different results. In some studies, both primary service (i.e. actor satisfaction, play attitudes; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, 2001 stage, performance; Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2010b) and servicescape (i.e. theatre facility attitudes; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, 2001 service; Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2010b) have been identified as relevant determinants of

customers' satisfaction. However, Voss and Cova (2006) could only confirm the so-called *functional quality* (including aspects of the theatre's service such as box office staff, ushers). Contrariwise, Boerner *et al.* (2011) and Jobst and Boerner (2013) confirmed only factors pertaining to the primary service (i.e. customer perception of stage direction and their emotional response) as determinants of customer satisfaction in theatre.

In addition, the impact of visitors' characteristics on the satisfaction in theatre has been investigated, albeit with contradictory results. For example, regular subscribers are more satisfied than occasional subscribers or individual ticket buyers (Garbarino & Johnson, 2001). In contrast, Boerner *et al.* (2011) fail to confirm the expected differences between experienced and unexperienced visitors in their statements on visitor satisfaction. Further, differences between male and female theatre visitors occur (Voss & Cova, 2006). For example, *pro-social image* has a positive impact on female satisfaction, but no impact on male satisfaction. Artistic image has stronger influence on male satisfaction than on female satisfaction. As stated in the preceding texts, the functional quality (i.e. the servicescape) does only influence male satisfaction.

In addition, visitors' characteristics have been analyzed as contingencies of the relative impact of primary service and servicescape on visitors' satisfaction. Garbarino and Johnson (2001) investigate the impact of visitors' motives for their theatre visit on customer satisfaction. As expected, visitors' motives influence the impact of the single determinants (core and service) on customer satisfaction (Garbarino & Johnson, 2001). For example, if a visitor seeks for intellectual stimulation (vs. relaxing), only actor satisfaction affects his overall satisfaction. Similarly, visitors' gender, age, and marital status moderate the impact of the determinants of their satisfaction (core and service) (Song & Cheung, 2010a).

The disparate results on visitors' satisfaction in theatre cited in the preceding texts may be because

of certain shortcomings of this stream of research. First, with the only exception of Voss and Cova (2006), the existing studies rely on relatively homogenous samples, including audiences from only one theatre (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, 2001; Johnson, Garbarino, & Sivadas, 2006), one production (Song & Cheung, 2010b; Boerner *et al.*, 2011), or one performance (Jobst & Boerner, 2011). In addition, samples in all studies are small, ranging from $n=116$ (Jobst & Boerner, 2011) to $n=401$ theatergoers (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Hence, results of these studies are difficult to compare and can hardly be generalized. Second, different theoretical considerations have resulted in different factors representing both primary service and servicescape. As a result, the selection of these factors is inconsistent, making it difficult to compare the results of the studies. Third, the studies include different moderators of the relationship between service quality (i.e. primary service and servicescape) and customer satisfaction, such as visitors' motives (Garbarino & Johnson, 2001), their age, gender (Voss & Cova, 2006; Song & Cheung, 2010a; Boerner *et al.*, 2011), and income (Song & Cheung, 2010b). With the exception of gender, each moderator has only been studied once. As a result, generalized statements about moderators cannot be made.

Against this background, we focus on overall customer satisfaction based on one specific visit to the theatre. More precisely, we analyze the relative impact of both the primary service (the artistic performance) and the environment in which the primary service is presented to the customer (the servicescape) on visitors' overall satisfaction (research question 1). In addition, we investigate moderators of the relationship between primary service and servicescape, respectively, and customer satisfaction (research question 2).

To answer these questions, we conducted an empirical investigation in German-speaking theatres, aiming at overcoming the previously mentioned shortcomings of previous studies by using a multi-method design. First, in order to be able to

investigate theatre experiences across a broad range of settings, we invited all German-speaking theatres to participate in our study. Second, for lack of consistent theoretical considerations for selecting the factors representing primary service and servicescape, our study was based on a preliminary interview study with $n=21$ theatregoers (Boerner & Jobst, 2013). Third, in order to identify potential moderators of the service quality-satisfaction relationship, we hark back to results of reception research (e.g. Heitmann & Crocken, 1976; Martin, 1999; Stafford & Tripp, 2001; Swanson & Davis, 2006). Thereby, visitors' theatre competence, their motivation to attend a theatre performance, their personality, and their lifestyle were selected as potential moderators.

Methodology

Sampling and data collection procedure

To investigate the impact of primary service and servicescape quality on visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre, we collected data from visitors of several public theatres. For data collection, we chose the German-speaking area where the theatre landscape is unique with respect to its concentration and plurality, because of a comparably generous public funding.

