The Influence of Colour Psychology on Advertising Effectiveness

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Abstract
The impact of colour on human life is tremendous. Colour affects us through its power to shape our perception, feelings, and actions subconsciously. When it comes to advertising, colour becomes a strong tool used to persuade customers. This article is dedicated to studying the effects of colour psychology on the performance of advertisements. The impact of particular colours on human psychology is analysed along with the way how they are used to make consumers choose certain products. The article uses scientific research results of contemporary scientists, psychologists, and marketers in order to prove that colour is a tool which works differently for different cultures and contexts.

Keywords: Colour-Psychology, Advertising-Effectiveness, Consumer-Behaviour, Marketing-Communication, Branding, Visual-Perception, Emotional-Response.

1.0 Introduction

Advertising has always used visual appeal to influence people's decisions. From the earliest printed posters to modern digital campaigns, how ads look matters just as much as the message they deliver. Colour is at the heart of this visual appeal; it can grab attention, trigger memory, and evoke emotional responses (Elliot & Maier, 2014). Research in psychology shows that colour

can boost brand recognition by up to 80 percent, making it one of the strongest parts of consumer perception and loyalty (Singh, 2006). For advertisers, this shows that colour is not just about design or style. It serves as a persuasive tool that shapes attitudes, purchasing behaviour, and long-term brand identity. Colour psychology is the study of how different colours affect human feelings and behaviours. Scholars maintain that colours impact both conscious and subconscious processes, often guiding choices before people even consider written or spoken information. For example, warm colours like red and orange may spark excitement, urgency, or appetite. In contrast, cool colours like blue and green can suggest calmness, trust, or environmental awareness. However, these meanings are not the same everywhere. Cultural contexts greatly influence how colours are seen and what they represent (Aslam, 2006). A notable example is white, which symbolizes purity and weddings in Western societies but stands for mourning and loss in many Asian cultures. This contrast highlights the importance of context in marketing. A colour that boosts sales in one area might turn off consumers in another. In today's global marketplace, where brands often cross-cultural borders, the stakes are even higher. Mistakes in colour choice can damage marketing campaigns, while strategic colour use can set products apart, increase consumer engagement, and drive sales. Companies like Coca-Cola, Facebook, and McDonald's have developed strong brand identities by consistently using specific colours, showing the lasting impact of visual psychology on consumer loyalty.

This article will examine colour psychology as it pertains to advertisement by way of literature review, identifying general colour associations and providing examples of multinational corporations that employ colour psychology as a marketing tactic to sway consumers into buying their products. I hope to convince you that colour psychology is necessary to master if you want to be successful in the world of advertising.

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Figure 1: **First Impressions in Advertising**

Figure Note: The figure shows the percentage of brand recognition which is attributed to colour influence since brand recognition can be attributed to up to 80% due to colour usage in advertisements. The darker portion represents the percentage influenced by colour, while the lighter portion represents other influences.
Source: Singh, (2006).

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2.0 The Science of Colour Psychology

Colour psychology is based upon the belief that colours can affect human behaviour. Humans are biologically and environmentally conditioned to react to colour. Biologically speaking, we can prove that colour provokes a physical reaction. Blood pressure can increase/decrease, people can feel hungry, and heart rates can rise based on certain colours (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994). Naturally, warm colours like red-orange invoke feelings of stimulation and excitement, while cool colours like blue-green can invoke feelings of trust and calmness. Much of this has to do with biological evolutionary reasons for associate certain colours. Red is danger or blood but could also mean that something is ripe, while green means vegetative and nothing dangerous is growing. New neurological research has found that colour is very significant in how we perceive things. research indicates that humans process colours quicker than text and even faster than shapes (Spence, 2021). Therefore, colour is noticed before anything else in visual communications. as consumers begin to form impressions and emotional responses before, they consciously engage with slogans, logos, or product details. In this way, colour bypasses rational thought and appeals directly to the subconscious.

The practical implications of this are evident in modern branding and marketing strategies. For instance, many fast-food chains, including McDonald's, KFC, and Burger King, consistently use red and yellow in their logos and store designs. These colours are not accidental choices: red stimulates appetite and urgency, while yellow creates a sense of happiness and warmth, encouraging quick decisions and repeat visits (Garcia & Patel, 2021). Similarly, banks and technology companies often rely on shades of blue, which convey trustworthiness, stability, and professionalism qualities essential for building long-term consumer confidence.

