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Colours in Branding: Creating Brand Identity and Influencing Consumer Perception

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Abstract

Marketing is a battle of perceptions, not products. Perception is reality. Everything else is an illusion. And one of the most perceptive tools a marketer can use is colour. Colours are a pervasive source of knowledge. Researchers for decades have concluded that the wise use of colours can help distinguish products from rivals as well as affect perceptions towards products by altering the moods and feelings of the target consumers. This makes colour a key component of perceptual marketing strategies. Hence, marketing professionals have traditionally leveraged this capacity of colours to mould consumer perception and to draw in customers. It affects consumer behaviour and perceptions, stirs up feelings and emotions, and aids businesses in separating themselves from rivals. According to the different synergistic effects of colour, the perception of how well a colour fits a certain brand determines how well a brand could be perceived by the market. It is thus crucial that decision-makers and marketers are truly aware of the value and impact of colour and employ it skillfully in not only logos or products but across the whole brand identity. With the inherent importance of colour in mind, the objective of this research is to explore how crucial the selection and protection of colour is, for a brand and how colour impacts the perceptions of the consumers towards a brand. By the end, after analysing multiple cases and giving supporting instances, the study reaffirms the correlation of colours & consumer perception for decision making and concludes on the vitality of colour.

Keywords: Brand, Colour, Brand Personality, Brand Identity, Consumer Perception, Trademarks.

1   Introduction

The objective of any business or brand is to create an image in the minds of its consumers. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2011), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a mix of these, used to identify the product of one firm & to distinguish it from the products in competition. Brand perception has its roots in fact and it reflects the opinions and even the mannerisms of its target audience. The brand ultimately lives in the minds of its consumers (Keller, 2003). Therefore, branding has an inseparable impact on consumer decision-making.

Colour is one of the first things any consumer notices about a product. Attractive colours play an influential role in deciding what product a consumer ultimately decides to purchase (Singh, 2006). From logos and product packaging to overall brand image, colours associated with a company are crucial to creating its brand equity and attracting consumers to purchase its products (Cunningham, 2017). Compared to words or images, colours have a finer ability to stimulate

people's emotions, making them a crucial component of business and branding. Studies have found that customers notice colour before reading any text or analysing any visuals, making it undoubtedly the most significant part of packaging and advertising (Singh, 2006). The use of colour by a brand can significantly impact consumer perceptions, including its personality, trustworthiness, and overall image. Colours have emotional and psychological connotations (Clarke & Costall, 2008) in the minds of consumers which can create brand recognition, increase brand awareness, and most importantly improve brand perceptions. By understanding and harnessing these emotional and psychological connotations of different colours and using them strategically, brands can create a compelling visual identity that resonates with consumers.

Perception is the phenomenon by which a coherent image is created in the minds of the perceiver, i.e., the customer in this case, after selection, organisation, and interpretation of information received from an external stimulus (Madichie, 2012; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). In simple words, perception is the process by which an individual uses their sensory receptors to detect and understand information from the outside world (Goldstein, 2018), influencing and giving rise to informed decision-making. Consumer perception is the awareness, impression, image, and opinion that customers have, of a particular company, its brand, and its goods and services in the market. With the first contact of the consumer with a brand, this perception establishes the meaning of the said brand in the consume's mind, establishing a relationship between the stimuli and the said image. This is synonymous with brand perception i.e., the process through which a customer chooses, arranges, and interprets information or stimulus inputs to generate a meaningful impression of a brand or its products (Thiruvenkatraj & Vetrivel, 2017; Madichie, 2012). Consumers while purchasing, make informed decisions (Pooja & Kumar, 2021). This consumer perception of a brand or product is hence one of the primary and vital forces that drive a consumer to purchase the said product or service.

Consumer perception of brand colours thus, is one of the ultimate responses to all marketing tactics of a brand that help achieve its marketing objectives (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Considering this influencing power of colour, marketers have identified its potential and are continually employing it in novel ways (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). Brands today are positioning themselves in the market and creating a strong visual identity using colours. This gives rise to the concept of Brand Personality, which refers to the collection of human traits connected to a brand. It is a framework that aids a business or organisation in moulding the perceptions that customers have of its goods, services, or goals i.e., the image of the brand itself (Aaker, 1997).

