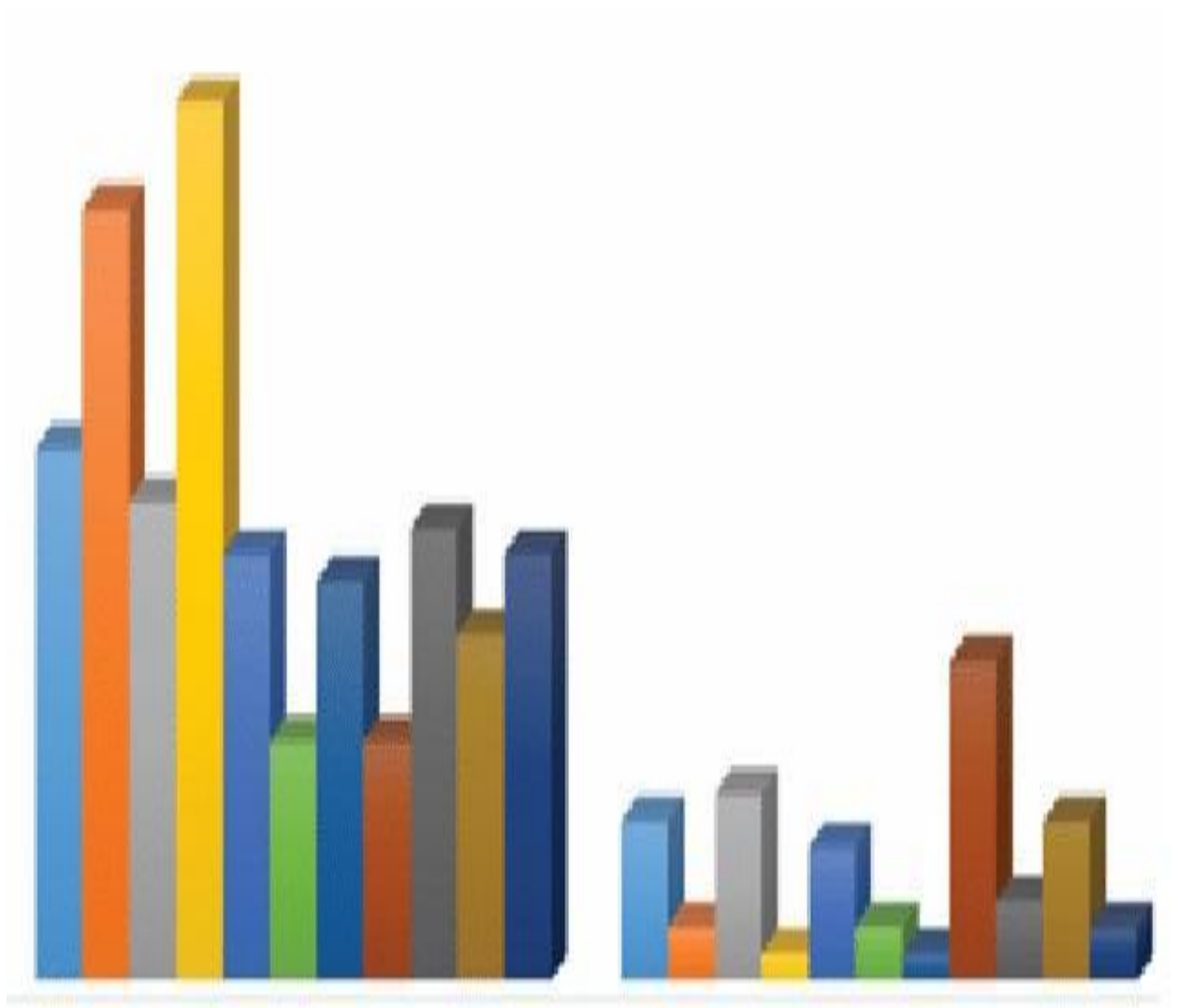


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Research Article

The Influence of Colour Psychology in Business Advertising and Communication

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ABSTRACT

Colour is a fundamental element of visual communication, shaping perception, emotion, and meaning in both advertising and corporate communication. Within business contexts, colour psychology refers to the study of how specific hues influence consumer attitudes, decision-making, and brand associations. This article examines the role of colour as a communicative medium in business advertising, exploring its psychological underpinnings and strategic applications. Drawing from theoretical perspectives in semiotics, cognitive psychology, cultural studies, and brand identity theory, the study develops an integrated framework that connects colour selection and usage with communication effectiveness and consumer engagement. Employing a qualitative research methodology—semi-structured interviews with advertisers, marketers, and communication designers, along with document and visual discourse analysis—the research investigates how corporations leverage colour to convey brand personality, elicit emotions, and shape behavioural intentions. Findings reveal that colours operate as non-verbal rhetorical devices that influence trust, excitement, and urgency; cultural and contextual variations significantly affect colour interpretations, consistency in colour application strengthens brand equity, and accessibility and inclusivity concerns are increasingly shaping colour strategy. The study concludes with theoretical, managerial, and ethical implications, underscoring colour's multifaceted role in modern business communication.

