



AENSI Journals

Journal of Applied Science and Agriculture

ISSN 1816-9112

Journal home page: www.aensiweb.com/jasa/index.html

The Study of the Function of Colors in Visual Media Advertisements

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 December 2013

Received in revised form 27

February 2014

Accepted 29 March 2014

Available online 15 April 2014

Keywords:

Function of Colors Visual Media,
Advertisements

ABSTRACT

In modern world, man is faced with a large amount of advertisement. The volume of such advertisements in various forms and types has got quite extensive. Newspapers, magazines, T.V, movies, internet websites, and even the wall and spaces in pavements have been utilized for advertisement. These factors within different shapes and operational methods suggest us to visit this exhibition or watch that program. It is obvious that the visual media, among the other different types, have more outstanding stand which is due to the great power of the language of pictures in expressing and introducing its contents.

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To Cite This Article: Rahman Parchegani., The Study of the Function of Colors in Visual Media Advertisements. *J. Appl. Sci. & Agric.*, 9(3): 1187-1192, 2014

INTRODUCTION

In modern world, man is faced with a large amount of advertisement. The volume of such advertisements in various forms and types has got quite extensive. Newspapers, magazines, T.V, movies, internet websites, and even the wall and spaces in pavements have been utilized for advertisement. These factors within different shapes and operational methods suggest us to visit this exhibition or watch that program. It is obvious that the visual media, among the other different types, have more outstanding stand which is due to the great power of the language of pictures in expressing and introducing its contents. The variety of types and their enormous attractions could be accounted for the visual media's influential power. It is clear that the role of colors in the media is one of the most important and the most fundamental elements of formation and impact.

The impact of the collective phenomena and social mutual responses on human's behavior is not an issue to which only modern man has paid attention, but human being has always made his attempts to consider social relations, affairs and communication with others since he found out about his social existence.

In recent years, due to the extension of cities, the social life of man has become more complicated, so such complexity can be easily noted in different areas such as behavior, communication, as well as the mutual social actions. Communication is among the issues whose complexity has made much impact on the mutual social relations, since communication has a significant role in extending human's knowledge and awareness. Developing awareness among human beings has in turn resulted in innovation, creation and invention which would be committed through the extension of knowledge of communication.

As an effective foundation of the communication science, advertisement also matters a lot, since it is enmeshed in the texture of societies in such a way that modern man is now living under an everyday bombardment of advertisement flow. The amount of such advertisements through our lives has become so enormous that has undoubtedly created a profound influence on man's nature and his interaction with others. Thus, this research paper aims to study the role and function of one of the basic features of advertisement in visual media namely the color.

Statement of the Problem:

Studying how colors affect different people, either individually or as a group, is something some people build their careers on. Something as simple as changing the exact hue or saturation of a color can evoke a completely different feeling. Color motivates many people and is why many companies advertise on what we now know as color television. These companies use color to help convince us to purchase goods or services they offer. The influence color has on buyers may play a bigger part than we think. The influence of color can be so great that it occurs almost anywhere. For instance, a lawyer may instruct a defendant to dress in blue simply to spark sympathy in the minds of the people in the courtroom. The color blue here may instill the idea that the defendant is telling the truth.

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Color influences many things in many ways even though we may not even be aware of it. It is for this reason that color is so influential for a buyer choosing which item to purchase. The psychology of colors is important to companies' marketing efforts. When we watch a commercial or see an advertisement, we may not think about the colors used in them. But that may just be the point. Advertising agencies and companies all over the world conduct market research on the effects of color on consumer behavior. Though we might not consciously notice the colors, subconsciously color is an important consideration in any brand identity system. Colors have a significant impact on people's emotional state. They also have been shown to impact people's ability to concentrate and learn. They have a wide variety of specific mental associations. In fact, the effects are physiological, psychological, and sociological.