The colours associated with a brand serve as a source of recognition and reinforce the identity of the brand (Abril et al., 2009). For instance, Pantone 2685C purple i.e., the trademark purple of Cadbury, a subsidy of Mondelez International Inc., has today become synonymous with not only the brand itself but with chocolates and cocoa milk products in the whole of the industry. The company has used the colour since 1905 and has also fought various legal battles to preserve the legal rights to use it. As a result, today for the customers a differentiation has been created between the brand and the rest of the market, based on this colour association. Similar to a carefully selected brand name, colour has an intrinsic meaning that becomes essential to the brand's identity, aids in brand identification (Abril et al., 2009) and communicates the desired perception or image (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006).

This case is just one of many examples of how psychological marketing is done with the help of colours. This colour psychology is a crucial tool for marketers to understand & utilize to create desirable consumer perceptions of a brand and ultimately influence consumers to think about their brand and make purchases.

The aim is to provide consumers with a stimulus that results in creating a positive image in their minds, ultimately resulting in purchase decisions in favour of the said brand. Every individual infers the meaning of a stimulus to be consistent with their own unique biases, needs, and experiences (Madichie, 2012). This perception process that involves stimuli contact, processing, interpretation, and formation of opinions runs parallel to consumer decision-making about purchases and thus is an inherent part of consumer behaviour that needs to be carefully studied and should form the basis for all marketing decisions for successful acceptance of products in the market. In an era of endless competition & easy imitation, besides just understanding the needs of the customer an effective brand is required (Kumar et al, 2016). A special brand identity arising out of a brand's colour choices thus becomes imperative for influencing consumer perceptions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Colour

Some consumers view colour as solely an aesthetic feature. However, brands utilize colour in marketing tactics to connect with customers on a deeper level and differentiate themselves from rivals, says Cunningham (2017). Under this study, a non-random sample of men & women between the ages of 18 and 37 took part in a focus group that included colour-centric photographs and a survey to investigate the importance of colour to consumer perception and brand imaging. The non-random sample's findings demonstrated how colours employed in branding affect consumers' perceptions, serve to distinguish items, and have come to signify a connection between a brand and its audience. The results were in line with an earlier study (Labrecque & Milne, 2012) that discovered brands can successfully establish an identity, convey a mood, and build a relationship with consumers through the use of colour.

Based on these studies, brands that want to maximize their success should look for colour research that can best achieve their goals of appealing to consumers and ensuring that colour is most successful in moulding consumer perceptions.

2.2   Effect of Colour

According to Levy (1984), the effect of colour offers empirical proof of a consistent connection between colour and emotions during the functioning of a consumer and their decision-making. This impact of colour has been largely consistent across numerous studies. People frequently connect colours with specific emotions, such as red and terror, white with tranquillity, etc., and such links seem to be consistent. Through the referential significance of colour, associations are sparked in the mind. The hue, saturation, and value of a business's logo typically elicit related colour associations, which add to the sense of the personality of the brand. Brand association and colours are linked in memory when brands and colours are paired, and as a result, semantic meanings of colour are developed through a dynamic and reactive process. It is crucial to note that the activation of colour associations as well as their impact on mood, cognition, and behaviour can happen without a person being aware of it or intending it to. (Elliot et al., 2007). All this, if appropriately identified by brands and efficiently employed in their branding strategies can result in positive and effective consumer perceptions, driving up both brand equity and sales.

2.3   Consumer Perception & Colours

Bellizzi and Hite (1992) researched how colour impacts mood, which affects emotional states, which affects buying behaviours and consumer perceptions. In their first experiment, a sample of 70 women was exposed to one of two displays (red/blue), while in the second experiment; a sample of 107 students was exposed to slides of the interiors of store furniture, which had either a red or blue interior. The results of the two studies unmistakably demonstrated that consumers reacted to blue more favourably. Piotrowski (2012) and their study strengthened these claims by showing the colour red tends to make people feel unsafe, threatened, and avoidance motivated. In the study, the respondents responded to an a priori-determined negative stimulus using a reply set-up where the word Red was rated on a 7-point scale. A semantic differential scale with 14 bi-polar adjective scales was employed, one of them being "Red-Green". Red is universally associated with strong emotions, generally negative but also with positive on occasion, and is a common stimulus used by researchers (e.g., warning signs, red-coloured objects, blood). The results of this study support previous studies that claim humans have a negative perception of the colour red. These studies thus, statistically prove that certain colours have positive and certain negative perceptions in the minds of consumers. However, these connotations have not stopped brands from successfully leveraging them to create a desirable consumer perception.