We invited all public theatres in Germany, the German-speaking parts of Switzerland, and Austria with an auditorium of 300 seats or more to participate in our study. Twelve theatres were willing to participate—representing a quota of more than 10% of the 111 existing theatres that is acceptable for a so-called cold calling (e.g. Schön, 2010). Research teams were sent to these theatres to collect data from visitors of 44 performances of 18 productions (Boerner & Jobst, 2013). To include a broad range of productions, the selection was balanced with respect to epoch, genre, and popularity of the piece, production style, and popularity of the persons involved. Self-administered questionnaires were handed out to randomly chosen visitors after

the performances. Theatre visitors were allowed to choose between filling out the questionnaire before leaving the theatre or taking it home and sending it back at no charge. A total of 2897 theatre visitors agreed to complete the questionnaire. As 102 questionnaires showed limited data quality (i.e. missing values >30% in scale items), the effective sample size was reduced to 2795 visitors. Of the respondents, 37% were males and 63% were females. In terms of age range, 4% of the respondents were up to 20 years old, 8% were between 21 and 30, 8% were between 31 and 40, 16% were between 41 and 50, 22% were between 51 and 60, 27% were between 61 and 70, and the remaining 15% were above 70 years old (mean = 54; standard deviation = 17). The respondents of our study were thus similar to

other samples of theatre audiences (e.g. Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Boerner *et al.*, 2011; Jobst & Boerner, 2011).

Measures

A questionnaire was developed in order to measure the determinants of visitors' overall satisfaction based on the findings of our preliminary interview study (refer to **Figure 1**). According to our interviews, the primary service includes six factors (i.e. general evaluation of the theatrical organization; mood, pre-information, and expectations; perceived artistic quality; cognitive response; emotional response; conative response). Similarly, our

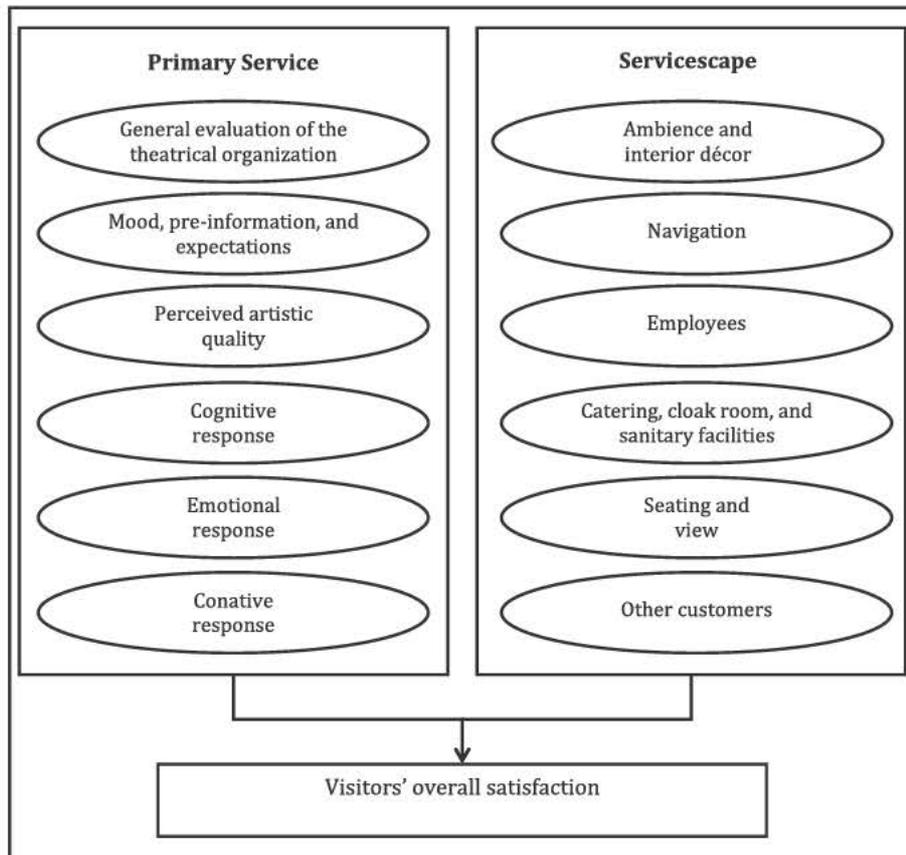


Figure 1. Factors of primary service and servicescape in theatres.

respondents identified six factors constituting the servicescape (i.e. ambience and interior décor; navigation; employees; catering, cloak room, and sanitary facilities; seating and view; other customers).

