THE ROLE OF PRODUCT COLOR IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

In the present world, the development of the market and attracting new customers or even retaining the old customers is the concern of many companies. Hence, due to the severe competitive pressures companies and organizations use various methods of marketing. Due to the development of self-service stores the product selection of customers without any interference by the seller, the most important factor to attract customers in today’s world is the product’s color that manifests more in product’s packaging. Packaging a product is the combination of various elements each of which can be effective in creating a certain image in the minds of consumers. Color is the first and most important factor in the attractiveness of packaging. The purpose of this study is to address the difficulties facing managers and packaging designers and transfer the messages intended by the organization through the product’s color. A greater understanding of the impact of the visual aspects enables them to direct the content of their messages in a better way and find a more appropriate place against the competing products. In this study, the researcher has attempted to review the relevant research papers and explain the reasons of color importance in attracting the customer. In this research, the consumer behavior, the factors influencing the behavior and the relevance of color element have been carefully examined; and then the feature of different colors and their functions and roles in marketing has been described. The final section gives suggestions on the increase of attracting customers with regard to the functional nature of each product and its appropriate color.

Keywords: Marketing, Color, Consumer Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The consumer behavior is a disputatious and challenging issue and involves the individuals and whatever the buy, why and how they buy, marketing mixed and market. Consumer behavior is a very interesting field to study. Since it is consumers who buy goods and services, they can use their daily experience in order to perceive the concepts and theories of this field. Perceiving consumer behavior and evaluation of the consumer performance is of particular importance considering cultural differences in different societies. Consumer behavior is a subtle phenomenon due to the fact that individuals do not always act overtly. Their performance as consumers is not often predictable and even explainable. Individuals gain practical experience through observing shopping behavior of others and doing their own shopping. (Johan, Michiel; 2010). Human being has continuously been affected by colors either physically or psychologically. How humans are affected by colors has obviously a psychological nature which indirectly influences norms, reactions and individual behavior. (Elm, 2012). Buying behaviors are the decision processes and acts of people involved in buying and using products. For understanding buying behavior, we need to understand why consumers make the purchases that they make, what factors control consumer purchases, and the altering factors in our society. A firm needs to examine buying behavior because buyer’s reactions to a firm's marketing strategy has a great impact on the firm’s accomplishment. It stresses that a firm should generate such strategies, which satisfies customers and therefore need to evaluate that what, where, when and how consumers buy. Marketers can better forecast how consumers will respond to marketing strategies. Consumer’s behavior depends on many factors.
Brown said that majority of buyers were mostly influenced by a number of factors, including prestige, advertising, and satisfactory familiarity in use, but in most occasions the authentic liking for a fastidious chief brand seemed pathetic. However, one significant factor is the psychological impact on consumer’s mind of a particular product. (Brown, 1950) Sewall said that in market segments a lot of people were observed, having different intentions to purchase similar product. Color is one of the basic things, which have a psychological impact on consumers mind and in result on his buying behavior.

In our daily life, there are plenty of things that we have taken for granted in the sense that we do not notice, acknowledge, enjoy them fully or sometimes even complain about. Among those precious gifts existing in our life there are the ability to see things in colors and the color itself. (Sewall, 1978)

Color affects every moment in life. It is an important marketing communication tool, a memorable visual element and carries key symbolic and associative information about products (Garber, et al., 2000). It strongly influences the clothes we wear, the car we drive, the backpack or hand bag we choose to use, the shoes or sneakers we wear and the furnishings in our homes. The product’s color may play a significant role in the consumer’s purchasing decisions for certain products (Ogden et al., 2010; Akcay et al., 2011). Many companies in the world hire color consultants to help identify the best color for their product, one which would appeal to their potential buyers. 62-90% of a product purchase decision is based on the color of the product and the decision is made within minutes of seeing it (Singh, 2006; online, pcimag.com, 2002). Color is a highly noticeable attribute for presenting images. It improves recognition, memory and increases subjects’ attention (Wichmann, et al., 2002)

