A STUDY OF COLOR AS A MARKETING CUE IN SAUDI ARABIA

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─**Abstract** ─

Colors have powerful effects and prompt reactions based on both instincts and connotations. Colors have a subtle but pervasively effective element in graphic design. Colors alter the meanings of the objects or situations with which they are associated and color inclinations can predict consumers' behavior. Colors instil graphic representations in packaging, advertising, and branding. Colors are also considered a significant part of our psychological and biological heritage. The cultural and social trends greatly influence the meaning of a color. Therefore, it is both challenging and rewarding to study the color psychology because of the various figurative meanings of colors in the various cultures. In this paper we will study the color psychology in marketing based on survey of 75 mostly Saudi respondents from different age groups and both genders. We will consider the impact of color on dependability, quality and inexpensiveness of the items being marketed. We argue that a cultural perspective of color research and application is vital for developing marketing strategies for the Saudi market.

Key Words: *psychology, physiology, color, therapy.*
JEL Classification: M310, M370, Z10.

1. INTRODUCTION
Color is an essential element of marketing and corporate communications. It induces emotions and moods, influences consumer's behavior and perceptions and helps companies to differentiate or position from the competition. However, the published literature in the public domain largely has a Western focus, therefore, the notion universality of color is fraught with risk. Assuming a narrow Western

perspective of color as 'universal' and applying it to other markets has often led to cultural faux pas and there is need for a systematic color theory in marketing [aslam06]. This is being the main justification and need for our work.

Although we use he five senses of touching, smelling, tasting, hearing and seeingin order to perceive the world around us, but sight is the sense that we use the most. Thus color is a powerful medium through which we view the world. Unlike most animals, which can only see shades of gray, humans have this marvelous additional dimension of colored vision (Bleicher, 2005).

For these very reason, branding designers consider competitors' palettes (Nelson, 1994). Brand confusion is an important factor that can either help or harm the business. Often within a given market, companies choose colors that will differentiate them from the competitors. For example, in the cell phone market, Verizon owns red, AT&T owns blue, Sprint owns yellow , T-Mobile owns pink, , and Cingular Wireless owned orange (Alva, 2006). Similarly in Saudi Arabia Mobily owns blue and Zain owns aqua-green.

In the western societies, the bride often chooses a white wedding dress because the white color stands for innocence and purity. On the other hand, the bride in the eastern societies such as China often chooses a red wedding dress because the red color stands for good luck and welfare. Furthermore, culture affects the color preference. For instance, the gentle colors are preferred by the Japanese, while the vivid colors are preferred by the Mexican people (Barbara, 2009). Therefore, it is important to realize what color psychology is and how it influences our values, our emotions, culture, and associations, and how it influences our senses. Thus it is important to understand the influences and choice of colors in order to recognize how to utilize it in designing and marketing in different cultures and societies.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes brief background. Section 3 reviews some related work. Section 4 describes the experimental method in this study. Section 5 describes experimental results and discussion. The conclusion is given in the final section.

2. BACKGROUND

Throughout history, color has been examined and utilized for more than 2000 years. It is said that the ancient Egyptians have been utilizing colors as a therapy. They adored the sun as they thought that there will be no life without the light of the sun. Also, they observed the nature and imitate it in various aspects of their lives. In addition, it is observed that their holy places floors were usually green in order to imitate the grass growing by the side of the Nile river. In addition, the blue color is a very significant color for them as well since it is the sky color. The temples have been constructed by them for curing and medicating and the gemstones have been used because the sunlight shines through them. Besides, they could have various chambers for various colors. Therefore, we might connect our current ways of color/light therapy with the ancient practice (Valerie, 1997).

 In the early fifth century BC, the Greeks referred to the antithesis between black and white, or
darkness and light, and introduced a scheme of primary colors (white, black and red) and a range of mixes from red through yellow to green. Aristotle suggested that the intermediate colors were a mixture of light and dark, and later Hippocrates put forward the four-color theory: white, black, red and yellow (Gage, 1993).