2.4   Importance of Colour in Branding

Labrecque & Milne (2012) stated that marketers are utilizing colour in novel ways in anything from beverages to consumer electronics. Despite this, there has not been much academic research on the significance of colour in branding. Their research examined how consumer perception was affected by colour through a series of studies. The findings were consistent with previous literature and found that not merely hue but saturation & value have a significant influence on the said variables. These studies resulted in strengthening the claim that colour plays an important part in driving consumer perceptions of brands. When consumers examine an associated colour, their perceptions of the brand shift. By itself, colour improves consumer perception when it creates a match between the brand colour and the personality it conveys.

This importance of colour in branding is indispensable and can be observed in the everyday actions of corporations, that seek to create a competitive advantage for themselves by differentiation amongst products (Kumar et al., 2016). For brands, colours are not merely an asset but an intrinsic part of their whole identity and existence. As discussed previously, Cadbury's characteristic purple has become linked with not only the company itself but also with quality chocolate goods throughout the industry. This consistent use of colour across their branding has contributed to Cadbury's strong brand identity in the market and deep emotional connection with consumers. This significance of colour in branding thus becomes evident when we examine real-world cases that showcase its profound impact on consumer perceptions. These cases illustrate how colour, encompassing not just hue but also saturation and value, exerts a substantial influence on consumer perception, reinforcing the notion that colour serves as a powerful tool for brands to convey their desired personality and resonate with their target audience.

Further discussion of such real-world cases can be instrumental in reflecting just how crucial colours are for a brand. From legally safeguarding colour rights (Louboutin and Tiffany & Co.) to leveraging the power of colours despite contradictions in their perception (Coca-Cola and Pepsi) and altogether giving up colours to create a new identity (Apple), the following segment displays just how vibrant this spectrum of hues can be.

3   Cases

3.1   Case 1: Colour Matters For Product Identity - Louboutin's Legal Struggle for Colour

The colour Pantone 18-1663 TCX, often called the Culte Chinese Red, might seem like any other colour out of the infinite spectrum of colours, but it has its history and relation with branding. Pantone 18-1663 TCX is the iconic shade of Red that high-end French fashion designer Christian Louboutin has been using for decades for its signature red-soled stiletto footwear. Since 1992, the renowned company has used the shade in their exclusive line of luxury products and has fought

valiantly to preserve the right to use the same.

In 1992 Paris, the designer was exploring prototypes of his now renowned products in his workshop. Besides one "sole" detail; he had a breakthrough in his product development. The problem lay with the colour of the soles. The designer found that the black bottoms of the shoes gave them a heavy appearance in actuality and made the product look clumsy and unattractive, which was not trendy and hence faced a stiff possibility of customer rejection. By chance, his assistant just so happened to be painting her nails a striking shade of red. Christian reached for the polish and started painting one of the prototypes' soles with what would later become the House's distinguishing colour.

The designer today owns the exclusive rights to use the shade of red. However, it has been the subject of numerous litigations across countries. Several nations recognize the colour as trademarked and Louboutin has filed lawsuits in several issues alleging infringement of its rights. Discussions over the legality or extent of trademark protection were frequently included in court proceedings. In Belgium, [Louboutin vs. Dr Adams Footwear, 2013] litigation led by Louboutin claimed trademark infringement by the latter. The verdict initially went against the suitor, with the trademark being declared invalid, but in the end, the decision was overturned and Louboutin got sole colour rights back. Similar were results in the cases of the Netherlands [Louboutin vs. Van Haren, 2012] and the USA [Louboutin vs. YSL, 2011], where rulings were in favour of Louboutin. In contrast, during a similar timeline, in France [Louboutin vs. Zara, 2012] & Switzerland [Louboutin vs. IGE, 2011], Louboutin lost the rights of the colour & with it, a part of its brand identity.

In India, the fate of the trademark is still up in the air despite three significant cases in the Delhi High Court. The brand enjoys protection of trademarks under classes 3, 14, 18, & 25, and has strong grounds for enforcement against infringement. Out of the three cases litigated in the year 2017-18, in two cases the Delhi High Court granted perpetual injunctions & punitive damages for the loss of goodwill & reputation while dismissing the lawsuit in the third case. It is fascinating to see how the future appeals proceed & whether the country can have clear judicial support for the protection of single-colour trademarks (Wadkar, 2019).

