

Abstract

In the past, many attempts have been made to measure aesthetic sensitivity. However, these measures either show poor psychometric properties, were developed for specific experimental purposes, are rather time-consuming, and/or focus exclusively on art works. The research presented here shows how existing methods such as multidimensional unfolding and conjoint analysis can be used for scale development in aesthetics research and presents a step-by-step approach that can be followed to construct scales measuring aesthetic sensitivity.

Chapter 1 describes the use of a classic approach to development a scale measuring aesthetic sensitivity. This approach resulted in a reliable and valid measure for aesthetic sensitivity. However, it also revealed important problems of the approach especially when dealing with visual stimuli. One problem was that the heterogeneity of the stimuli resulted in relatively low goodness of fit measures in exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis as compared with scales using verbal stimuli. A second problem concerned the validity of the new measure. It was concluded that in order to construct a scale that measures aesthetic sensitivity for everyday objects an approach has to be taken that incorporates more knowledge of the judgments criteria that people use to evaluate the aesthetic value of everyday objects.

The aim of the research reported in Chapter 2 was thus to identify the dimensions that people commonly use to evaluate the aesthetic value of everyday objects. The results are contrary to the assumption that people use the same general dimensions for evaluating the aesthetic values of all kinds of everyday objects, as for example had been proposed in the concept of Gute Gestalt from Gestalt Psychology or Berlyne's collative variables for other aesthetic objects. In contrast, individuals use different dimensions for different classes of objects. The dimensions identified for each class of objects were then used to create systematically varied, real-life stimuli.

The studies described in Chapter 3 served to develop a scale measuring visual aesthetic sensitivity using the new systematically varied stimuli. The results of this research indicate that the use of rating scales as response format for the items might not be appropriate even though it resulted in good goodness of fit measures.

The research described in Chapter 4 focuses mainly on two aspects. One aspect concerns the relative importance of relevant dimensions for the aesthetic judgment. Conjoint analysis revealed that the dimensions are differentially important for the aesthetic judgment. A second aspect concerns the external standard that is used to assess an individuals' aesthetic sensitivity. The external standards in the aesthetic sensitivity literature are measures of agreement rather than direct measures of a person's aesthetic sensitivity. In order to overcome this problem, the second aim of the research described in Chapter 4 was to establish an external standard that is different from the commonly used criteria in that: (a) it is based on knowledge about the properties of stimuli gained from interviews with experts and from multidimensional unfolding studies with non-experts, (b) the relative importance of each aesthetic dimension on the aesthetic judgment is taken into account, and (c) it is not a measure that is relative to a certain reference group (such as an average judgment) but rather based on the properties of the stimuli themselves.