Aristotle has conducted some of the researches and theories concerning light. He found out that by blending two colors, the result will be a new different third color. He mixed yellow and blue, the green was produced as a result of this mixture. Color therapy was actually practiced in China. The Nei/Ching, 2000 years old, registers color diagnoses. During the middle Ages Paracelsus reintroduced the color philosophy through utilizing the color rays as a means of therapy in addition to the usage of music and herbs. Isaac Newton is considered to be one of the leaders in the field of color. In 1672, he wrote his first paper about color. He discovered that white light is composed of seven basic colors (Valerie, 1997). Figure 1 shows the "evolution" of color throughout history.

Figure-1:   Color Throughout history.
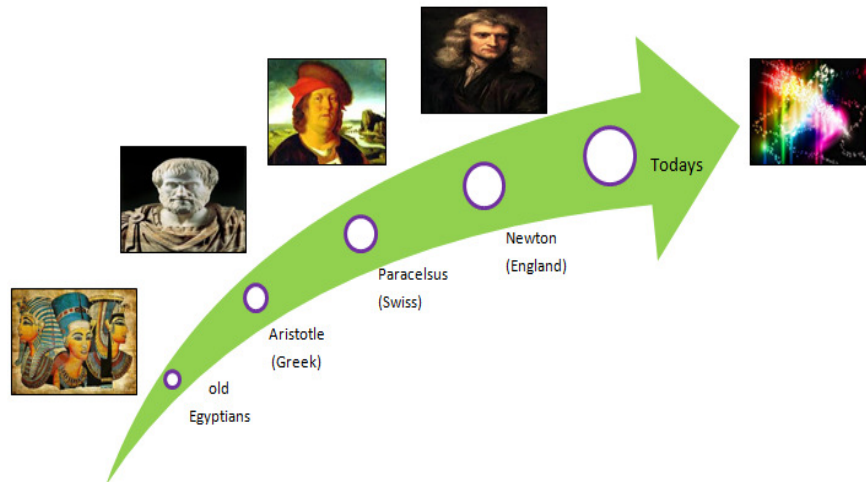
So scientifically what actually is color and where lies color? Actually the physical world has no colors, instead there are only light waves of different wavelengths. It is upto to the retinal cones of the normal human eye to differentiate among these bands of light and make this world a colorful for us. So, is color produced in our brain to act as a perceptual tool for our visual–affective and visual–cognitive functions or does it lie in the external world? Is color a primary or a secondary quality of matter? Galileo (1623). Further discussion of this aspect of color is beyond the scope of this paper.

In the domain of marketing, color is considered to be a vital part of products, services, logos, collateral, packages, and displays. Color is a potent cue for creating and sustaining corporate identities (Garber et al., 2000; Madden et al., 2000) and consumer perceptions (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999) and for product and brand differentiation (Schmitt and Pan, 1994) . For details of the basic interactions of color in marketing w.r.t corporate image, point of purchase and point of sale respectively the reader is referred to Aslam (2006).

3. RELATED WORK

In this section we will discuss related work and compare it with our work. In some studies, arguments are made in an authoritative manner urging the reader to accept a set of statements, e.g. blue color being characterized as being cured and calming and the red color being characterized as being physically stimulating and exciting. These claims are widespread in the popular culture and Zena (2011) examines a

group of those claims related to the color psychology and healing also covering interior design in Sydney and colour treatment workshops offered by the Colour Therapy Healing organization in the United Kingdom. However, our focus is on the effect of color on marketing in the Saudi society in w.r.t demographics of age and gender.

Palmer and Schloss (2010) tackle an ecological valence theory. According to this theory, color preferences emanate from the individuals' emotional reactions towards the color-related substances. Also, this theory is strongly backed up by an experimental test: individuals prefer colors that are directly connected with objects they prefer (for example, they like the blue color whereas they like the sky and fresh water) and hot colors that are directly connected with the objects they hate (for instance, they hate the brown color whereas it is directly associated with the rotten food). Palmer and Schloss focus in study of color preferences emanates from the individuals' emotional reactions towards the color-related substances but in this paper we focus on the study of color in the demographic cultural trends.

