

# The Psychology of Color in Branding and Marketing

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## ABSTRACT

Color is a fundamental element in branding and marketing that influences consumer perception, behavior, and emotional response. This paper examines the psychological and cultural underpinnings of color use in branding, examining how color choices shape brand identity, impact marketing effectiveness, and contribute to consumer engagement. Through analysis of color perception, historical marketing trends, cross-cultural associations, logo design, and psychological effects of color combinations, the study highlights the multidimensional role color plays in marketing communication. Drawing on expert insights, cross-cultural studies, and successful branding case studies (e.g., Coca-Cola, Nike, and Starbucks), the research emphasizes that effective use of color is both an art and a science. Strategic application of color can increase brand recognition, foster emotional connections, and influence purchase decisions. However, its effectiveness is mediated by cultural context, individual experience, and evolving consumer expectations. Marketers must consider these variables to create resonant and inclusive color strategies that enhance brand equity and market appeal.

**Keywords:** Color psychology, branding, consumer behavior, marketing strategy, cultural perception, emotional response, logo design.

## INTRODUCTION

Color is a very personal thing. It can evoke emotion and association as well as be used as a means of identification. The use of color is one of the most powerful tools a marketer has at their disposal to put their audience in a particular frame of mind. The best brands are recognized just by their color. There are countless choices around us and color plays a huge role in this perceived reality. With such a variety of choices and avenues of information through which to learn about them, having a strong representation in the minds of consumers is paramount. A great deal of time and energy is put into influencing what we think about a product and that thought is based in part on how we feel about a product. Color is well known as a communication device but how is it used in branding? A study was conducted with experts from branding, design and psychology involved in branding to further understand how color is used, its importance and what can be done about it. Furthermore, theories from psychology were explored to gain a deeper insight into fundamental aspects associated with color. Most respondents believed everything is color. In advertising or promotional material, applies to graphics, fashion, photography, interior design, movies, and packaging. Branding often begins with a logo and color. When touched by personal experience, color becomes more than production but an important part of the identity of the branded. Some respondents although brand, color by itself could be meaningless, depending on person's background. Respondents who found color of a brand engaging often wanted to associate themselves with the brand and would choose the alternative promoting that color. Would regret it for the physical possessions. Some respondents did not know the color in branding should or would play an important role, until the conscious thought was directed to it [1, 2].

### The Science of Color Perception

Color is a key visual characteristic that humans notice, providing information about objects and their surroundings. Human color perception is influenced by physiology, psychology, and societal factors. With

trichromatic vision, we interpret colors through red, blue, and green cones, but this perception can be misleading. The human perception of hue, brightness, and saturation is a constructed experience. Color evokes emotions and behaviors, making it crucial for consumer responses. Preferences are swayed by lifestyle, experiences, and gender. The impact of color extends beyond product identity to advertisements and consumer engagement. Various elements like brand and commentary influence product perception. Color serves as a powerful tool for subliminal and subconscious messaging, shaping how we perceive stimuli. Different colors can evoke distinct feelings; for example, black is linked with negativity, while red may incite strong emotions. Cultural differences exist in color meanings and preferences, affecting safety, agriculture, and emotional expression. Color's interaction with other attributes influences how we perceive texts, brands, and advertisements, shaped by our prior experiences. Text properties and experimental factors also affect identification and appreciation. Choices regarding brands, objects, and advertisements are informed by previous experiences and scheduled attributes. Ultimately, from natural influences to subtle effects, advertisements shape cognitive responses while their media effectiveness relies on aligning with perceived attributes [3, 4].

### **Historical Context of Color in Marketing**

Research shows colors significantly influence advertising and marketing by shaping perceptions, moods, and emotions. Understanding color psychology is essential for marketers, as it impacts audience targeting, brand perception, and demographic appeal. Age affects responses to color; thus, marketers must tailor their strategies accordingly. Color combinations also influence interpretations across genders and ages, with cultural differences playing a crucial role. When color meanings align across cultures, unified strategies are feasible. However, if meanings differ, a customized approach may be more effective. A study involving Japanese, Chinese, South Korean, and American students revealed shared associations, such as blue linked to quality and red to love, while purple's connotations of expense varied. Black consistently symbolizes power and wealth across cultures. Preference studies indicated that African Americans favor vibrant colors within red, purple, and black, contrasting with white subjects' inclinations for blues and greens. Hispanic groups display a preference for bright colors, reflecting the intense lighting of Latin America. The Color Marketing Group suggests these Latin influences will expand beyond geographic boundaries, impacting marketing strategies. Yet, cultural distinctions remain critical; for example, orange holds sacred value for Hindus in India, while it is disregarded by the Ndembo of Zambia [5, 6].

