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COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

Study of Multicultural Color Preferences



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ADV5416- Multicultural Marketing Communication
Final Assignment

Spring 2009
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STUDY OF MULTICULTURAL COLOR PREFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

There are various factors that differentiate cultural groups worldwide and within the increasingly multicultural society of the United States “Today, taste and trends must be considered globally in order to effectively market a product, and understanding regional preferences is a prerequisite” (Hayden, 2008). Firms in our nation and globally should develop marketing strategies that create and maintain the desired brand image in customers’ minds and across cultural borders.

“One marketing cue that marketers can use regardless of location is color. Color is an integral part of products, services, packaging, logos, and other collateral that can be an effective means of creating and sustaining brand images in customers’ minds” (Madden, Hewett, and Roth).

Marketers that underestimate color may not realize that it is especially crucial for creating first impressions. In the United States-- a society feeling increasingly rushed for time-- many purchase decisions are considered the result of impulse shopping. In these cases, color plays a huge role in standing out on the aisles to consumers. “Color sets the tone before you can even begin to load the mental software required to read a product’s label, marketing messages, promotional materials, etc” (Sturgess, 2008). Before conducting my research on color preferences, an important initial step is to explore previous studies that have already been conducted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality Influences on Color Preferences

Research has been performed since the 1970s regarding the impact of color on individuals' moods and behaviors. One of the most prominent theorists arguing that color preferences and personality are linked is Max Lüscher. He was a Swiss psychotherapist who determined in 1971 that people with similar color preferences also tend to possess similar personality characteristics (Lange and Rentfrow, 2007).

Importance of Color in Consumer Purchases

A website design and marketing firm, Cooper Marketing Group, conducts a nationwide consumer color preference study each year and sells the results to businesses. In their survey, "for each of 75 consumer products where color is an important part of the purchase decision, respondents are asked to identify their most and least favorite colors, colors of products they currently own, and the colors of products they anticipate buying in the future. Based on the demographic information on each respondent, the color preference data can be segmented by age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, occupation, income, type of housing, and geography" (Triplett, 1995).

The purpose of their study is not based on personality, but rather to determine how color affects purchasing decisions. Cooper Marketing developed a "color lifestyle" segmentation, which places consumers in three groups according to the importance of color in their buying decisions:

- ***The Color-Forward Consumer*** likes to be the first to try a new color and is willing to spend more for a product in a fashionable color. This group represents a small, but highly influential consumer segment.
- ***The Color-Prudent Consumer*** will buy a new color only after seeing friends try it. They often put quality ahead of color when choosing products and are the largest majority of the market.
- ***The Color-Loyal Consumer*** replaces a product with another of the same color and prefers safe rather than fashionable colors. These are a small, predictable segment because they usually consistently buy the same color.

The Impact of Gender and Age on Color Preferences

Traditionally, men and women have had different tastes in color. In the past, women were usually drawn to brighter tones and more sensitive to subtle shadings and patterns. “The differences are attributed to biology, since females see color better than males do (color blindness is 16 times more prevalent in men), and in part to socialization”, says Kathy LaManchusa, a color trend strategist for companies such as Kmart, Motorola and Philip Morris (Paul, 2002). More recently, some studies are showing that gender is having less of an impact on color choices.

Research has also found that age can affect color preferences. Margaret Miele, assistant professor of psychology at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, explains that as we get older, our eyes mature and our vision takes on a yellow cast. “Color looks less bright to older people, so they gravitate to white and other bright tones” (Miele, 2002).

Due to the evidence of age influencing preferred colors, the director of color marketing and design at the Sherwin-Williams Company (a global paint producer), Linda Trent, made divisions of color preferences into age groups consisting of:

- ***The Mature Market*** (individuals over the age of 65)- prefer yellow, pink, blue, and white
- ***Baby Boomers*** (born between 1945 and 1964)- drawn to cool shades of blue
- ***Generation X*** (born between 1964 and 1980)- exotic greens, violet, and reds
- ***Generation Next*** (teenagers)- leans towards bright neons and tropical hues

Multicultural Influences Affecting Color Preferences

Ethnic differences arising from cultural, religious and historical experiences are a major influence on color preferences (Paul, 2002). Research has indicated that the color choices of younger consumers can be particularly influenced by the cultural context in which they come of age.

"Each generation has its own history. They grew up with different values and ideals, were exposed to different cultural trends and ethnic influences. Today, people are surrounded by many more cultures, making younger generations more open to cultural influences, and this comes out in color preferences a great deal."

-Kathy LaManchusa, a color trend strategist for companies such as Kmart, Motorola and Philip Morris

The trend we may be witnessing in the United States toward brighter and more complex colors reflects the increasingly multicultural makeup of the country.

The vice president of Cooper Marketing Group, Mimi Cooper explains that “As we become a nation of minorities, more people are going to want to try out new colors. That may mean the country will keep getting more colorful.”