Paintings can be defined as being a result of complex neural machinery interpreting the light signals into feelings, actions, activities and practice. In the course of evolution, the brain mechanisms of perception and vision were formed. Then, they were changed due to some factors such as the cultural exposure and progress. Bevil concentrates on an important feature of color features. This feature is the color contrast which forms a challenge facing the artists but in this study not all focus cultural exposure and progress but also take age, gender in consideration (Bevil, 2012).

Yamashita &Yamada et al. (2012) have studied the emotional and physical influences of the colored lights of 18 kinds (red, green, and blue) each one with particular saturation and lightness with different Co-ordinate conditions system. The electroencephalographic and emotional assessments have indicated that the Bright tone has a positive impact whereas it achieves relaxation. On the other hand, vivid tone with the highest saturation boosted of the blue and red lights. In this study we only focus on the demographics of 10 colors (black, blue, brown, green, gray, orange, red, white, purple and yellow) and their effect on marketing.

4. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

In this section we will describe our experimental method used to the study the color psychology in marketing.

Participants: Participants ranged from 18 to 70 years of age, with a mean age of 28. Twenty one participants were from the college-aged group i.e. 22 or under, and 54 participants were 23 or above. Nineteen males and 56 females took part in the study. The results of this survey are based on the replies of 75 respondents most of them females from Saudi Arabia and from different age groups.

Procedure: The survey was distributed via Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and other social network websites, which helped participants, use their smart phones and tablets to answer the questions and distribute them to their friends quickly and easily. This approach was considered to be better than traditional paper-and-pencil based surveys.

Our study is based on three demographic questions and five color specific questions on how colors can effect marketing, the questions are as follows:

Q1. i) What country best represents your culture? ii) What is your age and iii) gender?
Q2. Which do you think best represents something cheap/inexpensive?
Q3. Which color do you think best represents reliability/dependability?
Q4. Which color best represents high-quality?
Q5. Of the listed colors, which is your favorite?
Q6. Which is your least favorite color?

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section we will present the results of our study, perform a comparison between those results and corresponding discussion. Among the 75 respondents, 85.33% said that Saudi Arabia best represents their culture with the other participants mostly from the same region i.e. Yemen, Qatar, UAE and more. The age distribution of the survey respondents is shown in Fig-2. It can be observed from Fig-2 that a sizeable majority is from the age-group 19-24 and 25-35, therefore, the analysis in this paper will be centered on these two age-groups.

Figure -2:   Frequency distribution of age of respondents
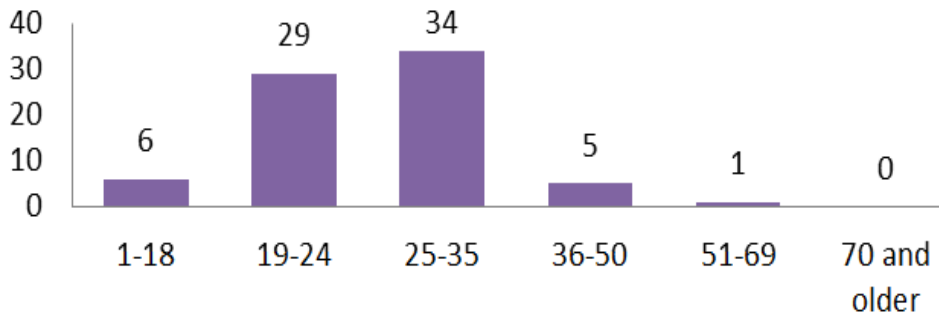
Because of the space constraints, we cannot present and discuss the detailed survey results, hence we will present a summary of the results and then discuss some of those results. For each of the color-phycology questions i.e. Q2 to Q6, we created a pie-chart of the responses to different colors, the collection of those pie-charts is given in Fig-3 along with brief comments.