### **Color Associations and Meanings**

When branding a new product, several aspects need prioritization beyond just the brand and product names. Should colored samples accompany monochrome ones? It's important to consider the meanings and associations that colors evoke in consumers. Research shows that color words often trigger specific conceptual categories linked to those hues. Additionally, multidimensional color spaces align with biological and cultural perceptions of good-bad and dark-bright. Emotions mediate associations between color and stimuli, although these connections can be weak. Direct and indirect associations for various hues exist, with blues and greens signaling safety and tranquility, while reds convey aggression and warmth. Lightness in colors often relates to emotions, with lower lightness associated with worry, and red linking more to anger. Color meanings may be inconsistent, as agreements on color meanings are not robust when comparing verbal responses. Basic colors like red, green, and yellow have common meanings identified across countries, yet cultural overlap is limited, particularly with Western interpretations. Current research on cross-cultural associations is hindered by two main factors: the reliance on diverse quantifying indexes across studies, and a lack of information on how colors correlate with specific meanings within the Hong Kong Chinese demographic [7, 8].

### **Cultural Differences in Color Perception**

Cultural variances lead to different emotional expressions and color associations. A study on nine populations examined basic and complex colors to see if associations held without memory colors. Data showed broad cultural trends; the same color evoked similar emotions despite language and geography. Culture-specific factors influenced these effects, with variations in color-emotion associations linked to non-native language use. Hierarchical analysis of predicted colors revealed similar trends across cultures, indicating that emotion-color connections are not solely language-dependent. Analysis indicated shifts in emotion-color associations due to cultural and linguistic differences. To explore language's impact, fifty-four Americans and fifty-six Japanese subjects assessed color-emotion ties in English and Japanese. Generally, associations varied more with culture than language, aligning with color-environment and color-object links. Notably, similar associations across cultures suggest shared perceptual roles for colors. The study started with the idea of "One World, One Color," reflecting linguistic and geographic

differences in these associations. Results show significant contrasts in color-emotion links, with some appearing universal across cultures, suggesting a shared cultural evolution, while others are unique to specific cultures and languages [9, 10].

### Color in Logo Design

Color increases the brand recognition of logos by 80% and affects how we converse with one another. Through careful scent mixtures, people can also be persuaded to spend more time in stores. Advertisers frequently employ visual design to elicit feelings of happiness while blinking. A fancy brand design can also provoke feelings of trust or suspicion. Knowing how this method works can help us create significant brands. Logo design is a crucial step in establishing how consumers perceive a brand. It is a firm's primary brand identity, and its choice can evoke strong associations. A good logo can increase awareness, evoke emotions that translate into brand equity, and enhance attitudes toward the brand. Identification of a logo is primarily influenced by the logo's unique features. It is said that for a logo to be memorable, a brand sign must be distinguished. Distinctness entails looking different in any manner that matters to the relevant audience, making a logo look different across colors, shapes, letters, or elements. Characteristics of that logo can affect emotional reactions to brands. Some shape attributes, colors, and designs can be the basis of a brand's perceivable traits in consumers' minds. On a general level, logo characteristics can evoke behaviorally oriented cognitions and physiological engagement, both of which can create likes and dislikes for them. Cultural grounds of differences in the form evaluations of logos are not taken into consideration, nor are there any inquiries about the emotional triggers of the perceived beauty of the shapes portrayed in brand logos. Additionally, there is little consideration of the comparative efficiency of logos with distinct and abstract shapes in evoking and enhancing emotional reactions, and whether this influence is moderated by socio-demographics or cultural contextual variables. Brand logos are another key central element from which visual temporary feelings arise. They are essential to consumers' perceptions of brands, and their design is critical for building positive brand equity [11, 12].

### Color in Advertising

For a long time now, human beings have not only seen things but also attributed other characteristics to what they see. They think and ponder a color before announcing it as the color of an object. People who buy products or services are no exception when it comes to showing an affective colorful response to it. Colors, being an integral part of a product or service, greatly influence consumers' perceptions of how good or bad that product or service is. In this regard, colors work in conjunction with shapes, letters, designs, and figures in communicating messages, marketing products and services, and enabling consumers or customers to store the information in their minds. Colors impact on human perception through which, as a product of perception, judgment and emotion emerge. Color-meaning associations arise cognitively within culture-bound environments. They are formed through social, cultural, and humanistic experiences that transpire within a given spatio-temporal context. Culturalization of these meanings then leads to the attributeowment of color-feeling associations. These associations do surface in the form of advertisements and logos, as indirectly experienced realities from consumers' perceptions then directly observed in the advertising communication of brands. Pitching a product upon the wrong knowledge and understanding of its meaning can simply obliterate the effort for success and awareness campaigns. As a solution to such pitfalls, a careful choice of dye, along with an investigation of how, when, and by whom the advertisement is to be seen, is vital in capturing the intended feelings. One implication of this study for practitioners in the industry is that the color systems of advertisement and branding should be constructed with reference to the contexts, products, philosophy, and advertising cultures [13, 14].