Psychological impact of colors on the process of consumer shopping behavior has been scrutinized in this article. To attract customer, color is considered to be a crucial factor. Being acquainted with psychological impact of colors and its different combinations would be of great help to designers. Designers pick out a particular color based on the nature of the product (Roulard, 1999). In addition, particular colors could be signified by marketers by using association theory and be used as an experimental sign or image expansion. Research on “Color scheming” is gaining increased awareness and popularity among the number of marketing researchers. The main reason behind this is that human brain receives signals faster through eyes rather than ears. Young supported this by showing the impact of luminous body and its colored particles, when they get into the eyes of a human being. It’s obvious that one feels the visuals readily and uses other senses afterwards. (Young, 1802) Palmeri and et al explained that the visual appearance of objects first moves to neural activity within diverse brain areas and helps in the product acknowledgment and detection. By using different methods, we can increase the quality of visuals used in ads and packaging. Now a days we see that product with an effective color scheming gains success in consumers while many products fail due to poor color scheming. Brightness of colors and their saturation levels have different impacts according to the saturation level. (Palmeri et al., 2002)

**Consumer behavior**

Blackwell, Miniard and Engel define consumer behavior as “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services” During the long history of marketing, consumer behavior has always been an attractive field for marketers who are market-oriented rather than product-oriented, since it is the study of why people buy. With the insights gained about the reasons people buy specific products/services or brands, marketers can then develop strategies to influence purchasing behavior of consumers. (Blackwell, Miniard, Engel, 2006)

**Sequential effects of response to marketing**

Marketing activities are no longer acting in a one-way road from marketers to audience. It is vital for marketers to truly understand how their audience in general and consumers in particular respond to their marketing effort. Evans, Jamal and Foxall introduce a model called the hierarchy (or sequence) of communication effects which consists of seven stages: exposure, attention, perception, learning, attitude, action, and post-purchase
However, like other economics and business models, it is not necessary that consumers follow this sequence in all purchasing situations; this model rather provides marketers a logical framework to integrate psychological concepts with the purpose of interpreting: why and how people respond to marketing activity. (Evans, Jamal, Foxall, 2006)

Color

Color can be distinguished in hue, brightness and saturation (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994). Based on hue, colors are broadly divided into cool and warm colors. Cool colors are also known as colors with short wavelengths (i.e. violet and blue). Warm colors are also known as colors with long wavelengths (i.e. red and orange). There exists a hierarchy in color from violet, blue and green (short-wavelength colors) to yellow, orange and red (long-wavelength colors) (Crowley, 1993). Brightness and saturation also play an important role in the perception of color. Brightness determines the lightness or darkness of a color. Much light reflection indicates a light color, low light reflection indicates a dark color. Saturation points to the purity of a color: high saturation represents a pure color and low saturation a pale, greyish color. Colors are seen as more pleasant by an increase of both characteristics (Camgöz, Yener & Güvenç, 2002; Crozier, 1996). Hemphill proved that bright colors are associated with positive feelings such as happiness, joy and hope. Grandjean also suggested that brighter colors are judged as being friendlier, more cultured, pleasant and beautiful. In contrast, dark colors can evoke negative feelings, such as boredom and sadness (Camgöz et al., 2002).

Elliot and Maier found that color may evoke associations and reactions. According to the researchers, the meaning of color is bipartite. First, the meaning of color can be a result of learned associations, for example red, orange and green colors on traffic lights. Second, the meaning of colors can be determined by nature (i.e. associations between black and death). (Elliot, Maier, 2007) Tofle, Schwartz, Yoon and Max-Royale also argued that emotional reactions evoked by color are results of learned associations based on culture and characteristics of an individual. (Tofle, et al., 2004)

Wexner examined the associations between color and mood. Participants were faced with colored cards and asked to indicate associations with different moods. Cool colors were associated with calm, serene and comfortable moods. In contrast, warm colors were associated with stressful and exciting moods. However, the participants in the study were only exposed to colored cards and not actually located in a colored environment. According to Wexner there is a relationship between wavelength and level of arousal. (Wexner, 1954). These findings were later confirmed by Valdez and Mehrabian who found that long-wavelength colors were more arousing than short-wavelength colors (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994).