Louboutin's long legal struggles emphasize just how crucial it is to ensure the protection of a brand's identity worldwide, and how things like colour that may seem trivial on the surface must be accurately specified, especially when they create distinction for a brand in the market. A layperson can readily associate some colours with a particular thing, like red with danger, green with nature, and blue with water or the sky and hence these may not be distinguishable. However, in this instance, the referred-to shade of red has nothing to do with the product segment as a whole, yet consumer perception associates it with the reputation, luxury & exclusiveness of the Louboutin brand in the product market. These legal battles are a manifestation of the general public's growing understanding of the branding tenet that colour has significant value. The Pantone Colour Institute, the developer & guardian of the majority of the colours, thus rightfully claims that "along with the form, texture, and scale of the package, colour promptly draws the eye & starts the debate and deliberation procedure of whether or not to make a purchase" (Adrenaline, 2017).

3.2 Case 2: The Tiffany Blue-Protecting an Exclusive Packaging Colour

In 1845, world-renowned jeweller, Charles Lewis Tiffany decided on the shade of bright green with a tinge of blue as the official hue for his jewellery line and packaging. With the brand's rising fame throughout time, their tiny packaging of boxes with this exclusive robin-egg blue colour became iconic; getting the nickname of Tiffany Blue. The colour was created by Pantone Colour Institute, who gave it a unique number: 1837, which also happens to be the year of the establishment of Tiffany & Co. This patented colour is so exclusive to the brand that it is not even represented in Pantone samplers. To be instantly recognizable, Tiffany utilizes Pantone 1837 on gift boxes and sachets which has become synonymous with the brand.

The brand's distinctive colour packaging is so exclusive that as per a 1906 report by The New York Sun, no amount of money offered to the jeweller could make him sell one of his iconic boxes (Barnebys, 2022). The establishment has a strict regulation that no box containing the name of the firm may be removed from the premises unless it is accompanied by a product they have sold and are accountable for. This regulation is still followed today, upholding Tiffany's original intent and the colour's valued status.

The colour has been a registered trademark of the brand since 1998 and the hue was standardised as a special colour by Pantone exclusively for Tiffany and not made available publicly. An international symbol of sophistication and elegance, Tiffany Blue®today stands for the promise that whatever comes out of a Tiffany Blue Box®will always bring happiness to the consumer (Tiffany & Co., 2023).

No other trademarked hue has established such a robust connection to the brand. The brand is protective of the colour to such an extent that it does not hesitate to go after others, no matter the size of its establishment. In 2019, a Melbourne-based paper-flower maker Hannah Poppins, owner of small-business 'Miss Poppins & Me' was contacted by Tiffany & Co. after she listed a couple of her products by using the term "Tiffany Blue" to describe them. The brand did not object to the actual colour of her products, but only to her use of the name of the trademarked colour of the brand, leading her to change the description to "blue turquoise". The owner stated that she used the phrase to refer to a similar shade, since people recognize the colour a lot by the said name and believed it would be a typical term customers would be looking for (Waters, 2019).

The incident goes on to show just how important proper research of colour and trademarks is before you employ them in your enterprise. No matter the size of one's establishment, using things exclusive to other brands can lead to legal trouble. Hence, Tiffany Blue has established itself as one of the best-known symbols for the brand, showing prestige, quality, &

value in consumers' perception.

3.3   Case 3: Brand Colours - Red Vs Blue

Colours are now an indispensable part of communication today. Our thoughts, behaviours, and reactions are all affected by them. Each colour has a certain connotation and set of associations. Some hues can induce negative feelings like discomfort, tension; nausea etc. while others can be soothing and leave us a sense of calmness. These attributes and influencing ability of colours are most often seen by brands employing colours like red and blue in their marketing tactics and brand image.

Red is regarded as a colour that is extremely powerful, visible, and emotionally overwhelming. In general, the colour red is linked to emotions and feelings like vitality, youth, bravery, strength, warmth, desire, passion, and excitement. The most obvious example of this colour association with a brand is perhaps that of The Coca-Cola Company. Stated simply, the company painted the cola barrels red to differentiate them from alcohol during transportation, the colour today is an indispensable part of the brand's image in the market. The colour is present in some way or another across every product variant of the brand and is alone enough to induce thirst for the product in the minds of the consumers, and even contributing to the brand being the market leader in the segment.