### Case Studies: Successful Color Use

The introduction emphasizes color as a pivotal component in brand perceptions and marketing communication. It follows a dual approach methodology: initially highlighting the psychological mechanisms through which colors influence consumer responses, using examples from pop culture, and reflected later in a survey-like case study targeting globally recognized brands with well-known color-identifying elements. Issues with the choice of color are discussed, along with recommendations for marketers to help strengthen the study findings. Nike is used as a dominating example, with secondary and relevant examples detailing further detailed dual analyses in the corresponding related studies. Other successful cases include Coca-Cola's well-recognized red hue, Budweiser's appealing red, white, and blue, Starbucks' conservative, trustworthy green, and Lego's eye-catching red. Case studies from the clothing, sport shoe, and technology industries demonstrate powerful, consistent, and distinguishable brand identity colors such as PUMA's red, Wilson's yellow and black, Apple's silver, and Microsoft's four-color combination. Overall, these color choices have yielded positive market performance results, with

consecutive design suggestions based on diverse other industry-related brand color findings. The goal was to encourage new in-depth studies targeting local brands, with well-defined hues, in simple promotional tickets or signages, linked to successful marketing ideas worldwide [15, 16].

### **Color Trends in Modern Marketing**

Today's trendy tropical colors are brights that embrace everything from melon and lime to coral and turquoise. Many, particularly the neons, are reminiscent of the Miami Vice/Beverly Hills 90210 era of bold color. Nowadays, these colors are being paired with dark, sometimes moody hues in an edgier mix, in direct contrast to the warm pastels generally used with traditional tropics [10]. In this newest twist, colors play nice with black, charcoal, navy, ochre, and purple. This match is brighter and bolder, edged with a touch of sophistication. Done via polka dots, stripes, plaids, and florals, these classics are welcome relief from solid colors. Designers also note that greens are vying to become the new black or beige. Forest greens in rich jewel tones are on the rise, incorporating various shades of gold, graphite, plum, and russet, while pastels are taking a back seat. Hunter is taking a cue from a host of British designers with earthy colors, rounded shapes, and graphic patterns reminiscent of Chippendale furniture. Fall/Winter 2020 was marked by an embrace of soft channels in color-on-color combinations or a surreal riot of tropical colors that jab at the mind. Filling the need for joy evoked by clever patterns, florals, or fantastical graphics, Chiavari's designs take inspiration from Renaissance artists. Particularly beautiful colors, which were more common than pure blacks or whites, are being used to link sheeted room-dresses, wrapping curtains, and canopy layouts. The color trend is placing greater emphasis on textures in the raw, used, scrappy, and soft-veined. Popular woven materials include katrans, linen, and hemp the last of which is making an appearance in carpets. Impressive panel lengths give rise to consummate curtains in organic raw silk or muslin. More expensive curtains are colored with tea or onion skins, with hand-painted florals or checks, and worn-thin tapestry carpets keep company with megaboy models from France, Italy, and the UK [17, 18].

### **Psychological Effects of Color Combinations**

Color combinations elicit physiological and psychological responses on various levels. A mechanical framework interprets colors and wavelengths as triggers for these responses. Brand communication content translates into behavioral expectations, where past experiences influence vague preferences. Positive correlations appear with yellows, browns, and reds, while blues show negative associations. The combination of red and blue reflects an idealized 'American dream,' contrasting with the negative implications of yellow and blue. Effective brand image marketing must address these dualities in a controlled environment. The key challenge is leveraging color to evoke desired communication effects, which influence brand preference, emotional engagement, and perception judgments. The literature integrates psychological insights with physiological responses to color stimuli through neurobiology, mental models, and social psychology of culture and branding. Advances in methods enhance our understanding of psycho-physiological reactions to color combinations in product branding. A singular focus on isolating these effects is inadequate; instead, a comprehensive approach includes all visual and non-visual stimuli, including language, that act as triggers. Research involved four color composition types within various settings, comparing color indexes and brand equity scores in destination marketing. The highest scores often stem from simple and colorful compositions that initially capture interest but don't fully convert it into brand loyalty. Notably, there is considerable variation in conditions across original compositions, influencing design forms more than presentation processes. Fast-processing abstract designs also entail unique internal mechanisms and patterns involving color imagery [19, 20].

