

COLOURS IN LOGOS: A STUDY OF CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION OF COLOUR AND BRAND PERSONALITY ASSOCIATIONS

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Brand logo as a prominent visual element of a brand plays a vital role in facilitating brand recognition, association and distinction. Of the various elements of brand logo, colours have been found to be influential at almost every level in the marketplace for their meanings and associations with brand personality. However, though the importance and impact of colours has been well examined by previous studies, research integrating colours with personality traits is fairly lacking. The present work contributes to the existing literature in this regard by providing an encompassing view of consumers' perception of colours in conjunction with their association with various dimensions of brand personality. The paper further examines the appropriateness of specific colours in brand logo. The findings of the study may help the manufacturers and marketers in making a more accurate choice of colours, thereby evoking a favorable perception and response for their brands.

INTRODUCTION

Brands are critical to the success of companies (Wood, 2000) due to their ability to provide primary points of differentiation between competitive offerings. The elements that provide brand distinction in a product category include brand name, logos, symbols, jingles, endorsers, slogans and packaging. An appropriate use of one or more of these elements help the manufacturers and marketers in increasing brand awareness, creating a unique product identity and keeping the consumer motivated about the choice process. Of the various brand elements examined in the marketing literature, researchers have found brand logo and personality to be the key point of association for consumers (e.g. Pittard et al., 2007; Plummer, 2000). Though studies have established the importance of various elements of brand logo in terms of affecting recall and recognition (Henderson and Cote, 1998), brand identity and image, attitude and value (Adir, 2013), colour has

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been found to be influential at almost every level in the marketplace with its importance ranging from the identity of the brand in the form of brand logo, image, signage, display, and packaging, to the product itself. However, despite being extensively researched as an independent marketing tool, studies on colour associations in brand logo are fairly lacking. A few studies (e.g. Hynes, 2009) on use of colours in corporate logos have too failed to include brand personality in the analysis. It is in this context that the present work attempts to bridge the gap in existing literature by examining colour element of brand logo for its meanings and associations with brand personality.

Colours and Personality Associations in Brand Logo: An Overview

Brand logo is one of the most salient visual elements of a brand (Wallace, 2001) which facilitate its identification as well as differentiation from competing alternatives (Janiszewski and Meyvis, 2001; MacInnis et al., 1999). Through a logo, a company attempts to influence consumers' impressions of the brand (Colman et al., 1995), impression of the retailer (Tractinsky and Lowengart, 2007) and the final purchase intentions. According to the study by Kohli et al., (2002), logos can help a brand by either being used in conjunction with the brand name or by being used in place of the actual name. Thus, as a communication tool of brand image (Hynes, 2009), a logo should hold a meaning beyond the individual elements used to create it and evoke an emotional response from the consumer (Pittard et al., 2007).

Though a number of elements (such as images, colours, shapes, and words) are taken into account while designing a logo, colour is considered to be of vital significance due to its mnemonic quality in the areas of recognition and recall (Henderson and Cote, 1998). Researchers examining the importance and impact of colours in marketing have considered it to be a part of the aesthetic appeal of the product that creates resonance with consumers (Pittard et al., 2007), facilitates identification of the brand (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999), affects positive or negative feeling resulting out of product evaluation (Tractinsky and Lowengart, 2007), induce reactions based on both instincts and associations (Ridgeway, 2011) and play a substantial role in consumer decision making when shopping time is limited (Silayoi and Speece, 2007).

In recognition of the influence of colours on brand identity, product design and packaging, marketers and researchers have specifically examined the way consumers perceive and associate with colours. A synthesis of literature in this regard provides an

likely that a consumer choose a product based on previously existing colour associations that correspond to product category (Grossman and Wisnenblit, 1999). Repetitive exposure to logo elements (including colours) thereby plays an important role in conveying the intended characteristics of a brand's personality*. Further, researchers have found that consumers establish a personality for most brands with limited cultural differences (e.g. Aaker, 2001; Parker, 2009) and it is the congruence of colour association with brand personality which makes specific colours appropriate for the brand's logo (Bottomley and Doyle, 2006).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In the light of the aforesaid discussion, the objectives of present study can be stated as follows:

- a) To examine the associations that consumers apply to a given colour in the logo.
- b) To assess the personality traits that consumers attribute to various colours of a brand logo.
- c) To investigate the appropriateness of specific colours in brand logo.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using snowball sampling technique, responses for the study were collected through a well-designed online questionnaire divided into four broad sections. The first section related to a colour vision test and general profile of the respondents. The second section examined the association that consumers had with colours in a logo. Following the approach of Ridgway (2011), a logo was designed using three shapes namely, a triangle, a square and a circle. Efforts were made to ensure that the designed logo was not similar to any logo that currently exists. Using different values of red, green and blue (RGB values), the same logo was developed in six different colours so as to assess the colour preference of consumers. These colours were: blue (R= 20, G= 63, B= 141), green (R=0, G= 79, B= 47), pink (R= 239, G=37, B=119), red (R=231, G=27, B= 38), yellow (R= 243, G= 233, B= 13) and purple (R= 107, G= 33, B= 130). The associations given by Hynes (2009) formed the basis for the colour association options provided to the respondents. Respondents were asked to select an option (or association) that they

*Brand personality can be defined as attributing human characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997).

thought was the best fit for a particular colour. The next section of the questionnaire included the list of 42 traits as developed by Aaker (1997). The respondents were asked to choose all the traits they thought would be applicable to the logo that they were assessing. The last section sought the opinion of the respondents regarding the appropriateness of the logo colour. For this purpose, the same logo was provided along with the description of the brand in terms of two personality traits. The personality traits, adopted from Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits, were chosen from the same dimension and were either congruent or incongruent with the colour associations. The responses were obtained using a seven-point likert scale ranging from 'highly inappropriate' (1) to 'highly appropriate' (7). The developed logo along with the sample of the questions asked in various sections of the questionnaire for six logo colours is provided in the Appendix.

Due to high reach and popularity of social networking sites, Facebook was chosen as a medium to obtain participation for the survey. The link to the survey was made available for a period of one week (3rd - 10th March, 2014) and users were encouraged to respond to the survey. Of the total of 227 people who participated in the survey, only 137 provided complete responses to the questionnaire and hence comprised the sample for the study. One respondent was disqualified due to the failure in the colour vision test. The sample constituted of 66% males and 34% females, with majority of respondents (43%) in the age group of 18-24 years, followed by 52% respondents who were between 25-34 years. In terms of the geographic diversity, the respondents were mainly from Karnataka 66 (49%), followed by Kerala 15 (11%), Maharashtra 9 (7%), Delhi 9 (7%) and Andhra Pradesh 8 (6%). The data so collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS 17.0 version. The results are discussed in the ensuing section of the paper.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

• *Assessing Consumers' Colour Associations*

To understand the difference in proportion of respondents' selecting a colour association for the logo that was developed in six different colours (blue, green, pink, red, yellow and purple), chi-square test was performed. The color association with the highest percentage is indicated (see Table 1) as it is the association that differ the most from the other associations. As observed from the findings, the respondents chose trustworthy (35%) over all the other options for colour blue, although playful was a close second choice. The respondents chose healthy (59%) over all the options that were given for the

colour green. For the colour pink the respondents chose fun (62%) over the other colour associations. Energetic and passionate carried almost equal weights for the colour red for the respondents. Energetic was also the association that respondents chose for the colour yellow. For the colour purple there was no clear association as playful (26%), stable (34%) and justice (23%) had almost even preference. Further, though majority of participants chose colour associations that were most widely accepted as the association for the respective colour, the proportions of the groups are found to be significantly different from one another ($p < .000$). Accordingly, the 'trustworthy' association for colour blue is found to be significantly different ($\chi^2 (4, N = 136) = 25.176, p < .000$) from other suggested associations of this colour. Similar results were obtained in respect of other five colours examined in the study.

Table 1: Result of the Chi-Square Analysis of Colour Association

Colour and significant association	N Frequency	Percent	N	df		p
<u>Blue</u>						
Trustworthy	47	35%	136	4	25.176 ^a	0.000
Playful	31					
Energetic	27					
Warm	17					
Happy	14					
<u>Green</u>						
Healthy	80	59%	136	4	153.632 ^a	0.000
Protective	36					
Dynamic	10					
Passionate	9					
Exciting	1					
<u>Pink</u>						
Fun	84	62%	136	4	177.162 ^a	0.000
Passionate	37					
Prestigious	8					
Reliable	5					
Trustworthy	2					
<u>Red</u>						
Energetic	54	40%	136	4	87.015 ^a	0.000
Passionate	53					
Secure	16					
Stable	7					
Justice	6					

<u>Yellow</u>							
Energetic	54	40%	136	4	38.118 ^a	0.000	
Trustworthy	27						
Protective	23						
Secure	21						
Healthy	11						
<u>Purple</u>							
Playful	36	26%	136	4	12.162 ^a	0.016	
Stable	34						
Justice	31						
Secure	19						
Fun	16						

^a0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 27.2.