This is contrary to the claim in Piotrowski (2012) that the red colour elicits principally negative reactions in humans, i.e., avoidance, threat, and danger. Their findings suggest that red is associated with perceived onerous issues or events and has a negative connotation. Implications for the field of consumer behaviour, human factors, applied psychology, and marketing research were noted. However, even though the colour may have negative connotations, this does not necessarily mean that brands have not successfully leveraged them to create a desirable image in the minds of their consumers. The colour today is effectively being employed by top brands across the world in all sectors & industries, like fast food (Pizza Hut, McDonald's, KFC), automobile (Toyota, Honda, Kia), FMCG (Colgate, Red Bull, Kellogg's) etc.

On the same spectrum of infinite colours lies another colour, Blue. Because of its versatile qualities, tranquillity and peace, blue is a universally popular and well-liked colour. Blue logos for brands provide a sense of intelligence (Cunningham, 2017), dependability, authority, and trustworthiness. Today, different shades of blue are used across industries, from tech to FMCG and beyond. The trustworthiness and confidence that the colour exhibits are often leveraged by financial companies like PayPal, Paytm, Visa and technology giants like Facebook, Twitter etc. This construct of trustworthiness is associated with other attributes including dependability, honesty, reliability & sincerity (Pooja & Kumar, 2021) giving a comprehensive positive association with the colour. Rathee et al., (2019) study to understand customer colour preferences found that colour influenced customer's decisions and brand recall while making purchases, among which blue was found to be the most preferred colour.

In FMCG, the counterpart to Coca-Cola's Red is PepsiCo's Blue. PepsiCo's brand image used to feature the colour red prominently till the 1940s. But Pepsi abandoned red in favour of the colour blue, investing millions of dollars in marketing campaigns that even included painting an aeroplane that colour (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). The two colours stand for many different and opposite things and generate different perceptions in the minds of consumers. Yet these two similar corporations which are market leaders and perhaps the biggest competitors of each other in the product segment have been using both these colours successfully for the same type of product.

Comparing the two colours, experiments as hypothesised by Bottomley & Doyle (2006) described red as a sensory-social colour and blue as a functional colour. The conclusions of their study showed shades of blue being more appropriate than red for functional product categories including power tools, electrician services, car tyre brands etc. and shades of red being more suitable than blue for sensory-social products like ice creams, perfumes, expensive restaurants, amusement parks etc. The study thus showed that functional products should be presented in functional colours, and sensory-social products in sensory-social colours. The research strengthened the claim that colours have contrasting connotations and that these connotations & meanings are adequately shared by consumers to give rise to systematic purchase patterns.

3.4   Case 4: Ditching Colours for Synonymity with Products and Time

The immense impact of colours and their inseparable use in branding is undeniable. However, they are not always relevant, like the case with Apple. When the technology giant was incorporated in 1976, it chose a black & white intricate image of Isaac Newton sitting under an apple tree, accompanied by an excerpt of a William Wordsworth poem around the border, saying-'Newton, A Mind Forever Voyaging Through Strange Seas of Thought, alone'- as the primary brand image i.e., the logo (Think Marketing, 2012). However, the logo was too complex and detailed to be easily recreated on computers at that time and a replacement was sought. Hence, the new logo was born-that of a rainbow-coloured bitten Apple.

Multiple thoughts went behind the creation of the logo and the employment of multiple colours in the brand image. Several concepts were explored by the logo's creator, Rob Janoff, a graphic designer working at the Regis McKenna Advertising/PR Agency, including design concepts with metallic hues, monochromes, and other multiple colours (Janoff, 2018). From these, the iconic rainbow logo was selected by Steve Jobs, partly reflecting the products' capacity to display colour images, which was an exclusive and rare product feature at that time. The Apple II, which was the first full-colour computer display in the world, was the primary reference for this iteration of the logo. Jean-Louis Gassé, a renowned Apple executive, famously described the logo as "a symbol of knowledge & lust, bitten into, crossed with rainbow colours in the wrong order which could not be more appropriate showing hope, knowledge, anarchy, & lust."

However, the corporation a few years later realized some crucial truths about colours - printing colour was difficult,

involved high costs, and most importantly the colours were no longer synonymous with their new product range. The company replaced the beloved rainbow logo in 1998, with the introduction of the first iMac and formally discontinued it on August 27, 1999, instructing vendors not to use it anymore. The company swapped it out for simpler, mute-toned, single-colour variations of the logo.

