

Visual experience of qualities in photo-representations of tool handles Studies with non-professional and professional subjects

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Abstract

Positive visual qualities of hand-tools are of great importance in working life, as they contribute to the image of the work-place and, particularly, to the pride of users and respect by persons who meet them at work. In connection with an industrial design project of professional floor cleaning equipment, experiments were carried out on important visual qualities of handles. Thirty-eight non-professionals and eight professional users took part in evaluation of colour photos of six handles of various categories of hand-tools. For each handle, subjects were asked to judge six adjectives of importance for visual perception of professional cleaning equipment by means of a visual analogue rating scale. In addition, professional users were also asked to comment each rating. Results for different handles, qualities and user groups were compared. One important result was that products' visual signals did not always coincide with their corresponding ergonomic qualities. Nevertheless, even professional users rated representations of such handles as considerate and hand-friendly. The study shows that emotional statements are sometimes contradictory to consensus in ergonomics and that they must be carefully interpreted and realised in industrial design.

Introduction

Positive visual qualities of hand-tools are of importance in working life, as they contribute to the image of the work-place and, particularly, to the pride of users and respect by persons who meet them at work. Positive affect makes people more tolerant of minor difficulties and more flexible and creative in finding solutions (Norman, 2002). In addition, visual product qualities are an important part of the brand of the manufacturing company. Among the variables in product design, shape parameters have a relatively strong influence on the success of the product in the market (Wagner et al., 2003). The visual impression of qualities of products represented in company brochures and websites might be decisive when a customer makes a choice between two products of the same price and performance. However, the knowledge is lacking about how purchasers and users experience various visual qualities of tools.