(Source: Primary Data)

• *Assessing Brand Personality Traits Associated with Logo Colour*

The 42 personality traits comprising five distinct personality dimensions (sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness), as developed by Aaker (1997), were used to analyze the personality trait associated with each of the six colours of the designed logo. Using descriptive statistics, the traits selected by more than 3% of the sample respondents (maximum across all the traits being 13%) were examined to determine the fit within the five dimensions. The results (see Table 2) provide interesting insights with respect to the personality traits associated with different colours. More specifically,

- i. The blue logo is found as having its primary association with the dimensions of sincerity and competence. Of the 14 traits selected by the respondents, majority traits belong to the dimension of competence.
- ii. The green coloured logo too is found to be primarily associating with the dimensions of sincerity and competence. However, in comparison to blue colour, it largely captures the dimension of sincerity than competence.
- iii. Of the total of 11 traits that were above 3%, the respondents are found to associate the dimensions of excitement (6 traits) and sophistication (4 traits) for the logo developed in pink colour.
- iv. The red coloured logo is found to be exclusively associating with the dimension of excitement (6 out of 11 traits).

- v. The respondents are found to mostly associate the yellow coloured logo with the dimension of excitement (6 out of 10 traits).

Table 2: Brand Personality Dimension and Logo Colour

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension	Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Blue Logo				Green Logo			
Sincere	45	5.9%	Sincerity	Down-to-earth	66	9.9%	Sincerity
Down-to-earth	41	5.4%	Sincerity	Outdoorsy	34	5.1%	Ruggedness
Confident	38	5.0%	Competence	Secure	32	4.8%	Competence
Secure	36	4.8%	Competence	Reliable	29	4.3%	Competence
Corporate	36	4.8%	Competence	Real	28	4.2%	Sincerity
Family-Oriented	34	4.5%	Sincerity	Family-Oriented	27	4.0%	Sincerity
Intelligent	34	4.5%	Competence	Friendly	26	3.9%	Sincerity
Honest	30	4.0%	Sincerity	Spirited	23	3.4%	Excitement
Reliable	29	3.8%	Competence	Honest	22	3.3%	Sincerity
Cool	28	3.7%	Excitement	Sincere	22	3.3%	Sincerity
Friendly	27	3.6%	Sincerity	Successful	22	3.3%	Competence
Hard working	27	3.6%	Competence	Confident	22	3.3%	Competence
Successful	25	3.3%	Competence	Wholesome	21	3.1%	Sincerity
Masculine	23	3.0%	Ruggedness	Hard working	21	3.1%	Competence
Pink Logo				Red Logo			
Feminine	91	13.0%	Sophistication	Daring	67	9.1%	Excitement
Glamorous	69	9.9%	Sophistication	Exciting	55	7.5%	Excitement
Young	47	6.7%	Excitement	Spirited	46	6.2%	Excitement
Trendy	46	6.6%	Excitement	Glamorous	32	4.3%	Sophistication
Charming	36	5.2%	Sophistication	Trendy	31	4.2%	Excitement
Cheerful	34	4.9%	Sincerity	Confident	28	3.8%	Competence
Good looking	34	4.9%	Sophistication	Tough	26	3.5%	Ruggedness
Spirited	31	4.4%	Excitement	Real	25	3.4%	Sincerity
Daring	26	3.7%	Excitement	Independent	24	3.3%	Excitement
Exciting	26	3.7%	Excitement	Young	24	3.3%	Excitement
Cool	25	3.6%	Excitement	Cheerful	24	3.3%	Sincerity
Yellow Logo				Purple Logo			
Cheerful	45	6.9%	Sincerity	Upper class	32	4.5%	Sophistication
Friendly	43	6.6%	Sincerity	Corporate	29	4.1%	Competence
Young	43	6.6%	Excitement	Secure	28	4.0%	Competence
Trendy	33	5.1%	Excitement	Original	28	4.0%	Sincerity
Spirited	29	4.5%	Excitement	Trendy	28	4.0%	Excitement
Exciting	28	4.3%	Excitement	Glamorous	26	3.7%	Sophistication
Imaginative	24	3.7%	Excitement	Confident	25	3.5%	Competence
Original	23	3.5%	Sincerity	Sincere	24	3.4%	Sincerity
Outdoorsy	23	3.5%	Ruggedness	Intelligent	23	3.3%	Competence
Contemporary	22	3.4%	Excitement				

*0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 27.2.