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. **Table 1** provides a list of the constructs along with the description of their respective measures. We used a shortened version of the scale of Hinz, Hessel, and Brähler (2002) to ask for customer mood. Because for the rest of the primary service factors no validated scales were available, we developed our own multi-item scales based on our interview study (for details, refer to Boerner & Jobst, 2013). In order to ask how satisfied customers were with the servicescape, we modified the respective scales provided by Butzer-Strothmann, Günter, and Degen (2001), and Haefs and Schmidt (1999).

According to results of reception research (e.g. Heitmann & Crocken, 1976; Martin, 1999; Stafford & Tripp, 2001; Swanson & Davis, 2006), visitors' theatre competence, their motivation to attend a theatre performance, their personality, and their lifestyle were selected as potential moderators of the relationship between primary service and/or servicescape on one hand and visitors' overall satisfaction on the other hand. To ask for visitors' theatre competence, we developed our own four-item scale based on Jobst (2007) and Boerner and Renz (2008). We translated and modified the scale of Bouder-Pailler (1999) to ask for visitors' motivation to attend the specific theatre performance under study. To ask for visitors' personality and lifestyle, we used the 15-item Big Five Inventory Shortversion of Gerlitz and Schupp (2005) and the 10-item lifestyle scale of Otte (2005, 2008) differentiating between nine types of lifestyle.

Because age, gender, and education level have proven to influence customer satisfaction (e.g. Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Bryant & Cha, 1996; Danaher, 1998; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001), we included these variables as controls. The dependent variable, that is, customer satisfaction, was measured by a seven-item scale developed for the purpose of this study, based

on the literature (e.g. Bruhn & Murmann, 1998; Olsen, 2002; Swanson & Davis, 2006; Jobst, 2007; Boerner *et al.*, 2010).

Data analysis

Prior to the main data analysis, the remaining missing values were imputed by the expectation maximization algorithm. This is one of the recommended methods for preventing biases caused by not completely random missing data processes and estimates missing data by using an iterative maximum-likelihood procedure (Allison, 2001; Schafer & Graham, 2002). The imputation was performed with the software NORM (Schafer, 1999). Moreover, we performed confirmatory factor analyses to test the construct validity of the reflective scales (for details, refer to Boerner & Jobst, 2013). Results showed (very) good validity ($\chi^2/df=9.50$; $p=000$; comparative fit index=0.80; root mean square error of approximation=0.06) as well as reliability for the vast majority of the scales (refer to Table 1).

Results and discussion

Because of the hierarchical structure of the data (i.e. customers nested within performances, productions, and theatrical organizations), multi-level analysis was used (cp. Bickel, 2007). **Table 2** presents the results of the multi-level analysis with customer satisfaction as the dependent variable (full maximum likelihood estimation method). In the first step, we entered the control variables in the analysis (refer to model 1). Second, we added the factors of both the primary service and the servicescape to test their effects on customer satisfaction in the theatre setting (refer to model 2).

- (1) As can be seen in Table 2, customer satisfaction was significantly predicted by factors pertaining to the primary service quality in theatre, namely customer expectations (level, direction, specificity), perceived artistic quality (play; play's topicality; stage direction; 'werktreue'; actors;

Table 1. Constructs, measures, and reliability

Construct	Measure (number of items)	Reliability
Primary service factors		
General evaluation of the theatrical organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistic level (3) • Season's programming (1) • Additional offerings (1) 	
Mood, pre information, and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mood (5) • Pre information, expectations: level, specificity (4) • Expectations: direction (2) 	
Perceived artistic quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play (7) • Play's topicality (3) • Stage direction (5) • Fit (3) • 'Werktreue' (3) • Actors (4) • Stage design, costumes, and props (4) 	0.84
Cognitive response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelty (3) • Complexity (7) • Associations to own life (4) 	0.79
Emotional response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement (4) • Empathy (3) • Identification (3) • Norms and values (3) 	0.89
Conative response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought provoking impulses (4) • Animation for communication (3) • Animation for information seeking (3) 	0.83
Servicescape		
Ambience and interior décor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature (1) • Air quality (1) • Acoustics (1) • Foyer decorating (5) 	0.88
Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location (1) • Accessibility (2) 	0.70
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendliness (1) • Competence (1) 	0.88
Catering, cloak room, and sanitary facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price (1) • Speed (1) • Service (1) • Size (1) • Cleanliness (1) 	0.70
Seating and view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat comfort (2) • View of the stage (1) • Distance to the stage (1) 	0.73
Other customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before and after the performance (3) • During the performance: enrichment (3) • During the performance: disturbance (3) 	0.70
Dependent variable		
Customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall satisfaction with the theatre visit (3) • Confirmation of expectations (2) • Comparison with an ideal (1) • Intention to recommend (1) 	0.63