Elliot and Maier (2014) argue that the emotional impact of colour lies not only in the hue itself but also in its saturation and brightness. Bright, highly saturated colours are more likely to provoke strong, immediate emotional responses such as excitement or joy, whereas muted or pastel tones often suggest sophistication, subtlety, or calmness. For advertisers, this means that choosing a colour palette involves more than simply selecting a single colour it requires careful attention to shade, tone, and intensity to ensure alignment with the intended message and audience. A soft pastel pink might work well for a luxury cosmetics brand, while a bold, saturated red could be more effective for a clearance sale poster. Taken together, these insights show that colour is not a decorative afterthought in advertising but a central tool of persuasion. By shaping mood, guiding perception, and influencing behaviour, colour choices have the power to determine whether an advertisement resonates with its audience or fades into the background.

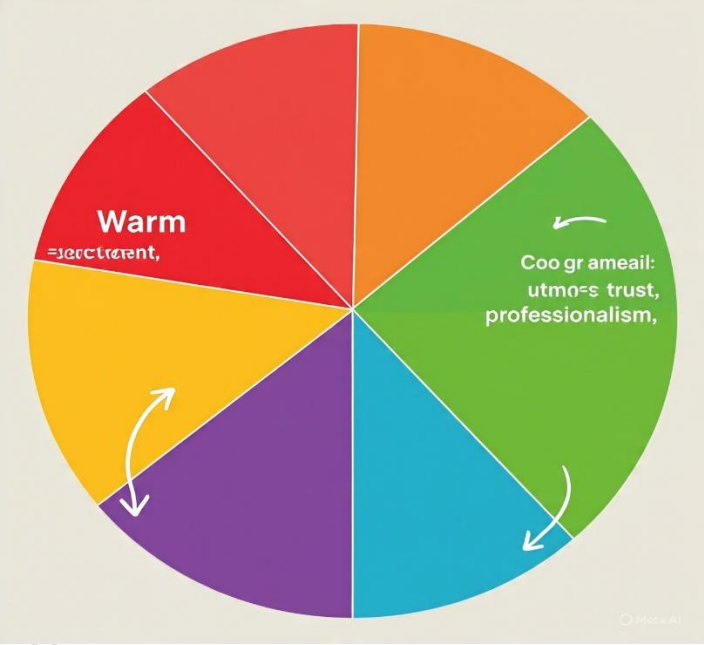


Figure 2: Colour Associations in Advertising
Remark: The above diagram shows the pie chart used to explain colour perceptions in advertising. Red and orange fall under the warm category, where they represent feelings of excitement, passion, and enthusiasm. Yellow denotes optimism and attracts attention. Blue and green are cool colours and suggest feelings of calmness, trustworthiness, and professionalism, while purple signifies luxury, creativity, and wisdom.

Reference: Adapted from: Singh, (2006).

3.0 Colour and Consumer Decision Making

Effectiveness in advertising can be seen in terms of the consumer's understanding and response to the advertisements. As purchasing behaviours of individuals are governed more by emotion than reason, colours become quite significant factors in influencing consumer behaviour (Labrecque & Milne, 2023). In this regard, for example, the colour blue conveys feelings of trustworthiness and reliability, thus explaining why banks and technology-based companies such as PayPal, Dell, and IBM use this colour in their brand advertisements. The colour red, for its part, instills feelings of urgency and passion, thereby becoming popular in clearance sales and fast-food advertisements. In an experimental study, Tavassoli & Zhang (2024) have proved that people who see advertisements using culturally significant colours remember these advertisements better and buy the advertised products. It implies that the role of colour in advertising is not only psychological but also cultural. For instance, the colour gold is considered to symbolize affluence and prosperity, making it useful in branding luxury goods. Naz & Ehsan note that almost 85 percent of consumers claim that the main reason behind their decision to choose a particular product against others is its colour.

