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Study #3: Experiment on Variety of Picture Types

Robinson's next study addressed the possibility that the variety of the picture content was important in predicting viewing time and "fatigue." In this study he presented a total of 25 pictures, 5 at a time. The pictures included 5 pictures of each of the following types: landscapes, Madonnas, portraits, marines, and animals.

Five conditions were studied:

Condition I. On the first card were 5 pictures of the first type, then on the next card were 5 pictures of the second type, etc. until all 25 had been presented.

Condition II. Two types of pictures were presented on each card.

Condition III. Three types of pictures were presented on each card.

Condition IV. Four types of pictures were presented on each card.

Condition V. Five types of pictures were presented on each card.

The average viewing time per picture increased from 15 to 20 seconds from Conditions I through IV, but Condition V resulted in an average of about 15 seconds. There appeared to be a consistent increase in time per picture as the variety of pictures increased from Condition I to IV, but the benefits of variety seemed to have limits since Condition V showed a drop compared with Condition IV.

Study #4: Use of Pamphlets to Reduce "Fatigue"

Robinson used a pamphlet as a visitor guide to pictures in the museum. After an initial problem in Museum Lg. where orientation problems prevented effective use of the pamphlet, Robinson reported a more successful use of pamphlets in Museum Sm. 2. The pamphlet focused on 20 of the pictures on display. The location, the title, and a brief describiton of these pictures were provided.

The pamphlet was handed to 86 visitors, of which 55 (over 60%) used it effectively. Of those who did not use it, 24 carried it but did not look at it, 4 looked at it as they left the museum, and 2 initially looked at it but did not use it.

Those who used the pamphlet spent more time in the museum (28 vs. 17 minutes); viewed a larger number of pictures (46 vs. 30); and viewed a larger percentage of pictures (25 vs. 17 %). Those who did not use the pamphlet showed the usual decrement in viewing time across successive tenths of their visit. Remarkably, those who used the pamphlet showed an increase in average viewing time across successive tenths of the visit.

The pamphlet appeared to counteract the "fatigue" effect usually observed in visitors. Visitors who used the pamphlet showed considerably more interest in the museum since they stayed longer, looked at more pictures, and examined a larger percentage of those they passed. □

Relative Importance of Size, Position, and Density of Exhibit Objects

From Robinson (1928), The Behavior of the Museum Visitor. AAM Monograph New Series No. 5.

Robinson reported that size of the object or picture, position on the wall, and density of exhibit objects or pictures (Robinson called this factor "isolation") were all important factors in determining visitor attention in art museums. He described the following order of these factors in terms of effectiveness:

1. Combination of large size and a central position on the wall.
2. Large size alone or the end position on the wall alone.
3. Combination of large size and end position on the wall.
4. Combination of large size and low density.
5. Low density by itself.
6. Central position on the wall alone. □

Special Issue on Evaluation in Art Museums coming soon!

Ross Loomis, Guest Editor

If you have any relevant material, submit it to Visitor Behavior.