(Continues)

Table 1. (Continued)

Construct	Measure (number of items)	Reliability
Moderating variables		
Theatre competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theatrical experience • Theatrical knowledge 	
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social hedonism (4) • Intellectual enrichment (3) • Arousal of emotions (4) • Entertainment (3) 	0.69 0.80 0.84 0.72
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraversion (3) • Openness (3) • Neuroticism (3) • Conscientiousness (3) • Agreeableness (3) 	0.78 0.69 0.71 0.65 0.51
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open biographical perspective (3) • Material level (5) • Traditionalism (2) 	0.70 0.57 0.68
Control variables		
Age		
Gender		
Education level		

For one item scales and scales that were constructed as formative scales, no reliability measure was calculated (cp. Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003).

stage design, costumes, and props), as well as customers' cognitive (complexity), emotional (involvement, empathy), and conative responses to the performance (thought-provoking impulses, animation for communication). In contrast, only two factors of the servicescape quality turned out to be significant (i.e. seating and view; enrichment by other customers during the performance). However, because only two factors pertaining to the servicescape quality turned out to be significant with only small determination coefficients (i.e. seating and view: $b=0.03$, $p\leq 0.050$; enrichment by other customers during the performance: $b=0.02$, $p\leq 0.050$), the impact of the servicescape is relatively weak compared with the impact of the primary service.

Gender turned out as significant control variable ($b=0.03$, $p\leq 0.050$), that is, women report higher levels of customer satisfaction than men. Because

studies usually report higher values for female consumers' satisfaction than for male consumers' satisfaction (e.g. Bryant & Cha, 1996; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001), this result is consistent with findings in the marketing literature. Contrariwise, the control variables age and education level did not turn out to be significant. One explanation for these non-significant effects of age and educational level might be a lack of variance because our participants are, similar to typical theatre audiences, (e.g. Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Boerner *et al.*, 2011), relatively old and well-educated.

Several predictors had negative b -coefficients. While the negative b -coefficients of complexity ($b=-0.03$, $p\leq 0.001$) and high expectations ($b=-0.13$, $p\leq 0.001$) are in accordance with findings from our interview study, the negative b -coefficients of the play's topicality ($b=-0.05$, $p\leq 0.001$) and empathy ($b=-0.03$, $p\leq 0.050$) came as surprises. In addition, several factors identified as predictors of customer satisfaction by our interview study failed

Table 2. Multi level analysis, dependent variable customer satisfaction

	Model 1 <i>b</i>	SE <i>b</i>	Model 2 <i>b</i>	SE <i>b</i>
Control variables				
Age	0.003**	0.001	n.s.	
Gender	0.096**	0.032	-0.032*	0.016
Education level	n.s.		n.s.	
Variables representing the primary service				
General evaluation				
Mood			n.s.	
Expectations: level, specificity			-0.032***	0.010
Expectations: direction			0.036***	0.011
Play			0.233***	0.018
Play's topicality			-0.050***	0.011
Stage direction			0.347***	0.020
Fit			n.s.	
'Werktreue'			0.030*	0.014
Actors			0.111***	0.016
Stage design, costumes, and props			0.048***	0.012
Novelty			n.s.	
Complexity			-0.125***	0.019
Associations to own life			n.s.	
Involvement			0.178***	0.015
Empathy			-0.029*	0.011
Identification			n.s.	
Norms and values			n.s.	
Thought provoking impulses			0.091***	0.013
Animation for communication			0.019*	0.009
Animation for information seeking			n.s.	
Variables representing the servicescape				
Ambience and interior décor			n.s.	
Navigation			n.s.	
Employees			n.s.	
Catering, cloak room, and sanitary facilities			n.s.	
Seating and view			0.029*	0.012
Other customers before and after the performance			n.s.	
Other customers during the performance: enrichment			0.019*	0.010
Other customers during the performance: disturbance			n.s.	

n.s., not significant; *b*, determination coefficient; SE *b*, standard error.

*** $p \leq 0.001$.

** $p \leq 0.010$.

* $p \leq 0.050$.

to reach significance in the questionnaire study, that is, general evaluation of the theatrical organization, mood, fit, novelty, associations to own life, identification, norms and values, animation for information seeking, ambience and interior décor, navigation, employees, other customers before and after the performance.