4.0. Colour and Brand Identity

The brand represents something more than just a company's name; it is the creation of an image through the combination of visual and emotional impressions that form the perceptions of consumers towards it. One such element of a company's image that often forms people's primary recognition of it is colour. The probability of consumers identifying a company through its colours is higher than through any other elements such as a logo, fonts, or slogans (Wright and Alford 122). This phenomenon can be seen through such examples as the colours red associated with Coca-Cola, blue associated with Facebook, and the golden arches used by McDonald's all around the world. There is constant research that highlights the need for consistency in colour choices. For example, O'Connor and Daniels say that consistency with colours used in various campaigns creates loyalty from customers based on familiarity and trust. Whenever customers see the same colours from their favorite brands, they recall something reliable. This is especially important in the digital age, as there are numerous screens where brands have to compete for visibility. With consistent colours, brands become identifiable despite all the competition surrounding them. Colour's function within branding can be seen through the idea of "exciting red and competent blue," created by Labrecque and Milne (2012). Their findings show that the colour red is associated with excitement, passion, and urgency, while blue is associated with competence, professionalism, and reliability. These concepts provide an explanation for the reason that companies involved in the sports or fitness industry such as Nike, Adidas, and Puma use vibrant colours such as red, orange, and black. On the other hand, financial organizations, insurance organizations, and technological organizations have always used blue shades as a way to emphasize the qualities of stability, security, and dependability that are very important in

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businesses where trust is vital. Colours also serve as key elements in establishing distinctions between business organizations operating within highly competitive environments where several organizations deal in almost identical products. One good illustration would be the rivalry between Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Although both organizations manufacture carbonated beverages, each organization's distinctive colours speak volumes about each product. In the long run, apart from establishing distinctiveness, these contrasts have led to emotional brand loyalty since many customers identify themselves and their preferences based on either one or the other colour choice. Besides distinction, colours are part of the story telling involved in branding. The luxury brand Chanel, for instance, makes extensive use of black and white to create associations with elegance and timeless sophistication, whereas eco-friendly businesses, such as Whole Foods and Tropicana, rely on green as a sign of health and sustainability. All of these efforts are geared toward creating a connection between brand values and cultural values that will influence consumer expectations. From all of these examples, it becomes evident that colours play a more fundamental role in the process of branding and identification than just being aesthetically pleasing.



Figure 3: Brand Colour Associations Across Selected Companies

Point to be noted: The image below demonstrates the brand colours that are most prominent among chosen firms from across the globe along with their corresponding psychological interpretations as related to advertisements. Red (Coca-Cola, McDonald's, for example) indicates excitement and energy; Blue (Pepsi) reflects trust and calmness; Yellow indicates optimism and focus (McDonald's); Green is associated with growth and environmental concerns (Starbucks). In the above image, Facebook has been shown in green colour although its actual colour in advertisements is usually blue to highlight the generic interpretation of the green colour in brand psychology.
Source: Own illustration based on colour psychology literature.

5.0 Advertising, Colour and Culture

Whereas psychology offers broad guidelines on the subject, culture plays an important role in shaping the meanings associated with colours. According to Aslam (2006), cultural differences in terms of colour perception can spell life or death for advertisements. For instance, whereas black is seen as elegant and classy in Western societies, it is viewed as being related to mourning in some African societies, something that could have unintended consequences. In addition, although green is a sign of wealth and divinity in the Middle Eastern culture, in some Latin societies, it is believed to signify death. Tavassoli and Zhang (2024) corroborate this idea through their findings that advertising campaigns using colours consistent with cultures had up to 20 percent more engagement than campaigns where colours were inconsistent with cultural norms.

5.1 Colour in Digital and Online Advertising

However, the advent of the digital era has widened the scope of colours used for advertisements through interactive advertisements. Digital technology gives colours the opportunity to be used not just statically but in ways such as adaptation to the theme or even changing according to consumer response. According to Garcia and Patel (2021), online advertisements have the feature of using attractive colours such as orange and red as these tend to attract consumers' attention among many other ads on the same page of the website. Softer colours might also be considered for their professional and friendly appearance and building long-term brand equity. Social media has increased the importance of uniformity in colours used. Companies and brands use different media for advertising, including Instagram and YouTube, which makes them require some coherence in their visual presentation.

5.2 Case Studies of Colour Use in Advertising

Examples abound from the real world showing how colour psychology has a direct impact on how ads can be made more effective. For instance, Coca-Cola's continuous use of the colour red was intentionally aimed at stimulating excitement, passion, and energy. As reported by Singh (2006), this decision has been made to reflect the essence of Coke as a global symbol of happiness and celebration. Since red is associated with festivity and joy, the colour has helped to portray Coke as not just any other drink but a drink of happiness and joy that fosters unity. In addition, one can cite the case of McDonald's red and yellow colour theme as another example

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where the psychology of colours is used. According to Valdez and Mehrabian (1994), red stimulates the appetite and urgency in people while yellow creates feelings of warmth and friendliness (403). However, while others have used a variety of colours to attract customers, Apple has made the deliberate decision to limit itself to black, white, and silver tones for its advertising campaigns. The three colours suggest elegance, sophistication, and class-connotations that reinforce the premium nature of the brand, created by its innovation and design (Mahnke, 1996).