### **Color Accessibility in Branding**

Marketers usually target specific demographics based on a variety of characteristics, including gender, age and race. Color is an important tool in indicating at what demographic a product is targeted. It is essential for executives to consider that when thinking about how colour affects the way their brand and corresponding products are viewed. For instance, if the meaning associated with colour is different across cultures, it may be beneficial for marketers to have a more customized strategy with respect to the color associated with the brand. Basic physiological research indicates that colours with lower wavelengths, such as blue, appear further away, whereas colours with higher wavelengths, such as red, appear closer. The Middle East uses green as a representation of the Muslim faith; the blue on the Israeli flag is similar to the hues associated with the Israeli defence force. Studies indicated that cultures associate meanings to colours; and that a relationship exists between these colour associations and culture. All four cultures appear to agree that blue is generally associated with high quality, while red is associated with love. In addition to the similarities, there are notable differences as well. Black is consistently associated with expensive and powerful across cultures. Some audiences, particularly those in China, tend to see white as

blissful. It is generally believed in Western societies that wearing black or white conveys a sense of mourning. Whether the hue of an object affects its perception is also an important element of research in this avenue. African American subjects like colors in the red-purple-black range, particularly dark red or violet and bright pink. White subjects prefer blues and greens, especially bright or dark blue and light or pale green. They also tend to enjoy historical colours in the yellow-cream-beige-tan range. A study indicated that African Americans prefer strong, saturated colour, often in the red, yellow and brown families, and wide ranges of tones such as dark teal and light blue. This is somewhat consistent with the results indicating preferences among Hispanics for bright colours, which may be a reflection of the intense lighting conditions in Latin America. Cola companies have often maintained red as the primary colour in their branding, as it represents fun and youth in many cultures. For those in the highly structured societies of Western nations, Coca Cola's Santa Claus mascot and its red colour both evoke an ambience of Christmas. As opposed to the meanings associated with Coca Cola, the red of Maté and Gato Negro provides a contrast to their yellow [21, 22].

### Testing Color Effectiveness

Brands are commonly perceived to be "human-like." Dimensions that describe the brand personality can be grouped into the Big Five factors: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. A variety of perceptual dimensions were designed and tested on brands and color-correctness intentions. Target brands were tested on 19 dimensions. Each perceptual dimension was described by a variety of attributes. Some brands are built around personality, like Coca-Cola. By adding each perceptual ladder of goals to visual product representations, the model was then tested by 25. Visual elements of product representations judged more subjectively than verbal elements did. To tap this dimension, single color was incrementally added to a twodimensional image until a color-correctness threshold was reached. The threshold reflectiveness color at which the eye, warmed by preferences, more readily extricates it was identified and preferred as "correct." An eye-tracking study further examined the effect of fit on color correctness, differentiating between choice and execution. Fitting colors to a brand in an incorrect fashion was found incremental, reflecting an increased number of fixations redistributed to multiple colors. Fitting colors in a correct fashion increased perceptual engagement, in extension of the expected positive effect of fit on preferences. Finally, an additional behavioral study was conducted. Each color was accompanied by a graphic that had either trial run or perceptual dimension or both. Empirical judgments were received about the color-correctness intentions of a graphic or its brand antecedents, and covariation mechanism across perceptual dimensions lay cautious limits on brand personality transfer. Brands evoke vivid images and rich associations. These associations could be verbal associations, non-verbal, visual, or affective evoked. It has been long hypothesized that icons could draw associations similar to those associated with the brands they represent. This suggested that discerning link from the brand image to the product image "in the eye of the beholder" was in the subjective nature of the images. The sum of all associations, developed in the target audience's mind after all of its encounters with the brand, is the brand image. It could either be correct, misleading, or even absent. However, the extent to which advertising messages effectively communicate the brand image to their target audience remains critical [23, 24].

### Color in Digital Marketing

Throughout the internet, the color in digital marketing has never mattered more than today. As artificial intelligence continues to rise, sites like Instagram now have a text-only option. Everyone is clamoring for brands to separate themselves from the competition. If you have branded yourself correctly, you could find success if not, you could figure it out for your competitors. When building a brand, color is one of the first things to consider. Color has meaning and can change the perception a user has of a brand instantly. The colors being used in logos, videos, and graphics could determine whether a brand sticks in the mind of a viewer or evokes the emotions a brand is trying to convey. Understanding color psychology can maximize the brand's effectiveness in conveying meaning, evoking emotions, and creating an identity. The psychology of color is the study of how colors affect human behavior. Certain colors evoke specific emotions and could dictate how a viewer responds to a brand or advertisement. It is important to note that everyone has a different perception of color. Just think of how many different shades of red exist. However, across a culture, like the United States, certain colors are commonly associated with specific meanings. In general, companies brand themselves in a way that is consistent with these meanings in their marketing strategies. Marketers and digital strategists can use this to their advantage, especially with social media assets and marketing to Millennial or Gen Z audiences [25, 26].