Answering our first research question, both the perceived primary service and the perceived servicescape are relevant predictors of visitors' satisfaction. However, the impact of the perceived primary service on overall customer satisfaction is greater than the impact of the servicescape. Despite the arguments in favour of a prominent role of

the servicescape in theatres lined out in the introduction (i.e. leisure activity; cp. Bitner, 1992; great amount of time spent in the facility Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996, 1999; intangibility of theatrical service; cp. Zeithaml *et al.*, 2006), its impact is relatively low compared with the primary service. This result is in line with the literature arguing for the relevance of both the primary service and the servicescape in general (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996, 1999) as well as in theatres (e.g. Almstedt, 1999; Martin, 1999; Hill *et al.*, 2003; Schwerdtfeger, 2004; Hausmann, 2005). In addition, this result contributes to specify the relative impact of both aspects of service quality in theatres. Moreover, the results of our study allow for the recommendation to analyse both aspects of service quality in further research. To conclude, servicescape is confirmed as a relevant determinant of customer satisfaction in theatres; however, if analysed in isolation, its relevance is likely to be overestimated.

(2) In order to answer the second research question, that is, which factors moderate the relationship between perceived primary service quality and perceived servicescape quality, respectively, and overall customer satisfaction in theatre, we calculated one additional model for each potential moderating variable (i.e. theatre competence, motivation, personality, and lifestyle), including the respective interaction terms. While visitors' personality and lifestyle did not turn out to moderate the relationship between primary service or servicescape and overall customer satisfaction, visitors' theatre competence and their motivation to attend a theatre performance were identified as moderating variables.

First, multi-level analysis revealed one significant interaction term for visitors' *theatre competence*. The impact of visitors' expectations before entering the theatre (i.e. level and specificity) on their overall satisfaction varies according to their theatre

competence ($b = -0.02, p \leq 0.050$).¹ In order to further investigate this interaction effect, cluster analysis was used to identify homogenous respondent groups with respect to theatre competence (cp. Bühl, 2010), resulting in three groups (i.e. laymen, advanced visitors, experts). Next, separate multi-level analyses were calculated for each group. Only for the laymen, expectations (i.e. level and specificity) turned out as a significant predictor of their overall satisfaction with a theatre visit ($b = -0.06, p \leq 0.001$). The higher and the more specific their expectations were before the visit, the less satisfied they are (refer to **Figure 2**). Explaining this result, one could argue that high levels of aspiration in the form of high and specific expectations result in more critical evaluations (cp. Boerner & Renz, 2008). In contrast, in the groups of the advanced theatre visitors and the experts, previous expectations did not have any significant impact on their overall satisfaction with a theatre visit.

Second, multi-level analysis identified four significant interaction terms for visitors' *motivation to attend a theatre performance*. In particular, the impact of visitors' general evaluation of the theatre ($b = 0.02, p \leq 0.050$), of the perceived complexity of the performance ($b = -0.04, p \leq 0.010$), of the perceived stage direction ($b = -0.04, p \leq 0.050$), and of stage design, costumes, and props ($b = 0.03, p \leq 0.050$) on their overall satisfaction varies according to their motivation to attend a theatre performance. Cluster analysis identified again three groups, namely highly motivated, moderately motivated, and low motivated visitors. In separate multi-level analyses, the general evaluation of the theatre did not turn out as significant determinant of overall satisfaction in any of the groups. Hence, only the remaining three potential moderators were further analysed in slope analyses. For all three motivation groups, the *perceived complexity of the performance* negatively predicts their overall satisfaction with a theatre visit. In other words, the more complex the performance

¹Because most of the tested interaction terms were not significant, we present only the significant results that significantly improved the model fit (criterion $-2 \log$ likelihood) in the text.