Figure -3:   Summary of results of five questions

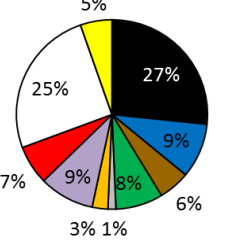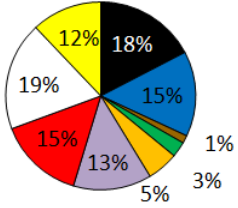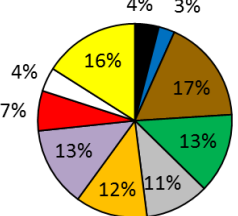|	
Q2. Which do you think best represents something cheap/inexpensive? We can observe that gray color is considered to be corresponding to something cheap which is followed by white. Note that both are aromatic colors.	
Q3. Which color do you think best represents reliability/dependability? It can be observed that blue color corresponds to reliability in the Saudi society, this being also true for the Western countries. This is one of the reasons why the logo of financial institutions is predominantly blue (Aslam, 2006).	

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Q4. Which color best represents high-quality?
The color signifying quality in Saudi society is black, this being also true for Western countries. However, the interesting fact is that black is closely followed by white color, which is the opposite of black. A possible explanation could be association of white with purity in the Saudi society, from which the corresponding high quality could be inferred.

Q5. Of the listed colors, which is your favorite?
From among the 10 colors we can observe groups of three colors to be favorite i.e. black-white, blue-red and yellow-purple. Brown is the least favorite color and none selected gray.

Q6. Which is your least favorite color?
It can be observed that brown is the least favorite color followed by yellow. Then there is a pair of least favorite colors i.e. green-purple. Observe that the least favorite colors are logically opposite to the favorite colors.

Figure -4: Comparison of the results of five questions for the two genders using R^2
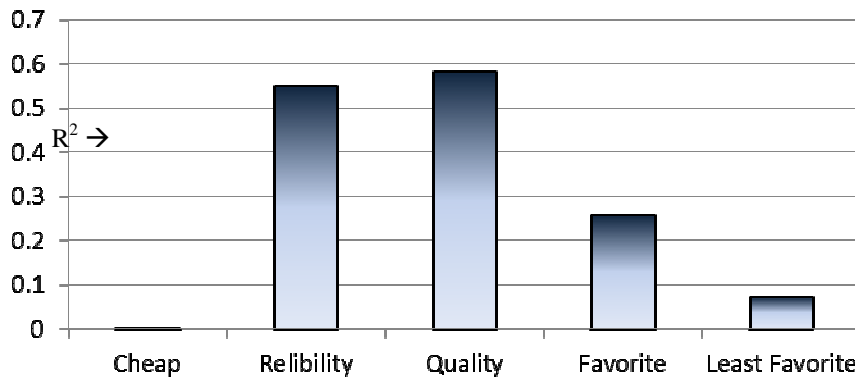
In Fig-3 we presented a summary of the responses for both genders in the form of pie-charts without distinguishing the gender. In Fig-4 we compare the color selection results based on the gender w.r.t the R^2 relationship between the

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frequencies of responses for each color for the five questions. From F-4 it can be observed that there is hardly any agreement between the two genders for the association of color with something being cheap, while there is significant agreement on the association of color for reliability and quality of an item. From Fig-3 we can observe that the common color for these two features for a product is the black color.

Due to scarcity of space some interesting results could not be discussed, such as the relationship between the choice of color for marketing w.r.t age, the correlation of the different age groups w.r.t color and the relationship between questions w.r.t a color being a favourite or least favorite.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Color symbolism greatly affects human life and behavior. Thus, it is important to appreciate it in different fields, including marketing. Although color can be considered to be a personal matter whereas every person has a different character and prefers different colors, however, culture and social trends greatly influence the meaning and preference of a color. Thus the meanings of a color can vary depending on the society's legends, myths, values, faith, and social habits, in addition to the historical and geographical background.

Color is king in advertising. It attracts viewers (Shank & LaGarce, 1990), holds their attention (Berman, 2007), and aids their memory (Shank & LaGarce). In the words of the Color Marketing Group, "Colour sells… and the right colours sell better" (Lambert, 2004, p. 77). According to Wallace (2002) consumers remember colors first, then graphics, numbers, and finally words. Although the notion of blue being associated with reliability in the Saudi society is similar to that of the Western society, but the notion of a color being cheap is very different for male and female members of the Saudi society. Thus slight variations in color can advance or destroy design effectiveness resulting in massive economic implications for companies and their products.

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