To have knowledge about the factor of color and its impacts from various viewpoints seems to be important round the world. To imagine a world without colors sounds implausible. Psychologists believe that colors own natural and impressive energies. Colors can influence man's soul and mind and could be healing and energetic. To them, if we reinforce our sense of color recognition, we will have deeper control on our emotions; thus there will be more coordination between one's soul and physique. The fact that colors reflect and represent our feelings, and on the other hand can raise specific feelings indicate that there is a dynamic relationship between our senses, our emotional needs and a particular color. Colors raise feelings of happiness or excitement, or give us peace and relaxation, so one can express his/her feelings through colors. Each person's favorite colors reflect his thoughts and interests in some way. In psychology of colors, it is believed that one's tendency towards specific colors might unconsciously represent much useful information about people's mental condition and their emotional and physical needs. Choosing particular colors could reveal person's short-comings, physical and emotional imbalance, as well as his positive and powerful personality traits – even those of which one is unaware. Applying colors, one can find out an effective approach to overcome problems and actualize a great part of one's potential capabilities.

Growing application of proper colors have always been due to the rising competition among manufacturers enthusiastic to sell their products and has in turn made a great change in the psychology of colors. The importance of the issue has already been proved among modern nations. For instance, between 1920-1930 company managers have been blamed for a rather severe decrease in their output in both executive and productive levels. However, they could find out the

problem with the aid of psychologists. The problem was diagnosed as being rooted in the color used in the factories and their products. They were replaced by some bright and fancy colors. As a result, the production rate was 15% elevated in one month. Thus, this research paper aims to study the role and function of color as one of the basic features of advertisement in visual media.

Purpose of the Study:

Advertisers have been quick to capitalize on psychological research into the effects of color on our emotions and perceptions. The advertisements we watch use this knowledge to evoke feelings or memories that make us want the goods on display. The main purpose of the present study is to find answers to the following research questions:

Does color have a direct impact on the quality of advertisement presentation?

Is color more influential in the written media or the visual media (such as television, the movies or the internet)?

Does the impact of color differ according to various advertisement styles?

Does the concept of color differ in various societies?

Does color play any role in remembering an advertisement?

Has the concept of color enjoyed different stances and interpretations throughout the history?

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses are investigated in order to answer the research questions:

The Study Hypotheses:

HO1. Color has a direct impact on the quality of advertisement presentation.

HO2. The influence of color is different according to the type of the media (e.g. the written media or the visual media).

HO3. The impact of color differs according to various advertisement styles.

HO4. The concept of color differs in various societies.

HO5. Color plays a crucial role in remembering an advertisement.

HO6. The concept of color has undergone different stances and interpretations throughout the history.

Review of the Literature:

Why is color important in advertising? While this seems like a simple question, looking at data from color studies around the world reveals a complex story. Clarke and Honeycutt, Jr. (2000) have determined that

different cultures use different color schema due to the amount of sun received, natural selection, biological factors (number of cones and rods in the eye), etc. Zettl (2005) indicates that these differences lead to different color conventions among the cultures around the world. When we delve further into the science behind color itself, people are affected by the many varying properties of color, specifically saturation, brightness, and hue. Studies have also been done looking at the effects of different combinations of color and lighting during shopping (Babin, Hardesty, Suter, 2003).

A study by Gorn *et al.* (1997) looked at saturation in advertising and feelings of excitement, relaxation, and boredom. Their findings indicate a positive correlation between saturation and excitement. One problem in Gorn *et al.*'s study is that they only tested a small subset of emotions which according to Mehrabian's Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (PAD) emotional-state model (1980) previously used to test the effects of color, all fall under arousal and boredom. Their findings indicate a positive correlation between saturation and excitement. The PAD emotional-state model was developed with the idea in mind that a person's emotional states change continuously as he progresses throughout his day. Since Mehrabian proposed the framework in 1980, he has continued to test and develop it for many years, with a recent study demonstrating 97% reliability in measuring pleasure, 89% in arousal, and 80% in dominance (Mehrabian, 1996). Another study by Gorn *et al.* (2004) demonstrated that the color of a webpage background can affect the perceived loading time of the page. The researchers used a sliding scale between 1 and 9 and tested for feelings of relaxation, peacefulness, uneasiness, tension and anxiousness. Gorn *et al.* found that as the attributes of the background colors changed, so did the participant's feelings of relaxation and perceived quickness. Once again, these measurements also fall under various aspects of Mehrabian's PAD emotional-state model.

Valdez and Mehrabian (1994) used the PAD emotional-state model to measure the effects of color, hue, saturation and brightness on emotional responses. They found that saturation and brightness positively correlated with effects on emotions.