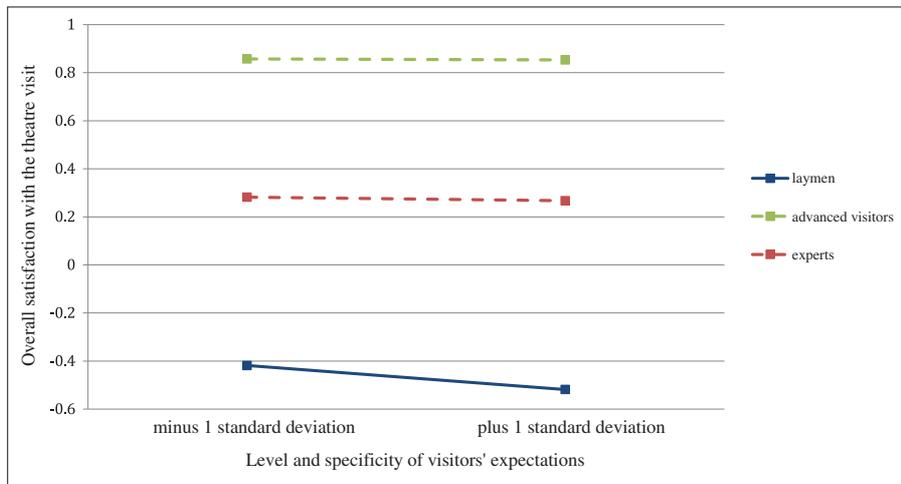


Figure 2. Interaction effect of the level/specificity of visitors' expectations and theatre competence on the overall satisfaction with the theatre visit.

is perceived to be, the lower visitors' satisfaction. However, this effect is stronger for low motivated visitors ($b = -0.21, p \leq 0.001$) than for moderately motivated visitors ($b = -0.12, p \leq 0.001$) and highly motivated visitors ($b = -0.06, p \leq 0.050$). Differences between these visitor groups are depicted in **Figure 3**. Interpreting these results, one could

argue that highly motivated theatergoers are more tolerant vis-à-vis complex performances than low motivated spectators.

For all motivation groups, the *perceived stage direction* has a positive impact on their overall satisfaction with the visit to the theatre. The better they evaluate the stage direction, the more satisfied

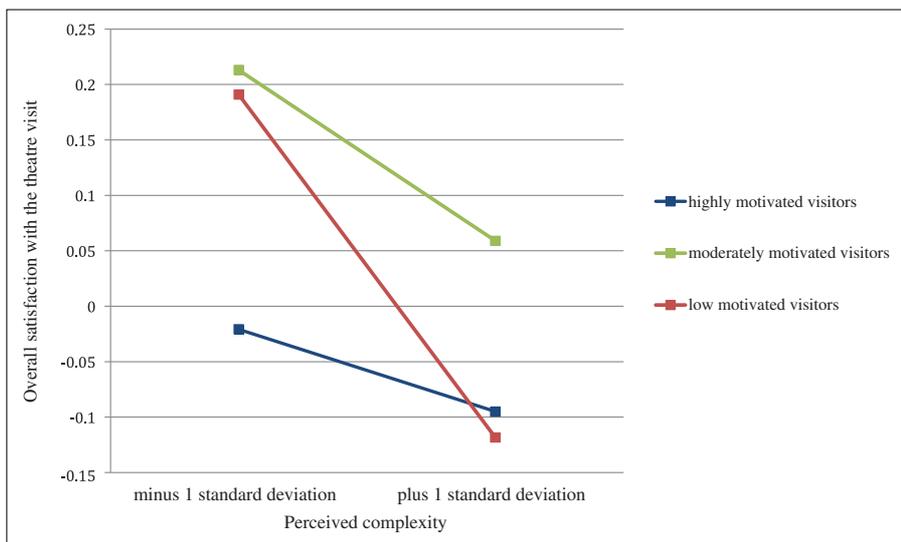


Figure 3. Interaction effect of perceived complexity and motivation on the overall satisfaction with the theatre visit.

they are with their visit. However, this effect is strongest for the highly motivated ($b=0.40$, $p\leq 0.001$), followed by the moderately motivated ($b=0.33$, $p\leq 0.001$) and the low motivated visitors ($b=0.29$, $p\leq 0.001$). **Figure 4** shows differences between the visitor groups.

Stage design, costumes, and props positively predict overall satisfaction only for low ($b=0.08$, $p\leq 0.010$)

and moderately motivated visitors ($b=0.06$, $p\leq 0.010$). Hence, the better they evaluate stage design, costumes, and props, the more satisfied these visitors are. In contrast, for highly motivated visitors, stage design, costumes, and props did not turn out as a significant predictor of their overall satisfaction. Differences between the groups are demonstrated in **Figure 5**.

