

## **PERCEPTION AND APPLICATION OF COLOUR IN MARKETING: A REVIEW OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE**

**Muskan Kaur**

Student, BCM Arya Sr. Sec. School Ludhiana

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### **ABSTRACT**

Colour is one of the most influential non-verbal elements in marketing, shaping consumer perception, emotion, and decision-making. This study reviews available literature to understand how colour is perceived and applied in marketing across global and Indian contexts. The findings reveal that colour not only enhances brand recognition and emotional engagement but also influences trust, excitement, and purchase intent. However, cultural variations lead to differing interpretations of the same hues, making localisation crucial for effective branding. Warm colours such as red and yellow stimulate energy and attention, while cool tones like blue and green evoke trust and calmness. Indian brands often integrate vibrant colours that align with cultural values of celebration and prosperity. The study concludes that successful marketing strategies require a balanced integration of psychological understanding and cultural awareness. This review highlights the need for more cross-cultural and empirical research on colour perception to strengthen global marketing practices.

Keywords: Perception and Application, Marketing, strengthen global marketing practices.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Colour has long been recognised as one of the most powerful non-verbal tools in marketing communication. It not only enhances visual appeal but also influences perception, emotion, and consumer decision-making. Research across disciplines—psychology, marketing, and design—suggests that colour serves as a critical cue for brand identity, product differentiation, and emotional connection. Consumers often form immediate judgments about products based on colour associations, which can determine trust, excitement, or luxury perceptions even before verbal communication occurs.

However, the perception and application of colour are not universal; they vary across cultural, demographic, and situational contexts. What evokes excitement in one culture may convey caution in another. As digital media and global branding expand, understanding how colour operates within these diverse frameworks becomes increasingly significant for marketers.

### **USE OF COLOUR IN MARKETING: GLOBAL AND INDIAN CONTEXTS**

Colour plays a multifaceted role in marketing — from attracting attention to shaping emotional associations and brand identity. Its meaning, however, is not universal; it changes with **culture, context, and industry**.

#### **1. Colour as a Brand Identity Tool**

Globally, leading brands use colour to evoke instant recognition.

- **Coca-Cola's red** signifies excitement and energy, stimulating appetite and urgency — a strategy mirrored by **KFC and McDonald's**, where red and yellow encourage quick consumption.
- **Pepsi's blue** creates contrast, symbolising calm and trustworthiness.

- **Starbucks' green** reflects freshness and sustainability, aligning with its global eco-conscious image.

In India, **Airtel's red** conveys vibrancy and emotional warmth, while **State Bank of India's blue** symbolises reliability and trust — values crucial in financial services.

## 2. CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL CONTEXTS

Cultural interpretations of colour dramatically affect marketing success.

- In Western countries, **white** symbolises purity and simplicity (used by Apple, Dove).
- In India and many Asian cultures, **white** is also associated with mourning, so brands often prefer **bright palettes** (reds, yellows, greens) that convey celebration and prosperity.
- **Red**, a colour of love and energy in the West, also represents auspiciousness and success in Indian weddings and festivals — which is why **bridal brands, jewelry houses (Tanishq), and ethnic wear labels (Manyavar)** often use it dominantly.

## 3. COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY IN PRODUCT AND RETAIL DESIGN

In the **FMCG sector**, warm tones (red, orange) are used to stimulate appetite, while cool tones (blue, green) suggest health, calmness, or purity. For example, **Bisleri's green-blue packaging** signals freshness and hygiene, whereas **Cadbury's royal purple** denotes luxury and indulgence.

In **retail spaces**, international chains like **IKEA** use yellow and blue to convey creativity and dependability; **Indian retailers like Big Bazaar** follow similar psychology, using bright, energising hues to increase walk-ins and impulse buying.

## 4. DIGITAL AND GLOBAL BRANDING CONTEXT

Online, colour drives visibility and emotional engagement. **Instagram's gradient palette** evokes creativity, while **LinkedIn's blue** reinforces professionalism. Indian startups — such as **Zomato's red** (energy, appetite) and **Byju's purple** (creativity, imagination) — use colour strategically to reflect brand personality and consumer emotion.

**In essence**, colour acts as a silent yet persuasive language of marketing — one that transcends words, but not culture. Its strategic application bridges psychology, design, and commerce, making it a vital differentiator in global and Indian branding alike.