(Source: Primary Data)

- vi. Lastly, the purple coloured logo is found to be associated more with the competence

dimension (4 out of 9 traits) in addition to the dimensions of sophistication and sincerity been captured with 2 traits each.

• *Examining the Appropriateness of Colour in Brand Logo*

In this stage of analysis, the study examines the appropriateness of the brand logo given the congruence of brand personality traits and colour associations. For each colour, two personality traits from the same dimensions that were either congruent or incongruent with the colour associations were taken. The responses between 5 and 7 on a 7-point likert scale (ranging from 'highly inappropriate' to 'highly appropriate') are considered appropriate; responses between 1 and 3 are considered inappropriate and a response score of 4 is considered as neutral. Chi-square test is used to determine if the proportion of the participants selecting appropriateness of the logo colour (blue, green, pink, red, yellow and purple) significantly differ from each other. The results presented in Table 3 indicate blue colour to be significantly appropriate ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 63.191, p < .000$) for a brand that is honest and sincere; green for a brand that is down to earth and wholesome ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 99.985, p < .000$); colour red for exciting and daring brand ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 134.397, p < .000$); and yellow for a brand that is cheerful and friendly ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 81.721, p < .000$). The responses indicate pink colour to be significantly inappropriate ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 189.544, p < .000$) for a brand that is masculine and tough. Lastly, logo in purple colour too is found to be significantly inappropriate ($\chi^2 (4, N=136) = 33.941, p < .000$) for a brand that is small town and sentimental.

Table 3: Appropriateness of Colour and Brand Description

Colour and significant association	N Frequency	Percent	N	df	p
Blue					
<i>Honest and Sincere</i>			136	2	63.191 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	89	65.4%			
Neutral	25	18.4%			
Inappropriate	22	16.2%			
Green					
<i>Down to earth and wholesome</i>			136	2	99.985 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	100	73.5%			
Neutral	13	9.6%			
Inappropriate	23	16.9%			

Pink					
<i>Masculine and tough</i>			136	2	189.544 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	9	6.6%			
Neutral	6	4.4%			
Inappropriate	121	89.0%			
Red					
<i>Exciting and daring</i>			136	2	134.397 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	109	80.1%			
Neutral	11	8.1%			
Inappropriate	16	11.8%			
Yellow					
<i>Cheerful and friendly</i>			136	2	81.721 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	95	69.9%			
Neutral	22	16.2%			
Inappropriate	19	14.0%			
Purple					
<i>Small-town and sentimental</i>			136	2	33.941 ^a 0.000
Appropriate	38	27.9%			
Neutral	22	16.2%			
Inappropriate	76	55.9%			

^a0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.

(Source: Primary Data)

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Colour as an important element of brand identity is used in logo, package, or product design to generate attention and facilitate distinction from competing brands. Despite this well established importance of colours in marketing, not much has been researched to understand the meanings associated with colours or to examine as to how the use of colours in logo affect consumers' perception of brand personality. The present paper provides a useful understanding in this regard by examining colour and personality associations as well as the appropriateness of colours used in a brand logo. A special logo in six colours namely, blue, green, pink, red, yellow and purple was designed for this purpose. On the basis of the responses collected through an online survey, the paper brings to the fore some interesting implications. *Firstly*, the results reveal that consumers apply conventional colour associations to colours used in a logo. This implies that colours with consistent meanings can be used as important and controllable