A study by Detenber, Simons, and Reiss (2000) gathered self-report and physiological measurements (such as skin conductance) concerning color and black-and-white television clips. They found that although people report a more positive attitude to a color TV clip than one of black-and-white, there were no noticeable physiological changes. Nevertheless, the effects of colors on emotions are still a prevalent research topic, so much so that the depth of the subject matter cannot be fully covered here.

Visual appeal has always had a prominent place in advertising. The old saying is that a picture is worth a thousand words; so many advertisers usually try to visually communicate messages, rather than bog down the receiver in heavy text. Hecker and Stewart state that Visual recall is becoming increasingly important and corporate symbols and advertising will need to be stronger and eye-catching to capture consumer attention. Nonverbal communication will not only become a means for drawing attention to a verbal message, but it will also become the message itself in many instances. The use of imagery, visual associations, drawings and paintings, models, visual memory devices, product and corporate symbols are pervasive in advertising.

Visual imagery is used to command attention, stimulate curiosity, demonstrate product features and benefits, establish a personality for a product, associate the product with certain symbols and lifestyles, and anchor the brand identity in the minds of the target audience. Additionally, advertisers use visual imagery to enhance or strengthen the message about their product. For instance, when something neutral (the product) is paired with something that elicits a positive affective reaction (a visual), the neutral stimulus may come to evoke a positive response to the ad. In other words, visuals can add meaning (and subsequently a positive response) to something that is basically neutral (the product).

Rossiter and Percy¹⁰ divided visual communication in advertising into two categories of stimuli; static and dynamic. The three elements that determine static stimuli are picture size, exposure duration and number of exposures. An increase in any of these variables has been shown to increase recognition, encoding of details and development of denotative images among viewers. Although the attributes of static stimuli do not fit perfectly in measuring dynamic stimuli, this latter type also has resulted in high viewer response.

Communication by visual image is easily the most important dimension of an advertising message. Even in a medium like radio, the images produced by the listener still carry an important function.¹¹ Visual imagery also can have an effect on textual components in advertisements, which affects brand awareness or liking. Edell and Staelin¹² found that very different processing occurs depending on pictorial and verbal message congruencies in advertisements. Advertisements were more effective when the picture "agreed" with the textual message. In 1987, Moriarty offered an effective typology of visuals in a content analysis of magazine advertising. The first category of visuals determines whether a visual is photographic or an illustration. At the next level (the crux of the current study), it is determined if visuals are literal or symbolic. If literal, they can be further subcategorized into identification (brand, logo, and package), description (what it looks like, parts attributes, and schematics), comparison (between two competitors, before and after) or demonstration (how to do, make, use, etc.). Symbolic visuals can use association (lifestyle, typical person, situation), association with a character or celebrity, metaphor, storytelling or aesthetics.

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Research Methodology:

(Case Study: IRAN)

To obtain more tangible data, agreements will be made in advance with a company or corporation whose product is considered to enjoy lower quality in terms of appearance and color presentation. It will be ensured that the selected product is wide-spread enough to include customers from various social, economic, and age groups and is also advertised in both printed and visual media. Based on our study framework, some modifications will be made to the product appearance in terms of color presentation. Three to six month after the product's modified appearance is advertised (published and broadcasted), field studies could be conducted utilizing statistics drawn from a questionnaire designed and developed to gather the related data and to find out

if the applied modifications have resulted in any difference in desirability and sale of the product. Statistics obtained from the sales department of the company indicating any probable increase or decrease in the product sales could also be used to provide answers to the study questions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the collected data will undergo statistical procedures. Also, in order to include customers from various social, cultural, economic and age levels, the statistical population who participate in the study will roughly consist of 500 customers who will be selected based on cluster sampling. All the data gathered from the questionnaire and the sales department, as well as the consequent statistical procedures are utilized to mainly cover the following research areas: 1) to measure the impact of colors in visual media advertisements and 2) to study and compare the influence of colors in different media types (e.g. the written media or the visual media).

Budget:

For the time being, no proper and definite estimate of the total costs of the present study could be made.

Outline of the Final Dissertation

The followings would be the plausible sections of this paper:

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Statement of the Problem
4. Purpose of the Study
5. Review of the Literature
6. Research Methodology
7. Results and Findings
8. Conclusion and Recommendations
9. Bibliography

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