Colors have the ability to attract attention, this is called the approach orientation of color (Bellizzi, Crowley and Hasty, 1983). Retailers can use this to elicit approach behavior. Research of Bellizzi and Hite showed that in a blue shopping environment, compared to a red one, people were more willing to look around and buy products. In a less distracting blue environment also less purchasing decisions are postponed and more money was spent. (Bellizzi, Hite, 1992) Bellizzi, Crowley and Hasty examined approach behavior and attractiveness of different colors in an experimental study. The study measured the distance and angle at which participants were sitting down relative to a colored wall. (Bellizzi, Crowley and Hasty, 1983)

Meanings of colors

In order to utilize color in marketing activities, marketers ought to understand which emotions and also the needs behind that each color can trigger from the target customers. The meanings associated with colors vary from culture to culture; there are no absolutely universal meanings applied for any color. Nowadays, the most widely known researches about what feelings that colors represent and trigger are from North America. With the global spread of North American culture, the interpretation of color meanings by people around the world
has been alternated and gradually shares some common points. The North American set of color meanings presented below is also rather similar to the Western world and it is the most closely applicable to the Finnish culture. (Scott-Kemmis 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Represent</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Energy; Action; Desire; Love; Passion</td>
<td>Stimulating; Exciting and Motivating; Attention-getting; Assertive and Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Adventure and risk taking; Social communication and interaction; Friendship; Divorce;</td>
<td>Enthusiasm; Rejuvenation; Stimulation; Courage; Vitality; Fun; Playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Mind and intellect; Happiness and fun; Communication of new ideas</td>
<td>Creative; Quick decisions; Anxiety producing; Critical; Non-emotional; Light; Warmth; Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Harmony and balance; Growth; Hope; Wealth; Health; Prestige; Serenity</td>
<td>Rejuvenation; Nurturing; Dependable; agreeable and diplomatic; Possessiveness; Envy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Communication; Peace and calm; Honesty; Authority; Religion; Wisdom</td>
<td>Conservative; Predictable; Orderly; Rigid; Trustworthy; Dependable; Secure; Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple/Violet</td>
<td>Inspiration; Imagination; Individuality; Spirituality; Royalty; Sophistication; Nostalgia; Mystery; Spirituality</td>
<td>Empathy; Controlled emotion; Respectable and distinguished; Impractical; Immature; Dignity; Cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Unconditional love; Compassion; Nurturing; Hope; Girlish</td>
<td>Calming; Non-threatening; Affectionate; Caring; Immature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Stability; Structure; Security; Natural and wholesome; Earthlike</td>
<td>Comforting; Protective; Materialistic; Simplistic; Durable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey/Gray</td>
<td>Neutrality; Compromise; Control</td>
<td>Indecision; Detached; Depression; Unemotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Innocence and purity; New beginning; Equality and unity; Fairness</td>
<td>Impartial; Rescuer; Futuristic; Efficient; Clean; Soft; Noble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Mystery; Power and control; Prestige; Value; Timelessness; Sophistication</td>
<td>Formal, dignified and sophisticated; Depressing; Pessimistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Meanings of colors (content adopted from Scott-Kemmis 2013)

Basis of color preferences

The colors that we see in this world are not exactly the same, they are different due to the dependence on lighting condition, observing position as well as surrounding environment, particularly other adjacent colors, can affect the manner the brain perceives a specific color. Furthermore, even when we can see the same color, how we perceive it, what it means to us and which emotions it can trigger from us vary largely from each individual to another. The reason for this ununiformed and varied color perception and preference is that they are “colored by our gender, our age, our education, the culture we grew up in, preconceived color beliefs of the societies we live in, our childhood associations with certain colors, and our life experiences, whether those associations are negative or positive” (Scott-Kemmis 2013).

In a study by Choungourian it was found that variations in color preferences indicate individual differences. Choungourian's subjects were from four diverse national backgrounds—the United States, Lebanon, Iran, and Kuwait. There were 160 subjects, with an equal representation of males and females for each nationality. Some
marked variations in color preferences were noticed among the subjects from the different countries. Americans had the highest preference for red and blue, but these were not preferred by subjects from the other countries. "Blue-green, which is least preferred in the United States, takes as its preference value the first position in Iran and Kuwait"Choungourian's findings indicate definite cultural differences in color preferences.