marketing variable for managing a uniform image of the brand across cultures and markets. The results are consistent with a cross-cultural study conducted by Madden et al. (2000) that too suggested certain colours to manifest pan cultural meaning and associations. *Second*, an assessment of colour associations in the context of brand personality revealed varied traits of Aaker (2001) with which respondents associate each of the colours. More specifically, while the colours blue and purple fell into the dimension of competence which indicates a brand to be responsible, dependable and secure; green colour captured the trait of sincerity which is described by a brand that is warm and acceptable. The colours pink, red and yellow were described by the dimension of excitement, thereby reflecting that the brand, through its logo colour, would be perceived as sociable, energetic and active. Sophistication and ruggedness are not clearly defined as they capture aspirational ideas rather than basic tendencies. This possibly could be the reason that none of the colours reflected these two dimensions. The results thus present useful insight with respect to the perception that a particular colour is likely to create when it is used in a logo. *Lastly*, the study investigates the appropriateness of colour choice in a logo when brand personality and colour associations are congruent. Except for pink and purple, the remaining colours were found to be having congruent associations. Manufacturers and marketers may use this information to create logos in colours that evoke positive brand image and associations. For instance, the trustworthy trait of a brand may best be represented by its logo in blue colour due to its high association with dimension of 'competence' that captures the traits of the brand being perceived as dependable and secure. The examples of the successful use of this include the brand logos of *Ford, Intel and Samsung*. As the colour green in the present work is represented by the dimension of 'sincerity' (associated with warmth, wholesome and acceptance), the use of this colour in brand logo is suggested for the products/companies which would like to stand for being eco-friendly and healthy. The colour pink, represented by the dimension of 'excitement', should be used by a brand that wants to be perceived as a trendy, unique and imaginative. Further, due to its inappropriateness for masculine associations, this colour should not be used for brands/products targeted at men. Red colour, generally associated with danger, was also found to be represented with the dimension of 'excitement'. It would therefore be appropriate if this colour is used in logos for the brands which stand for being up-to-date, daring, and exciting. We see brands like *Adobe, ESPN and Red Bull* which fit into this description. As against this, colour yellow may be used to connote a 'unique' or 'cool' brand and so may provide a better fit for brands such as *Nikon, Ferrari and Yellow Pages*. It was

interesting to note that the colour purple associated with mixed dimensions of 'competence', 'sophistication' and 'sincerity'. As using this colour could send a different and incongruent message to the consumers, a cautious use of this colour is suggested through the results of the present study.

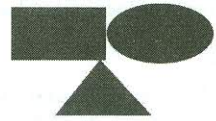
The limiting aspects of this study may be addressed by future researches. A larger and more diversified sample may be taken so as to provide greater credibility and representation to the research findings. Also, as the study was conducted via the online medium, there exists a possibility of colours being perceived differently due to difference in the configuration of respondents' computer screen. Some aspects such as difference in colour meanings and associations across consumer demographics such as age and gender have not been analyzed in the present work. It would be interesting to note if the colour and personality associations vary for different profile of consumers. It would also be worth examining whether the brand cues alter colour meaning and associations i.e. whether colours are associated with same meanings for different brands or are associated with different meanings in a brand context. An understanding of these aspects would help in enhancing the effectiveness of colour-focused marketing strategies in future.

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Appendix: Logo and Sample Questions



- Please select the association that you think best fits the colour in the logo.

- Trustworthy
- Warm
- Happy
- Energetic
- Playful

Note: The list of associations for each colour were taken from Hynes

- If this logo represented a brand, please select personality traits that you feel would best represent the brand. Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Down-to-earth | <input type="checkbox"/> Feminine | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Young | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small-town | <input type="checkbox"/> Masculine | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family- Oriented | <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Original | <input type="checkbox"/> Leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secure | <input type="checkbox"/> Sentimental | <input type="checkbox"/> Upper class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sincere | <input type="checkbox"/> Daring | <input type="checkbox"/> Good looking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Trendy | <input type="checkbox"/> Charming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Real | <input type="checkbox"/> Exciting | <input type="checkbox"/> Smooth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Successful | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirited | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoorsy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wholesome | <input type="checkbox"/> Cool | <input type="checkbox"/> Western |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glamorous | <input type="checkbox"/> Up-to-date | <input type="checkbox"/> Rugged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary | <input type="checkbox"/> Tough |

- Please read the brand statement and then please select how appropriate you think the color in the logo is according to the description provided.

The brand that this logo represents is **honest** and **sincere**.

- () 1- Highly Inappropriate
- () 2
- () 3
- () 4
- () 5
- () 6
- () 7- Highly Appropriate