Keywords: colour psychology, advertising, business communication, brand identity, semiotics, qualitative research

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1. Introduction

In the information-saturated landscapes of contemporary markets, businesses must communicate quickly and effectively to capture consumer attention and convey meaning. Visual communication plays a decisive role in this process, and among its components, colour stands out as one of the most powerful and immediate cues. Colours do not merely decorate—they persuade, signal, and resonate with audiences at cognitive and emotional levels. In advertising and business communication, strategic colour use influences purchase intentions, brand perceptions, and message clarity.

While colour's symbolic associations have long been recognised in art and culture, systematic inquiry into its psychological and communicative impact in business contexts has intensified in recent decades. For corporations, advertising agencies, and communication strategists, understanding colour psychology is not only an aesthetic consideration but a business imperative. The central research question of this article is:

How does colour psychology influence business advertising and communication, and what are the implications for brand strategy?

This study contributes by consolidating interdisciplinary literature into a comprehensive framework of colour psychology in business communication, presenting empirical insights from qualitative fieldwork, and outlining implications for theory and practice, including ethical challenges in manipulating consumer responses through colour.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Foundations of Colour

Colour psychology rests on theories of perception, cognition, and emotion. Research indicates that colour perception is both a physiological and cultural phenomenon (Elliot & Maier, 2014). Colours stimulate neural responses that evoke affective states (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994), while cultural conditioning shapes interpretations (Aslam, 2006). For instance, red is associated with danger and passion in many Western cultures, but in China it signifies prosperity and good fortune.

2.2 Colour in Advertising and Marketing

Advertising literature has long explored colour's impact on consumer attitudes. Studies suggest that warm colours (reds, oranges, yellows) can increase arousal and urgency, making them common in clearance sales and fast-food advertising (Bellizzi & Hite, 1992). Cool colours (blues, greens) evoke calmness, trust, and competence, which explains their dominance in finance and healthcare branding (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). Moreover, colour contrast influences readability and attention, critical in digital advertising where user attention spans are limited.

2.3 Brand Identity and Colour Consistency

Brand identity frameworks emphasise that colour is a central component of a brand's visual system, functioning as a symbolic anchor of recognition (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003). Consistent use of brand colours across platforms enhances recall and strengthens brand associations (Henderson et al., 2003). For example, Coca-Cola's red or Tiffany's

turquoise have become iconic brand assets inseparable from their corporate identities.

2.4 Semiotics of Colour

Semiotics conceptualises colour as a sign system where hues act as signifiers with culturally constructed meanings (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017). For example, green may signify nature, growth, and sustainability, but can also imply inexperience (“green” as a novice). Semiotic frameworks help decode the layered meanings that consumers attach to brand colour schemes.

2.5 Cultural Variations

Cross-cultural research highlights differences in colour symbolism and emotional responses. Aslam (2006) emphasises that misinterpreting cultural colour codes can lead to communication breakdowns in international advertising. Multinational corporations, therefore, must adapt colour strategies to local markets while maintaining global coherence.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The persuasive power of colour raises ethical questions. Overuse of red in clearance signage may pressure consumers into impulsive decisions, raising concerns about manipulation. Additionally, accessibility—ensuring colour contrast for readability and consideration of colour blindness—is increasingly viewed as both an ethical and legal requirement (W3C, 2018).

2.7 Research Gap

Despite extensive experimental studies on colour psychology, fewer qualitative explorations exist into how practitioners interpret and operationalise colour in business advertising and communication. This gap justifies a qualitative study to

capture the tacit, experiential knowledge of practitioners.

3. Theoretical Framework

The integrated theoretical framework guiding this study combines four perspectives:

Cognitive-Emotional Response Theory (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994): Explains how colour stimuli evoke affective responses.

Brand Identity and Equity Theory (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003): Situates colour as a strategic brand asset influencing brand equity.

Semiotics of Colour (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017): Interprets colour as a sign system with cultural and contextual meanings.

Visual Rhetoric (Foss, 2004): Positions colour as a rhetorical device that persuades through ethos, pathos, and logos.

3.1 Propositions

From the framework, the following propositions emerge:

P1: Strategic use of colour enhances message recall and brand recognition.

P2: Colour-induced emotional responses shape consumer attitudes toward advertisements.

P3: Consistent use of colour across media enhances trust and brand equity.

P4: Cultural variations moderate the impact of specific colours on communication effectiveness.