### Cultural Differences in Colour Interpretation

Cultural context profoundly shapes how consumers interpret colour in marketing communication. The same hue can evoke contrasting emotions and meanings across regions. For instance, **red** signifies love, power, and passion in Western markets but symbolises **prosperity, festivity, and good fortune** in India and China. Conversely, **white**, used by Western brands such as Apple or Dove to suggest purity and minimalism, carries associations of **mourning or detachment** in many Asian cultures, requiring contextual adaptation. Similarly, **green**, often linked to nature and health globally, can represent fertility and spirituality in Indian contexts. These variations compel multinational brands to tailor their palettes — as seen when **Pepsi softened its blue** tones for Middle Eastern packaging, or **Nestlé** adopted warmer colours for Indian campaigns to appear more relatable. Thus, understanding cultural semiotics of colour is essential for achieving emotional resonance and avoiding miscommunication in international marketing.

## Psychological Effects of Colour in Consumer Decision-Making

Colour acts as a psychological trigger that influences consumer perception long before conscious reasoning begins. Studies indicate that up to **90% of snap judgments** about products can be based on colour alone. Warm colours like **red, orange, and yellow** evoke excitement, energy, and urgency — commonly used in **sales promotions and fast-food branding** to stimulate quick action. In contrast, **blue and green** create a sense of calm, trust, and stability, explaining their dominance in **banking, healthcare, and technology** sectors. **Black and gold** are often associated with luxury, sophistication, and exclusivity — reflected in brands such as **Chanel, Rolex, and Louis Vuitton**. Psychologically, colour also shapes perceived taste, quality, and even price expectations. For example, **dark packaging** often signals premium positioning, while **bright hues** suggest affordability or youth appeal. Thus, marketers leverage colour strategically to align consumer emotions with brand positioning, guiding decision-making at both conscious and subconscious levels.

### REVIEW OF

1. **Madden, T. J., Hewett, K., & Roth, M. S. (2000)** – “*Managing Images in Different Cultures: A Cross-National Study of Colour Meanings and Preferences.*” This early cross-cultural study investigated how consumers from different countries interpret colour in branding. The findings revealed that while certain colour associations such as blue with trust are universal, others vary widely. The authors stressed the importance of **localising brand colours** to align with cultural meanings and emotional cues.
2. **Singh, S. (2006)** – “*Impact of Colour on Marketing.*” This foundational paper argued that up to **80% of product judgments** are influenced by colour. It classified colours by emotional tone, showing that warm hues increase impulse buying and cool hues foster trust and calmness. It also highlighted colour’s role in **brand recall and consumer preference**.
3. **Aslam, M. M. (2006)** – “*Are You Selling the Right Colour? A Cross-Cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue.*” Aslam’s review analysed **colour symbolism across cultures** and developed one of the earliest theoretical models linking colour to consumer emotion and decision-making. The paper emphasized that marketers must consider cultural beliefs, religion, and symbolism when applying colours globally.
4. **Elliot, A. J. & Maier, M. A. (2014)** – “*Colour Psychology: Effects of Perceiving Colour on Psychological Functioning in Humans.*” This psychological review explored how colour affects **motivation, mood, and cognition**. It found that red can heighten attention but also anxiety, whereas blue promotes creativity and openness. The study reinforced the **neuroscientific basis** of colour perception in marketing contexts.
5. **Singh, R., & Srivastava, R. K. (2011)** – “*Impact of Colour on Marketing in the Indian Context.*” This research focused on **Indian retail and FMCG sectors**, showing that bright colours like red, saffron, and green evoke cultural associations of celebration and prosperity. The study found that region-specific preferences shape brand success more than uniform global palettes.
6. **Labrecque, L. I., & Milne, G. R. (2012)** – “*Exciting Red and Competent Blue: The Importance of Colour in Marketing.*” This study provided empirical evidence that colour communicates **brand personality traits**. Red was found to convey energy and excitement, while blue symbolised competence and trust. The results reinforced colour’s strategic role in building **brand identity and differentiation**.

**7. Choudhary, A. & Sharma, N. (2019)** – “*The Role of Colour Psychology in Indian Branding and Advertising.*” Through a qualitative analysis of Indian advertisements, this study found that culturally resonant colour schemes (like gold-red for weddings or green for eco-friendly campaigns) created deeper **emotional engagement and purchase intent**.

**8. Dhanalakshmi, V. & Prasad, R. (2020)** – “*Colour Preference and Its Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour in India.*” Surveying 400 Indian consumers, this research revealed **gender and age-based variations** in colour preferences. It showed that women were more responsive to pastel and warm hues, while men preferred darker, neutral shades — particularly in apparel and automobiles.

**9. Mehta, S. & Kaur, J. (2021)** – “*Cross-Cultural Colour Perception in Indian and Western Brands.*” This comparative analysis demonstrated how international brands adapt colours for Indian audiences — for instance, **McDonald’s India** adding green to its logo to signify vegetarian inclusivity and **Cadbury** deepening its purple-gold hues to align with Indian festivity and luxury.