### The Role of Color in Consumer Behavior

The role of color in consumer behavior has been studied in various fields, including psychology, marketing, and art. However, despite its practical importance, it appears that systematic investigation of color mechanisms in consumer behavior is still in its infancy. Widespread marketing techniques that consciously alter the visual environment, integrating colors with other characteristics, could themselves raise questions about how such techniques can be used to equalize the effect of color while correcting possible non-effectiveness. Compared to other characteristics of products that generate vigor and achieve systematic effects, such as scents, colors have been more widely used for a longer time in non-conscious form. Various experiments throughout various domains have indicated that color affects actions that individuals perform and what they prefer in life. But some questions remain unanswered, for example: One of the most researched domains of color effect has been psychology; it has been shown that filters of colors can affect and elicit emotional states, creative effects and depressions, physiological states such as excitement and calmness. Importantly, how to measure such states and effect levels comprehensively were also uncovered. Overall, the research of color in psychology has advanced a lot during the last seven decades; yet, its implementation has not been applied to marketing and consumer-level research as wide and long as in psychology. The multiple interactions between consumers and companies, on multiple levels and domains, provide many potentially rich ways for color to affect consumer behavior. In such cases, the potential richness and multiplicative formats of color effect might suggest that color plays a very complex role in consumer environments. A richer model of both color and the processes might be needed to start answering the arising questions. Importantly, since colors affect cognition and behavior in non-conscious levels and ways, the enriched color mechanisms would be less applicable to self-reports measured cognitions and behavior observed on conscious levels. The mechanisms should be illuminated by procedures and measures which match its form of emergence [27, 28].

#### Ethical Considerations in Color Marketing

The increasing use of color marketing by brands raises a number of ethical considerations. Over recent years, marketing departments of brands have devoted increased attention to color. This is perhaps most prominent in companies producing food, beverage and consumer goods. As research into color has increased, so too has condemnation of misleading color marketing, misleading claims being made about color usefulness in branding, the involvement of advertising agencies in color manipulation and possible anti-competitive practices. Currently, there is little empirical research exploring exactly how companies are marketing color and whether this is considered ethical practice. This research aims to shed light on the patterns of unethical color use, the manner in which ethics are assessed by color marketers, and what others the decision making of marketers involves. Several diverse understanding of color marketing, including a range of disciplines, is assembled into a framework outlining the elements of color marketing. The framework is then used as the basis for semi-structured interviews with experts involved in color selection and use in branding and marketing. The ethical dilemmas faced by color marketers are shown to be closely linked to their understanding of the role and nature of color marketing. Differences in position regarding the ethical dimensions of color marketing occur broadly along a spectrum defined by understanding. There currently appears to be a void in the academic literature regarding color marketing, which may work against marketers' ability to engage with peers in a specific field. Other practitioners are also involved in the marketing of color. This raises potential issues of brand trust in regard to brands working with third parties. The contention is made that the increasing frequency and complexity of color marketing poses ethical dilemmas rarely considered. Retailers, as brands in their own right and producers of private label products, not only work to have their brand colors viewed positively but also manipulate product colors to undermine competitors. The potential for decreased product differentiation through the copying of competitors' product colors is also an emerging concern with increased litigation in this area [29, 30].

### CONCLUSION

Color is not merely a visual embellishment but a strategic communication tool in branding and marketing. It evokes emotional responses, shapes brand perceptions, and influences consumer choices often on a subconscious level. The psychological effects of color are deeply intertwined with cultural meanings, personal experiences, and environmental factors. Effective brand color strategies require an understanding of these complex interactions to resonate across diverse markets. Case studies of iconic brands demonstrate that consistent, culturally sensitive, and emotionally engaging color use can significantly enhance brand loyalty and recognition. As trends evolve, so too must color strategies blending scientific insight with creative expression. For marketers and designers, mastering the

psychology of color is essential to crafting powerful, memorable, and culturally relevant brand identities in an increasingly globalized market.

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**CITE AS: Atukunda Lucky (2025). The Psychology of Color in Branding and Marketing. NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION 5(2):58-65**  
<https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJRE/2025/525865>