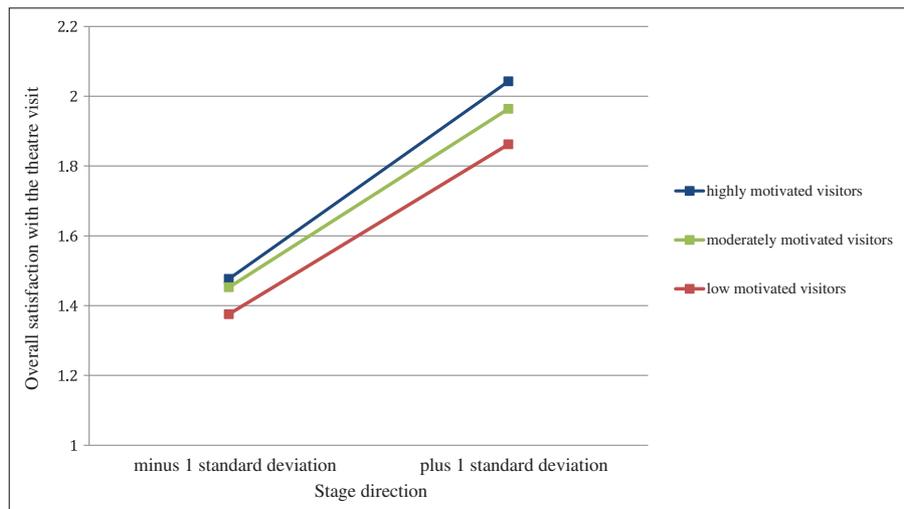


Figure 4. Interaction effect of perceived stage direction and motivation on the overall satisfaction with the theatre visit.

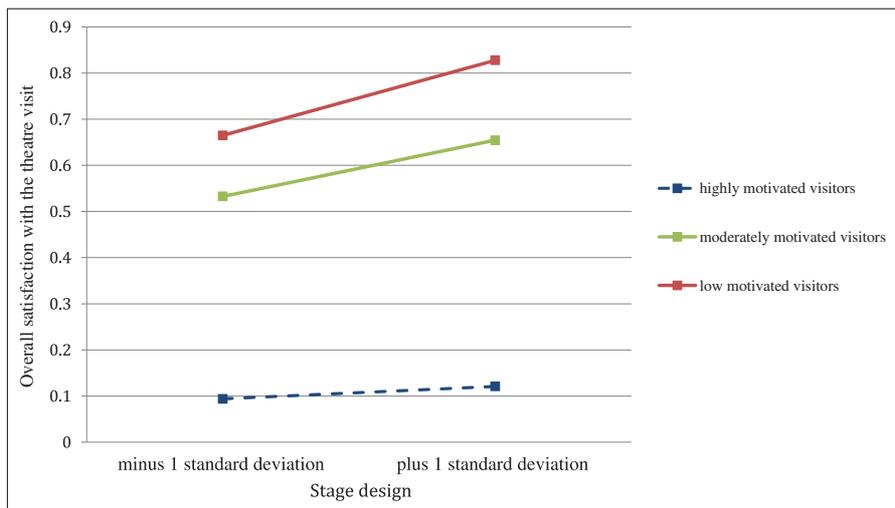


Figure 5. Interaction effect of the evaluation of the stage design and motivation on the overall satisfaction with the theatre visit.

To sum up the results for research question 2, only two moderators turned out to be significant, namely visitors' theatre competence and their motivation to attend a theatre performance. However, the moderator effect for theatre competence is limited to the layman group and the role of their expectations (i.e. level and specificity) before entering theatre. The moderator effect of visitors' motivation to attend a theatre performance appears slightly more important. Interpreting the results, one can state that low motivated visitors tend to be overextended by high degrees of performance complexity while highly appreciating visual aspects of the performance such as stage design, costumes, and props. In contrast, highly motivated theatre visitors tend to appreciate stage direction in general. However, the relatively small moderating effects of the personality traits analysed in this study may indicate that the reported main effects of primary service and servicescape on visitor satisfaction (refer to Table 2) are relatively robust.

Conclusions

The paper provides answers to the following research questions: (1) What is the impact of perceived primary service quality and perceived servicescape quality on visitors' overall satisfaction in theatre? The impact of the perceived primary service on visitors' satisfaction is by far greater than the impact of the servicescape, as indicated by more significant individual factors and higher *b*-values of the variables pertaining to the primary service. To conclude, servicescape is confirmed as a relevant determinant of customer satisfaction in theatres; however, if analysed in isolation (as was done in the literature), its relevance is likely to be overestimated. (2) Which factors moderate the relationship between primary service and servicescape, respectively, and overall customer satisfaction in theatre? Only visitors' theatre competence and their motivation to attend a theatre performance turned out to be significant moderators, although limited in range. To the

contrary, neither visitors' lifestyle nor their personality were significant moderators. To conclude, the identified main effects of primary service (i.e. the perceived artistic quality, followed by visitors' emotional and cognitive response to the performance) and servicescape (i.e. seating and view, other customers' behaviour) appear to be relatively robust.