"We're seeing a strong influence from the Hispanic market in terms of reds, yellows and oranges, being reflected in consumer products," says Jay de Sibour, president of the Color Marketing Group. "And with globalization, we're seeing more colors from Asia, also in the red and yellow family." Past research has found that African Americans are drawn to strong colors often in the red, yellow and brown families. This is a preference that may be rooted in their African heritage.

Ethnic tastes can also be based on environmental factors. An example is the preference among Hispanics for bright colors which is a reflection of the intense lighting conditions in Latin America. Although Hispanics may lean towards liking warm colors, there are variations that exist in color preferences. “When it comes to apparel, Mexicans are more traditional (i.e. reds, blues, black) and Puerto Ricans are drawn to livelier colors (i.e. pinks, purples). In Florida, a Cuban palette of pastels, flamingo pink, and salmon dominates fashion as well as exterior and interior design” (Paul, 2002). The following chart from the American Demographics/BuzzBack study breaks down least and favorite color preferences based on ethnicity in 2002:

ethnic color
 Blue is No. 1 overall, but the second-most popular color varies by ethnic group. Blacks and Hispanics lean proportionately more toward purple. Asians toward pink and whites toward green.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?

	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple	Black	White	Brown	Gray	Pink
Black	12%	0%	2%	12%	38%	16%	12%	0%	4%	3%	1%
Asian	3%	6%	9%	9%	40%	11%	11%	3%	0%	3%	6%
White	10%	2%	4%	15%	43%	13%	7%	0%	1%	1%	4%
Hispanic	15%	3%	2%	11%	35%	18%	11%	0%	1%	2%	2%

WHAT'S YOUR LEAST FAVORITE COLOR?

	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple	Black	White	Brown	Gray	Pink
Black	5%	16%	4%	5%	0%	6%	2%	6%	10%	4%	40%
Asian	9%	17%	6%	11%	3%	6%	6%	0%	14%	11%	17%
White	5%	21%	9%	3%	1%	6%	4%	4%	17%	8%	23%
Hispanic	4%	22%	12%	6%	2%	6%	2%	6%	18%	6%	17%

Source: American Demographics/BuzzBack

METHODS

Hypothesis

The aim of this report is to determine if cultural or ethnic background influences the preferences of colors. Past research has shown that preferred color choices differ based on certain ethnic groups. In our increasingly multicultural nation, there should be differences among the major U.S. cultural groups in terms of their preferred color choices. Therefore,

H₁: Ethnic groups will be different in terms of their preferences of colors.

Color Preferences_{HS} ≠ Color Preferences_{HE} ≠ Color Preferences_{NHW} ≠ Color Preferences_{AA} ≠ Color Preferences_{Asian}

Methodology

The data used for this analysis was collected in an online survey sponsored by Florida State University and American Online (AOL). The survey included questions regarding consumer behavior and online media habits on a variety of topics. For this report, we focused on questions about ethnicity, demographical information, and color preferences as well as determining the importance that colors play in these consumers' lives. For the English speaking sample, respondents were originally sampled via the Opinion Place online *river* methodology. Respondents were screened and assigned to surveys in real-time, and were not considered registered panelists since most did not return to the site for ongoing survey participation.

For the Spanish-speaking sample, respondents were invited from Tu Opinión Latina, a bilingual online Hispanic panel. Given the quota requirements for this

study, a random sample of respondents was selected based on their demographic characteristics and invited to participate in this special survey opportunity via a custom email invitation.

Respondents completed the survey by clicking on a link in the email invitation, which connected them with the online questionnaire. The fieldwork was executed from March 12 - 30, 2009. In order to participate, respondents were required to be at least 18 years old and quotas were set for five ethnic groups with a close monitoring and management of age and gender representation within each ethnic group. The actual number of completes per quota group is as follows: Non-Hispanic White (n=505), Hispanics who responded to the questionnaire in English (n=541), Hispanics who responded to the questionnaire in Spanish (n=351), African American (n=500), and Asian (n=502). Each respondent received a small incentive for completing the survey.

