

Branding in a new light

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Illuminated and neon signs outside businesses have contributed to brand identity for some years. But researchers are now evaluating how selecting a universal lighting design for stores can also send out branding signals to consumers. The concept of using lighting design as a form of corporate communication is illuminated further in an article in the current issue of *Lighting Research and Technology*, published by SAGE.

Lighting expert Thomas Schielke of Darmstadt University of Technology, Germany, designed an online study to investigate how lighting design contributes to the atmosphere in retail outlets. By using the same room image and varying the lighting set-up, he aimed to discover whether a lighting change would alter the perceived brand identity, and also to what extent this effect varied depending on culture.

In addition to quantitative studies of lighting around its safety and effectiveness in workplaces, studies into qualitative lighting - such as the room atmosphere and how this contributes to motivation or well-being - are on the increase. When it comes to branding, researchers are interested in the qualitative messages created by lighting, and how this can be incorporated in marketing.

Brand experts know that emotion can be more important than function when it comes to shopping. People perceive certain symbolic meanings in buildings; cultural, social, personal and psychological factors make a considerable contribution to the decision to buy; and the atmosphere in the particular retail outlet must be tailored to the targeted shopper. Today's shop lighting doesn't just need to show off the goods in their

best light, but also convey the brand image strategically in a chain of stores.

Schielke asked international study participants to judge the light, special setting and brand in a number of computer-simulated images of a clothing store. He found that rooms could convey a very different image in terms of brand identity simply through altered lighting. Lighting differences affected how participants rated the same room for brand attributes such as traditional or modern, or low budget vs. high class. Also there was a strong correlation between the scales uniform-differentiated, bright-dark, cold-warm, and traditional-modern. The study found some subtle differences between global regions, but broadly speaking a single lighting scheme would work for brand communication globally with minimal adjustment.

"Alone, interior lighting may not have the potential to explicitly communicate a specific brand name but it could facilitate sending a specific brand image," he explains.

The study represents a first step towards using lighting visualisations for subjective assessment, and as it can be done online it has international reach. Interestingly, although brightness is discussed a lot in lighting research, Schielke says that in terms of branding, this plays a subordinate role. So using light to construct a striking brand image does not necessarily entail higher energy consumption. Another budget point was that the branding result was down to the lighting effect itself, and not the actual [light](#) fixtures chosen to create it.

"For building a brand image, the importance of the lighting concept compared to the choice of luminaires should not be underestimated," explains Schielke. He adds that companies looking at lighting concepts in terms of investment and running costs should also consider the value added for the business by the enhanced brand identity from good

lighting design.

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