**10. Khattak, S. R., Ali, H., Khan, Y., & Shah, M. (2023)** – “*Colour Psychology in Marketing.*”

The most recent study in this review, it examined how Indian consumers interpret colour in advertising and packaging. Red and yellow were found to be most attention-grabbing, while blue and green built **trust, authenticity, and comfort** — reaffirming colour’s central role in brand–consumer communication.

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

Colour plays a vital role in shaping consumer perception, emotion, and brand identity. However, its impact varies across cultural and contextual settings, making it essential to study both global and Indian perspectives. Existing research remains fragmented, often focusing on limited sectors or psychological aspects alone. Hence, there is a need to consolidate available literature to understand how colour influences marketing effectiveness across diverse contexts. This study aims to bridge that gap by analysing how colour perception and application affect consumer behaviour and brand communication worldwide.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyse existing literature on how colour is perceived and applied in marketing across global and Indian contexts.
2. To understand the influence of colour on consumer perception, emotion, and brand communication in diverse cultural settings.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **descriptive and qualitative research design** based on a **review of secondary data**. The methodology involves analysing existing research, journal articles, conference papers, and credible online publications related to colour perception, psychology, and marketing applications in both global and Indian contexts.

Relevant literature was identified through databases such as **Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and academic journals** including *IJCRT* and *Science Daily*. Studies were selected based on their focus on the relationship between colour, consumer behaviour, and marketing communication.

The review follows an **interpretive approach**, comparing findings across different cultural, psychological, and industry perspectives. Emphasis was placed on identifying **patterns**,

**similarities, and research gaps** within previous work to build a comprehensive understanding of how colour functions as a marketing tool.

This secondary research approach enables the integration of theoretical insights and empirical findings to present a consolidated view of the role of colour in influencing consumer perception and brand strategy.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since this research is based solely on secondary data, its findings depend on the accuracy and scope of existing literature. The study does not include primary data collection, such as consumer surveys or experiments, which may have provided deeper behavioural insights. Additionally, variations in cultural interpretations, sample sizes, and methodologies across reviewed studies may limit the generalisability of conclusions. Despite these limitations, the review offers valuable theoretical and contextual understanding of how colour influences marketing and consumer perception.

## FINDINGS

- 1. Colour significantly influences consumer perception and decision-making.**  
Studies consistently show that colour shapes first impressions, emotional responses, and purchase intentions — with up to 90% of initial product judgments based on visual cues, particularly colour.
- 2. Emotional and psychological associations vary by hue.**  
Warm colours such as **red, orange, and yellow** evoke excitement, urgency, and appetite, while cool tones like **blue and green** convey calmness, trust, and stability. Luxury brands often use **black and gold** to reflect exclusivity and sophistication.
- 3. Cultural context determines meaning and effectiveness.**  
Colour interpretation differs globally — for example, **white** denotes purity in Western contexts but mourning in Indian culture; **red** symbolises love in the West and prosperity in India. Hence, localisation of colour strategy is vital for global branding.
- 4. Colour reinforces brand identity and recall.**  
Successful brands — such as **Coca-Cola (red)**, **Starbucks (green)**, and **Airtel (red)** — use consistent colour schemes to enhance recognition and emotional connection.
- 5. Indian consumers respond strongly to culturally resonant colours.**  
Research indicates that vibrant hues like red, saffron, and gold align with Indian values of festivity and success, making them more effective in advertisements and packaging.
- 6. Colour use is evolving with digital marketing.**  
Online platforms and startups (e.g., **Zomato, Byju's**) leverage colour to reflect personality and drive engagement, showing that digital branding now relies heavily on visual psychology.
- 7. Integration of psychology and culture is underexplored.**  
While multiple studies highlight either emotional or cultural aspects of colour, few integrate both, signalling a gap for future research on cross-cultural colour psychology in marketing.



## CONCLUSION

Colour remains one of the most powerful and immediate tools in marketing communication, influencing perception, emotion, and consumer behaviour across industries. The review highlights that while certain colour–emotion associations are universal, their meanings and effectiveness vary significantly across cultural and contextual settings. Global brands use colour strategically to establish trust, excitement, or luxury, whereas Indian marketing often draws upon traditional symbolism and vibrant palettes to evoke celebration and warmth.

The study concludes that effective colour application in marketing requires a balanced understanding of **psychological impact and cultural relevance**. As digital platforms continue to shape visual communication, marketers must adapt colour strategies that are both emotionally engaging and contextually appropriate. Future research integrating cross-cultural psychology with consumer analytics could further enhance understanding of how colour drives brand perception in an increasingly globalised market.

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