There are other brands which show how effective colour can be used in branding. In the case of Starbucks, for example, the use of green is meant to convey freshness and growth as well as calmness and community. This is consistent with the firm's goal of offering customers a third place, which lies between the realms of home and workplace. Again, luxury clothing brands such as Chanel and Gucci frequently feature black and gold in their advertisements. Here, black stands for timeless elegance, whereas gold indicates affluence and exclusivity. The use of colours like black and gold in such advertising helps to communicate messages associated with a sense of luxury to consumers. It is evident from the above discussion that effective advertising requires much more than just choosing appealing colours.



Figure 4: Comparative use of colour in branding by Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

Legend: The picture shows a juxtaposition between the two brands of Coca-Cola and Pepsi on the basis of their colour palettes so as to show how colour impacts consumer perceptions and emotions. The use of red colour by Coca-Cola signifies feelings of excitement, energy, passion, and urgency, hence giving its brand a bold and eye-catching look. On the other hand, the use of

blue colour by Pepsi means that the company wants to portray feelings of calmness, trust, dependability, and refreshment. This way, the colour becomes instrumental for brand identification and differentiation.

Source: Adapted from The Coca-Cola Company and Pepsico (2026)

5.3. Challenges and Criticisms of Colour Psychology

Although colour psychology provides helpful information, it does have some limitations. According to critics, most evidence is context-based. For example, as the colour red can increase the sense of urgency in advertising, it can also be used to indicate mistakes or danger elsewhere (Spence, 2020). Cultural considerations pose another problem in that one can never tell whether a colour that promotes trust and loyalty in one society will elicit suspicion in another. As noted by O'Connor & Daniels, advertisers should use colour psychology together with consumer research because it would be erroneous to make general assumptions about colours (82). Another limitation of colour psychology is associated with the increasing use of digital platforms for advertising, where colours may vary according to brightness, resolution, and personal preferences of users.

6.0. Conclusion

Colour psychology is one of the most important factors in making advertisements effective since colour plays an influential role in determining how a consumer thinks, feels, and reacts to marketing communications. Colour is more than just an aesthetic element because colour has the power to capture consumers' attention, direct their perceptions, and help them decide what to do. With the knowledge about the meanings that lie behind each colour, it is easier for marketers to develop advertisements that will appeal to customers and help them develop an interesting brand. Colour should not be considered in isolation since many other factors have to be considered. The colours that might convey positive emotions in one particular culture may convey the idea of being sad in another culture, and that is why advertisers need to consider the culture of their clients before using colour in advertisement. In addition, the effect that colours may have depends on the specific industry or product that is advertised. For example, the colour blue could work well for banks, but when it comes to sport products, it could not be a wise choice because sport products require high levels of excitement while blue conveys something else. If the colour remains uniform in packaging, on the Internet and elsewhere, then the message of the company is strengthened through repetition and unity. However, with the emergence of digital technologies, the problem arose with colours being presented differently through various media. It also becomes increasingly necessary for advertisers to test their options and fine-tune their decisions to ensure that the message conveyed through all mediums is the one they intended to send. In the future, the importance of colour in advertising cannot be overstated. With digital media taking over advertising campaigns in most markets, visual material needs to make a statement almost instantly. New technological innovations like artificial intelligence and advanced data analysis give marketers tools to understand consumer attitudes towards colours

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better. Under such conditions, understanding the psychology of colours will be indispensable for marketers who wish to both persuade and engage diverse audiences across the globe.



Figure 5: Relationship between Colour, Emotion, Perception, and Brand Loyalty.

Legend: The circle depicts the relationship between colour and emotions by depicting how colour tones evoke various emotions. The warm colours, such as orange and yellow, symbolize excitement and warmth while the cool colours include blue and teal and depict trust, serenity, and dependability. The perception bar indicates how emotions affect the perception of the message, whereby stronger colours attract greater attention and sense of urgency. On the other hand, the brand loyalty bar illustrates the lasting impact on a brand when there is consistency in colour-emotion relationship to build trust and loyalty.

Source: Author's conceptualization (2026).

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