P5: Ethical and accessible colour practices positively influence corporate reputation.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach was selected to explore how practitioners use and interpret colour in business communication. This approach prioritises depth and meaning over generalizability, aiming to uncover interpretive frameworks and lived experiences of marketers and designers.

4.2 Case Selection

Six corporations (consumer goods, finance, technology, retail, healthcare, and hospitality) were purposively sampled based on their demonstrated emphasis on colour in brand communication. Inclusion criteria required established brand guidelines with documented colour systems, and willingness to participate in interviews.

4.3 Data Collection

Three methods were employed:

Semi-structured interviews: 18 practitioners (brand managers, advertising creatives, UX designers) participated in 45–90-minute interviews covering colour strategy, cultural considerations, accessibility, and perceived effectiveness.

Document analysis: Corporate identity manuals and campaign briefs were examined to assess formalised rules and rationales behind colour choices.

Visual discourse analysis: Advertising artefacts (print, digital, packaging) were analysed for colour usage, rhetorical functions, and consistency.

4.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted through coding in NVivo, supported by multimodal semiotic analysis. Triangulation across interviews, documents, and artefacts ensured validity. Themes were developed inductively, guided by the theoretical framework.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's institution. Participants gave informed consent, and corporate identities were anonymised unless explicit permission was granted. Accessibility and inclusivity principles were also integrated into the analysis.

5. Findings

5.1 Colour as Emotional Catalyst

Practitioners emphasised that colours serve as emotional shortcuts. Red was frequently used to signal urgency in retail promotions, while blue communicated trustworthiness in financial services. Designers acknowledged using warm hues for excitement and cool hues for reassurance, aligning with psychological theories.

5.2 Colour Consistency and Brand Equity

Document analysis revealed rigorous codification of brand colours in corporate guidelines. Firms invested heavily in maintaining consistent hues across media, recognising that even minor deviations undermined recognition. Interviewees described colour as “the brand’s uniform,” indispensable to identity.

5.3 Cultural and Contextual Adaptation

Findings highlighted how global corporations adjust colour usage for local contexts. A hospitality brand, for example, modified its palette in Asian markets to incorporate auspicious reds and golds while maintaining brand coherence. Cultural semiotics shaped these choices to resonate with local consumers.

5.4 Accessibility and Inclusivity

Several organisations incorporated accessibility checks into their design processes, ensuring sufficient contrast and alternative cues for colour-blind audiences. Interviewees framed accessibility not only as compliance but as an ethical responsibility aligned with corporate social values.

5.5 Colour as a Competitive Differentiator

Practitioners viewed colour as a key differentiator in saturated markets. Distinctive hues, such as the specific shade of purple used by a telecommunications company, became shorthand for brand identity, even without logos or text.

5.6 Tensions in Colour Strategy

Tensions emerged between creativity and codification. While strict adherence to guidelines ensured consistency, some designers felt constrained, desiring flexibility to innovate. Balancing consistency with creativity was a recurring challenge.

6. Discussion

6.1 Integration with Theoretical Framework

Findings confirm propositions: strategic colour usage enhanced recognition and recall

(P1) and elicited emotional responses shaping attitudes (P2). Colour consistency reinforced brand equity (P3), while cultural adaptation proved essential for global effectiveness (P4). Finally, ethical and accessible practices supported positive reputation outcomes (P5).

6.2 Managerial Implications

Invest in Colour Governance: Corporations should codify colour usage with precision across touchpoints, ensuring consistency while allowing contextual flexibility.

Embed Accessibility: Inclusive colour practices should be embedded as standard, not optional, aligning with both ethical imperatives and legal requirements.

Balance Creativity and Control: Firms should design guidelines that empower creativity within boundaries, enabling innovation without diluting brand identity.

Cultural Intelligence: Global firms must integrate cultural semiotics into colour strategy to enhance resonance and avoid misinterpretation.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

This research extends branding literature by demonstrating colour's rhetorical and semiotic power in business communication. It highlights the need to integrate psychological, cultural, and ethical dimensions in colour strategy scholarship.

7. Conclusion

Colour is a persuasive and multifaceted communication tool in business advertising. It operates at the intersection of psychology, culture, and brand strategy, shaping consumer emotions, perceptions, and behaviours. By treating colour as a strategic

asset, corporations can enhance recognition, build trust, and foster resonance across diverse markets. Yet, this power must be exercised responsibly, with attention to ethics and inclusivity. As markets grow increasingly global and digital, colour psychology will remain central to effective business communication.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

Limitations include the small, purposive sample, which restricts generalizability. Future research could use quantitative or experimental methods to test causal relationships between colour usage and consumer behaviour. Cross-cultural experimental studies could further illuminate cultural differences. Additionally, neuroaesthetic methods (e.g., eye-tracking, fMRI) could provide deeper insights into unconscious colour responses.

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