Lastly, some limitations of this study have to be acknowledged. First, our sample was limited to German-speaking countries, that is, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In these countries, theatre funding is organized differently compared with other European countries and the USA (Van Maanen & Wilmer, 1998). Therefore, the structure and the organization of theatres are different, in particular with regard to both the ensemble and the repertory. Unless comparable studies are conducted in other countries, the possibility persists that our results apply solely to the German-speaking context. However, for two reasons, we are quite confident that our findings may be valid for other contexts as well. First, demographic characteristics of theatregoers, such as age, income, and socio-demographic status, seem to be similar across different countries (Stafford & Tripp, 2001). Second, as documented in our literature review, some of the determinants of customer satisfaction identified in our study have also been found in previous studies (Boerner *et al.*, 2011; Garbarino & Johnson, 2001; Jobst & Boerner, 2013; Song & Cheung, 2010a, 2010b; Voss & Cova, 2006).

Second, our survey study may suffer from a self-selection bias—both on the level of the theatres and the individual visitors. After inviting all public theatres in the German-speaking area to participate in our study, around 10 per cent agreed to do so. While this is an acceptable value for a so-called cold calling (e.g. Schön, 2010), the participating theatres might not accurately represent the population. However, the theatres in our sample are very typical with regard to their size, types, and the size of the cities. We are thus confident that the resulting bias is at most marginal.

Given the limitations cited in the preceding texts, it may be too early to develop practical implications.

However, we would like to highlight one aspect of our results. The overall evaluation of a theatre visit seems to depend on both the perceived artistic quality (i.e. staging, play, artistic quality) and visitors' individual emotional and cognitive reaction to the performance. Generally speaking, it can be concluded: The better visitors evaluate the artistic quality and the more intensive their emotional and cognitive response to the performance, the better they evaluate their overall theatre visit. This result underlines both visitors' high demand concerning artistic quality and the high relevance of the interaction between visitor and stage. Contrariwise, servicescape is much less relevant—pointing to the fact that visitors go to theatre primarily to enjoy the core service. The more this holds true, the less successful theatres' attempts to attire visitors by only improving the servicescape will be.

Future research on visitors' satisfaction in theatre should focus on two aspects. First, because our study is the first to include both the core service and the servicescape in one investigation, replications of our study appear to be necessary. A reliable and valid questionnaire for this purpose has been developed in our study. Second, as stated in the preceding texts, our sample is limited to German-speaking countries and German-speaking visitors. Further research is needed to investigate whether the obtained results generalize to the wider theatre population.

In addition to the servicescape perspective, our study may also contribute to the extant research on cultural consumption. This stream of research aims at studying consumer experience in different settings and under different theoretical perspectives (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). However, empirical investigations of the consumer experience in leisure settings appear to have overseen the theatre so far. While we found several studies in the museum setting (e.g. Goulding, 2000; Jafari, Taheri, & vom Lehn, 2013), we were not able to identify studies referring to theatres.

Nevertheless, we identified several interesting parallels between our study and the cultural consumption perspective. First, like in our study, customers' experience lies at the heart of cultural

consumption research (Goulding, 2000; Jafari *et al.*, 2013). Similar to theatre marketing, researchers of the cultural consumption perspective have long focused on statistical data to measure throughput and demographic profiles of visitors by ignoring the nature of the experiences itself (Goulding, 2000). Recently, however, efforts have been made to conceptualize and to measure the concept of experience quality. For example, Chang and Horng (2010, p. 2401) have defined experience quality 'as the customers' emotional judgment about an entire experience with an elaborately designed service setting'. Second, as this definition reveals, this concept seems to be close to our understanding of visitor satisfaction in theatre. Similar to our findings, experience quality can be described by multiple determinants, including cognitive (Goulding, 2000; Chang & Horng, 2010), affective (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Goulding, 2000; Chang & Horng, 2010), social, and physical aspects (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). Third, the social context is a prominent element of the cultural experience. For instance, Jafari *et al.* (2013, p. 1745) introduced the concept of 'interactive sociability' 'to explain our informants' sociability inside and outside the museum as they share their meanings and feelings'. Interactive sociability seems to be equally important in the theatre, as was demonstrated in previous reception research (Eversmann, 2004) as well as in our study (i.e. information seeking and enrichment by other customers during the performance turn out as significant predictors of overall satisfaction). Moreover, compared with museums, cultural consumption in theatre is a simultaneous process, whereby the sharing of meanings and feeling may be even more prominent than in the museum (Eversmann, 2004). Therefore, empirical studies in theatres may contribute to dig deeper into the concept of interactive sociability.

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