Females tend to have broader range of color preferences and these preferences are typically different from those of males. In addition, it is not rare that a number of Western males are red/green color blind. However, there are also unisex colors such as blue, red, black, white, silver or gold which can be used in marketing materials targeting both males and females. The more mature we become, we switch from bright and primary colors in solid blocks to more subdued and sophisticated colors with patterns. Reaching the adulthood, people seem to be less open for experimenting new colors; instead they rather stick with their safer favorites. In a similar manner with age, the more educated people get the more complex their color choices seem to be, with relatively unusual names given. Moreover, climate and the nature of the living environment have huge impacts on people’s color perception and preferences. People have a tendency to duplicate the colors that they are familiar with and become part of their lives. Thus, it is to believe that people from tropical climate respond more positive to bright and warm colors, while who live in colder regions prefer cooler and more toned down colors. (Scott-Kemmis 2013)

Roles of color in consumer behavior

Relationship between colors and buying behavior is very profound. Product’s packaging and color have direct and first impact on consumers psyche. Therefore, it is important to do research on this topic to distinguish which colors mostly impact positively and which impact negatively on consumer’s choice and consequently on buying behavior. The conclusion of Brody et al. (1981) research shows that television advertisements have great impact on children consumerism. So the children do not know about the substantial components or quality of a product. They are only fascinated towards the colors of the product. Therefore, if an advertisement has good color scheme it will attract a lot of children and consequently buyers for the company. The good commercials attract children’s attention and hence motivate their parents for buying the product (Brody et al., 1981).

Earlier studies show that roughly 80% of the hiring decisions are based on exterior factors, and that 65% of that involves clothing color. Brown and green seem to arouse confidence, and some designers use this information for intake interviews. In addition, black and deep blue colors imply authority. All this shows the importance of colors in human perception and hence decisions.

It is undeniable that color can help attracting consumers’ attention since by nature we humans can quickly spot colorful items and on general level, color tends to grab the attention more than monochrome. The reason is that our pre-attentive system of the brain has been designed and evolved to easily detect color from the external environment, and more importantly this system has the immediate function of selecting items for subsequent attentional processing. However, in the world, color never stays a lone and it is impossible to be perceived on its own but in the symphony with other adjacent colors; thus using color to capture consumers’ attention can face some obstacles of depending largely on the surroundings in which the item with target color(s) is placed and indeed different colors possess unique attention values. (Evans ym. 2006, 33; Jansson-Boyd 2010, 50.)

Conclusion

Today, companies have realized the miraculous effect of colors. Colors can arouse the interest and thus increase the desire to purchase the product. The results of Bellizzi’s study (1983) and his colleagues also confirm this issue. Colors in marketing directly affect the consumer behavior and the effects of colors determine the behavior of many consumers. The results of this study indicate that colors can stimulate the interest and increase the desire to purchase the product and the results of Elliot’s study (2004) and his colleagues confirm this issue. Colors improve the business in increasing the advertising effectiveness to eliminate the ambiguities of brands and even creating the new income. Consumers consider some colors as associated with specific products which make the understanding of how people react to colors much more difficult. Each color must be used in a suitable product according to its psychological characteristics and the results of Scott-Kemmis’s study (2013) confirm this issue. Manufacturing companies that intend to produce a product which boosts energy,
sense of exhilaration, and excitement in people must use warm colors like red, yellow and orange such as the production of energy drinks, sport cars and chocolates that the lovers give to each other on Valentine's Day. On the contrary, when the companies intend to induce the tranquility, peace and comfort to their customers, they must use cool colors like blue and green in their products such as comfortable furnishings, bottles of mineral water, bed clothes, and so on. A study by Wexner (1954) confirms these results. The inappropriate use of colors in products not only attracts the customers but also may prevent them from buying the product. Today, due to the development of self-service stores and the fewer roles of sellers, the colors psychology has become more important in the production and packaging of products, so that it greatly guarantees the preservation of manufacturing companies. The use of attractive and eye-catching packaging makes our products to show off more among thousands of items in stores’ shelves and encourage customers to buy. The results of this study show that colors can have different connotations in different cultures and ethnicities. Cultural differences play an important role in the interest or hatred towards various colors that are consistent with the results of Choungourian’s study (1972). Colors in products for children play a significant role to attract them and the results of Brodly’s study (1981) and his colleagues also confirm this issue. Manufacturing companies must consider the demographic characteristics of the target society such as gender and age in producing each product.

References


