Beware of dim shops! Those with low lighting make us more SELFISH and likely to buy things we want as opposed to what we need

- Lighting conditions in a room can change what items people buy, experts say
- Shoppers are more likely to make hedonistic purchases in dim conditions
- They buy more sensibly and choose items for their functionality in bright rooms
- Selfish impulses are reversed when they are reminded of their friends and family

Shops might be using dim lighting to encourage customers to buy products that give them pleasure, a study has found.

Low lighting puts people in a more selfish mindset meaning they are more likely to buy things for personal gain and not because they are functional, researchers found.

This is because a darker environment reduces emotional connections with others, leading people to be truer to their own wants, scientists say.

The opposite is true in a brightly lit area where customers tend to be more sensible in their shopping habits.

Researchers from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) and Northwestern University in the United States studied the effects of lighting on consumer preference.

This makes them more likely to choose what they believe will give them greater pleasure, rather than what they think is functional.
Assistant Professor Irene Huang said, ‘The results suggest that brighter surroundings may be better if one wants to highlight products prized for their function, while a dimmer environment works better for products prized for pleasure.’

‘The potential implication is that shop owners can adjust the store lighting to suit specific marketing campaigns, for example, to emphasise the functional or hedonic aspects of their products.’

Assistant Professor Huang, who does research in sensory marketing and emotions, said, ‘Often, for the same type of product, consumers may be choosing between what they like and what they find more practical.

‘We inferred from previous literature that people feel less intense emotions and feel emotionally disconnected from others in darker surroundings.

‘Thus we set out to find out if a darker environment can lead to people choosing what they truly want for themselves.’

Researchers conducted three separate studies to investigate the impact of lighting conditions on people’s choices.

One hundred participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: firstly a dark or well-lit computer lab setting, and then within that setting, whether their choice is observable or non-observable by others.

What this experiment showed was that the stylish, but less practical, chair was preferred by people in the dark room - even if they knew it would be a private purchase.

The second experiment studied 180 participants and randomly assigned them to dark or well-lit conditions.

Once here, they were tasked with choose between two job candidates, one competent and one fun.
HOW DO COMPANIES MANIPULATE YOUR SPENDING?

Shops and retailers have long used many different ways to control and influence consumer shopping habits.

Under-21s are the most likely to make an impulse purchase.

Young people are also hugely influenced by what others are buying as they are inclined to follow the herd more than older people.

Getting messy

Instead of constantly tidying the shop floor, some shop assistants are strategically messing things up. It's a tactic to make items appear popular, as if lots of people have been looking at them and they are a must-have.

Brand blurring

Companies are re-branding many of their lines to make the difference between cheap and mid-range goods less distinct.

This makes a ‘value’ product appear more desirable.

Location-specific offers

Companies use GPS data to track and make informed decisions about targeted advertisements.

Several other decisions were looked at as well, including a mobile app for work and a mobile app for entertainment; a durable laptop for the home office and a stylish laptop for the home office; and between a documentary drama and a love drama.

‘Analysis showed that when in darkness, the participants were truer to themselves and followed their heart, with a greater preference for the hedonic option as well,’ said Assistant Professor Huang.

These decisions were made in private and were thrown under scrutiny when the researchers reminded participants of their friends and family.

The research team then set out to test in the third study whether reminding people of their social connections to others could turn off this effect.

Interestingly, when participants were reminded of their personal connections, the tendency to favour hedonic options in darkness disappeared.

Assistant Professor Huang said: ‘There are other factors that affect consumer choice. For example, when a person has been through a situation where they have less control, such as a traffic jam, he is more likely to buy functional products.

‘Or when it is very difficult to choose, one will just follow their heart.

‘But marketers would still find it worthwhile to bear the effect of ambient lighting in mind when highlighting the hedonic or functional aspects of the products.’