

Psychology of Colour

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Modern Research on Colour Psychology

Most psychologists view colour therapy with skepticism and point out that the supposed effects of colour are often exaggerated. The research in this area is scarce and yet, the concept of colour psychology has become a hot topic in design, art, marketing, and other areas.

Using anecdotal evidence, experts have found that while colour can have an influence on how we feel and act, these effects are subject to personal, cultural, and situational factors. More scientific research is in fact needed to gain a better understanding of colour psychology.

Perception of Colour

While perceptions of colour are somewhat subjective, there are some colour attributes that have universal meaning. Colours in the red area of the colour spectrum (red, orange, and yellow) are known as warm colours and evoke emotions ranging from feelings of warmth and comfort to anger and hostility.

Colours on the blue side of the spectrum (blue, purple, and green) are known as cool colours and are often described as calming, but can also be associated with feelings of sadness or indifference.



The Importance of Colours in Branding

Branding is one of the most important areas relating to colour perception in marketing.

There have been numerous attempts to classify consumer responses to different individual colours, as illustrated next:



COLOR EMOTION GUIDE



Although colour is too dependent on personal experiences to be universally translated into specific feelings, there are broader messaging patterns to be found in the use of colour in purchases and branding as shown in the brand chart above.

In an appropriately titled study called *Impact of Colour on Marketing*¹, researchers found that up to 90% of snap judgments made about products are based on colour alone (depending on the product). In regards to the role that colour plays in branding, results from studies such as *The Interactive Effects of Colours and Products on Perceptions of Brand Logo Appropriateness*² show that the relationship between brands and colour hinges on the perceived appropriateness of the colour being used for the particular brand (in other words, does the colour “fit” what is being sold).

The study *Exciting Red and Competent Blue: the Importance of Color in Marketing*³ also confirms that purchasing intent is greatly affected by colours due to the impact they have on how a brand is perceived. This means that colours influence how consumers view the “personality” of the brand (after all, who would want to buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle if they didn’t get the feeling that Harleys are cool?).

¹ Impact of Color on Marketing, author Satyendra Singh (Department of Administrative Studies, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Canada), 2006. [Click here.](#)
² The Interactive Effects of Colors and Products on Perceptions of Brand Logo Appropriateness, authors Paul A. Bottomley and John R. Doyle, 2006. [Click here.](#)
³ Exciting Red and Competent Blue: the Importance of Color in Marketing, authors Lauren I. Labrecque and George R. Milne, 2012. [Click here.](#)

Colour and Conversion Rates

Finding the “best” colour for conversion rates on websites has recently become a very popular topic (conversion rate = “the percentage of visitors who take a desired action”, according to www.marketingterms.com).

Using a psychological principle known as the isolation effect (an item that “stands out like a sore thumb” is more likely to be remembered), research shows that users are able to recall an item far better when it blatantly sticks out from its surroundings.

An interesting test⁴ was conducted by Paras Chopra to see how he could get more downloads by using a range of variations:

1 Download PDFProducer v1.3	2 Download PDFProducer v1.3	3 Download PDFProducer v1.3	4 Download PDFProducer v1.3
5 Download PDFProducer v1.3	6 Download PDFProducer v1.3	7 Download PDFProducer v1.3	8 Download PDFProducer v1.3
9 Download PDFProducer v1.3	10 Download For Free PDFProducer v1.3	11 Download For Free PDFProducer v1.3	12 Download For Free PDFProducer v1.3

Here were the results:

#	DETAILS	CONVERSION RATE	% IMPROVEMENT
1	Default combination (control)	39.4%	-
10	“Download for Free” in red, default “PDFProducer” link	63.2%	60%
9	“Download” in big font, “PDFProducer” link in red	56.5%	43.3%
12	“Download for Free” in red, “PDFProducer” link in red	54.2%	37.7%
...
2	“Download” as default, “PDFProducer” in big font	41.3%	4.76%

⁴ Multivariate Testing in Action: Five Simple Steps to Increase Conversion Rates, author Paras Chopra, 2010. [Click here](#).

Example #10 outperformed by a large margin, partly because it has more colour contrast than the other examples, and partly due to the action text (“Download for Free”).

While this is only one study among many, the isolation effect should be kept in mind when testing colour palettes to create contrast in your web design for guiding people to important action areas.

More Interesting Facts About Colour

Check out and download this interesting infographic as an additional resource (available in English only): [Click here.](#)