	English Speaking Segment	Spanish Speaking Segment
Average survey length	20	28.7
Response rate	17.9%	10.3%
Completion rate	74.5%	64.4%

Questions Q14.41 through Q14.43 were responded on a Likert's scale which attempted to assess the importance of colors for the surveyed individuals. Each statement asked to indicate how much the respondent disagreed (0) or agreed (5) with each of the following statements:

- Q14.41 Color is one of my most important considerations when buying a product
- Q14.42 The colors that I choose to wear reflect how I think of myself
- Q14.43 The colors used in websites definitely affect my enjoyment of them

Additionally, Questions 18 a through Q18 b were used to test my hypothesis and also displayed on a Likert's scale. These were created to help determine which specific colors were preferred by individuals from varied U.S. multicultural groups preferred. Each statement asked respondents to rate how much they liked each of the following thirteen colors from "I hate this color" (0) to "I love this color" (5):

- Q18. a. White
- Q18. b. Black
- Q18. c. Silver
- Q18. d. Gold
- Q18. e. Brown
- Q18. f. Red
- Q18. g. Orange
- Q18. h. Yellow
- Q18. i. Green
- Q18. j. Blue
- Q18. k. Purple
- Q18. l. Pink
- Q18. m. Platinum

Using the SPSS computer program, the demographic information produced from the survey and specific data for the Color Preference variable questions were investigated using procedures. These included running Frequency Analyses, Compare Means, One-Way ANOVA tests, and Cross Tabs. A factor analysis was also conducted in order to determine the commonalities between the color choices for Q.18 a through m and group them according to the findings.

RESULTS

The Importance of Color for U.S. Multicultural Groups

From the five U.S. multicultural groups studied in the survey, based on Q.14 41 through 43, there was a clear indication that color was an especially important factor for Asians and to a lesser extent for English-Speaking Hispanics. Using the One-Way ANOVA Duncan procedure, significance was determined at the .05 alpha level for the three questions among ethnic groups.

Q14.41 asks respondents to rank 1 to 5 how much they agree that “*Color is one of my most important considerations when buying a product.*” Using the One-Way ANOVA- Duncan procedure, you can see from the following chart that Asians ranked the highest mean for this question with 2.92.

Q14_41 Q14_41. COLOR IS ONE OF MY MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN BUYING A PRODUCT

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (From 0 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree)

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Duncan ^a 5.00 Hispanic Spanish	335	2.37		
1.00 Non Hispanic White	498	2.38		
2.00 African American	489		2.59	
4.00 Hispanic English	528		2.62	
3.00 Asian	496			2.92
Sig.		.934	.781	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q14.42 asks respondents to rank 1 to 5 with how much they agree that “*The colors that I choose to wear reflect how I think of myself.*” With this question, Asians

again held the highest average with a ranking of 3.13 and English-Speaking Hispanics ranked second with an average of 2.98.

Q14_42 Q14_42. THE COLORS THAT I CHOOSE TO WEAR REFLECT HOW I THINK OF MYSELF

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (From 0 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree)

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Duncan ^a 5.00 Hispanic Spanish	333	2.58			
1.00 Non Hispanic White	500	2.70	2.70		
2.00 African American	487		2.89	2.89	
4.00 Hispanic English	528			2.98	2.98
3.00 Asian	494				3.13
Sig.		.261	.073	.362	.164

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q14.43 has specific implications for brands developing websites and asks respondents to rank 1 to 5 with how much they agree that “The colors used in websites definitely affect my enjoyment of them.” With this question, Asians once again had the highest average with a ranking of 3.07 and Hispanics who predominantly speak English were ranked second with a mean 2.91.

Q14_43 Q14_43. THE COLORS USED IN WEBSITES DEFINITELY AFFECT MY ENJOYMENT OF THEM

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (From 0 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree)

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Duncan ^a 5.00 Hispanic Spanish	351	2.52			
1.00 Non Hispanic White	505	2.63	2.63		
2.00 African American	500		2.81	2.81	
4.00 Hispanic English	541			2.91	2.91

3.00 Asian	502				3.07
Sig.		.314	.090	.339	.156

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Multicultural Color Preferences

In order to determine what were the most popular colors among the five major U.S. ethnic groups, One-Way ANOVA-Duncan tests were conducted to see how the thirteen colors ranked in popularity. The results showed that black ranked the overall highest among all the cultural groups, but was liked somewhat less by non-Hispanic Whites (M=3.81) and slightly more by African-Americans (M=4.30). The second most popular color chosen was Blue, whose averages were about the same for all groups (overall M=4.08).

White was the third most popular color. As can be seen from the following chart, it was slightly more popular among Spanish-speaking Hispanics and Asians.

Q18_1 Q18_1. WHITE

**How much do you like each of the following colors?
Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means
you hate the color and 5 means you love it.**

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2
1.00 Non Hispanic White	502	3.31	
4.00 Hispanic English	538	3.33	
2.00 African American	496	3.38	
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	351		3.70
3.00 Asian	497		3.71
Sig.		.487	.977

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

The following charts indicate the mean ranks for each of the five cultural groups. These charts were included to demonstrate the affinity that some ethnic groups have towards certain colors over others. This indicates truth in my hypothesis and has implications for marketers deciding which colors to use for their selected target audiences.

Q18_3 Q18_3. SILVER

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	343	2.42			
1.00 Non Hispanic White	502		2.90		
4.00 Hispanic English	537		3.01	3.01	
2.00 African American	494			3.14	3.14
3.00 Asian	498				3.20
Sig.		1.000	.229	.157	.472

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q18_4 Q18_4. GOLD

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503	2.23		
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	343	2.40	2.40	
4.00 Hispanic English	537		2.52	
3.00 Asian	497		2.59	
2.00 African American	492			2.97
Sig.		.071	.059	1.000

Q18_4 Q18_4. GOLD

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503	2.23		
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	343	2.40	2.40	
4.00 Hispanic English	537		2.52	
3.00 Asian	497		2.59	
2.00 African American	492			2.97
Sig.		.071	.059	1.000

Q18_5 Q18_5. BROWN

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503	2.78		
3.00 Asian	498	2.95	2.95	
4.00 Hispanic English	536		3.09	3.09
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	348		3.13	3.13
2.00 African American	494			3.20
Sig.		.058	.058	.259

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q18_6 Q18_6. RED

**How much do you like each of the following colors?
Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means
you hate the color and 5 means you love it.**

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2
3.00 Asian	499	3.30	
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503	3.41	3.41
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	348	3.43	3.43
2.00 African American	495		3.51
4.00 Hispanic English	536		3.53
Sig.		.171	.236

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q18_9 Q18_9. GREEN

**How much do you like each of the following colors?
Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means
you hate the color and 5 means you love it.**

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	348	3.05	
4.00 Hispanic English	537	3.16	3.16
2.00 African American	496	3.17	3.17
3.00 Asian	498		3.25
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503		3.32
Sig.		.246	.096

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q18_11 Q18_11. PURPLE

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	343	2.65		
3.00 Asian	498		2.88	
4.00 Hispanic English	537		2.94	2.94
1.00 Non Hispanic White	503			3.09
2.00 African American	494			3.11
Sig.		1.000	.586	.112

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Q18_13 Q18_13. PLATINUM

How much do you like each of the following colors? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means you hate the color and 5 means you love it.

Duncan

ETHNIC_FIN Final Ethnicity Quotas	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
5.00 Hispanic Spanish	340	2.16		
1.00 Non Hispanic White	499		2.62	
4.00 Hispanic English	531		2.66	
2.00 African American	480		2.73	
3.00 Asian	495			2.97
Sig.		1.000	.266	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

The colors that were least ranked from this study and can be considered not as popular among all ethnic groups are Orange (Total Mean= 2.35), Yellow (Total Mean= 2.58), Pink (Total Mean= 2.60).

After determining the differences in colors among the five ethnic groups surveyed, a factor analysis was conducted to determine the commonalities between the color choices for Q.18 a through m and group them according to the findings.

The colors were divided and labeled as follows into four color groups:

1. **Basics**- Black, White, Blue, and Brown
2. **Citrus**- Yellow, Orange, and Green
3. **Girly**- Pink, Purple, Red
4. **Metallics**- Gold, Silver, and Platinum

The color preferences of ethnic groups and division of these color groups has implications for combinations that marketers can choose to put together and arrange in their communication efforts.

DISCUSSION

Beyond the cultural associations of color, it is also important to take demographic differences into account when selecting a brand's colors because different hues may not be perceived the same by various ages, genders and ethnic groups. An issue related to my study is “the elasticity of meaning associated with certain chunks of the color spectrum” (Sturges, 2008). For example, green is almost universally regarded a color of youth, vitality and nature.

The data from this study indicates that it is important for marketers to consider color preferences of target audience consumers. Color choices do vary demographically so determining the color preferences of targeted consumers can be very useful in marketing and product positioning. The information from studies of multicultural color preferences can also be used to create decorating schemes (in product designs, marketing messages, websites, etc.) that enhance the pleasurable effects of colors for selected target audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Intuitive marketers should realize the potential that color choices have to create brand imagery and even to convey moods. With the current downturn of our economy and particularly the negative effects on car companies, data on color preferences is especially pertinent. Automotive marketing people must make business decisions every year about which colors to add and which colors to drop. (Triplett, 1995). Conducting studies of their target audience members' color

preferences will help them determine which color catalogue to keep for their car models. Color choices are also important for retail and other product industries.

It is no accident that Tiffany's "little blue box" and other colors representative of a brand are often trademarked. This is because color can take on cultural symbolism and ramifications for a brand. Eco-awareness is a perfect example of an entire consumer category that has given the color green a new relevance to markets, categories, and brands (Sturgess, 2008).

Ironically, "in the catalog of a brand's sensory equities, color is often one of the most overlooked, underleveraged assets." This implies that *some brands are missing out!* "Opportunities for significant growth come from exploring under appreciated (or downright ignored) adjacencies" (Sturgess, 2008). By anchoring a brand's equities (specifically color), product packaging will be able to interact with consumers in new ways and is more likely to catch their attention while shopping. Color choices and combinations are also important brand communicators for marketers developing other critical components such as their logos and websites.

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