Today, Apple's logo is made up of only monochrome i.e., single-colour shades of black, white, and silver/grey. This continues to be the company's choice of colours since giving up the rainbow hues. After his long-term dispute with co-founder Steve Wozniak, when Steve Jobs returned to a financially struggling Apple around 1997, changing the logo colours was one of the first things he did. He realized that the existing logo was not designed easily and did not serve the company's interests. Jobs decided to present Apple's image in the clearest & most obvious way possible as he believed that it was already a well-known one. He eliminated all coloured lines, giving the logotype a contemporary monochromatic appearance. Another significant factor in this transformation was synonymity with products- the fact that the newly manufactured Mac computers were built of metal and not plastic. The rainbow Apple logo on the metal did not look or function as intended given the composition of the material. The development of the monochrome logo was also simpler. Depending on the material utilised, the monochrome logo is varied into many variations, as stated previously (Gülsüm Çalişir, 2019).

These real-world cases discussed above stress the significance of colours for a brand. In the case of Louboutin and Tiffany & Co., colours were legally protected to preserve brand identity. Louboutin fought for the exclusive use of a red shade for its signature red-soled shoes, while Tiffany & Co. established the iconic Tiffany Blue as a protected trademark for its packaging. These cases demonstrate the importance of accurately specifying colours to create brand distinction. On the other hand, Coca-Cola and Pepsi successfully leveraged the power of colours despite contradictions in their perception. Coca-Cola's extensive use of the colour red in its branding has become synonymous with the brand and its product, while Pepsi transitioned from a red brand image to a blue one, effectively creating a different perception in consumers' minds. The cases also show that while colours can have contrasting connotations, all can be effectively leveraged to a brand's benefit. the case of Apple demonstrates how a brand can evolve by ditching colours to create a new identity. The company initially used a rainbow-coloured logo but eventually transitioned to a monochrome logo to align with its product range and simplify its brand image. Overall, these cases collectively emphasize the vibrancy and significance of colours in branding. They illustrate how colours can shape brand recognition, consumer perception, legal protection, and strategic marketing decisions. Understanding the role of colours in branding can help businesses effectively utilize colours to establish a strong brand identity and connect with their target audience.

Considering this vibrant and significant role of colours, the study by Ridgway (2011) on consumer perceptions of colour used in brand logos becomes highly relevant. It emphasizes that consumers are aware of the meanings associated with various hues and recognize brands based on their colours. The incorrect use of colours or colour combinations can be detrimental to a brand's value, while the right choice of colour can enhance brand equity and effectively communicate the brand's image to customers. The following section builds upon this understanding to connect the theoretical and real-world observations to the statistical survey conducted for this study.

4 Hypothesis Formulation

Brand Personality: Consumer's Perceptions of Colour Used in Brand Logos by Ridgway (2011) forms the basis for the following hypothesis and the subsequent survey. According to the study, the majority of consumers are aware of the meanings connected with several hues. Consumers recognize brands by their colour and incorrect use of these colours or colour combinations can be destructive to a brand's value. Studies have proven that picking the right colour for a brand raises brand equity. Combining colour with a logo can provide a brand with a competitive edge because it helps communicate its image to customers. Due to this, the brand's logo design must reflect the intended traits of the personality of the business.

4.1 Hypothesis 1: Associative Learning Theory

Associative Learning can be used to explain how colour preferences evolve. Based on their prior experiences with the product, consumers develop a preference for a certain colour. A positive association could make you prefer that colour. Because colour aids in the brain's recovery of previously established associations, it is also a useful retrieval tool for both customers & marketers. An individual engages in associative learning when they link events in their surroundings. This broad idea includes any systematic matching of stimuli to create relationships among them. Both colours and brands have ingrained connections (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Consumers form associations that help them understand a brand's personality, and this process frequently involves conditioning, which usually results from exposure to the brand's components repeatedly. This approach to creating associations is Classical Conditioning, which is actively used in creating consumer colour preferences and product choices. Consumers are conditioned through brand colour exposure in a way that aids in the creation of connections that are taken from the traditional colour associations to which they have previously been exposed. Even when the customer is observing colour inside a context-in this instance, a logo-these conventional connections will still be used. Thus, the Associative Learning theory provides support for the first hypothesis:

H1: Consumers will apply conventional colour associations to colours used in a logo.

4.2   Hypothesis 2: Consumer's Perception & Colour

Colour reflects moods and sentiments that trigger emotional reactions (Birren, 1950) and can be used to indicate personality traits (Kargere, 1979). In this study, colour serves as a bridge between consumers' perceptions of brand colours and their feelings toward the brand. When it comes to influencing the consumer's emotional state, colour is a mood-maker. Brand personality and colour preferences are closely related (Birren, 1950). Consumers are said to "carry their personalities on their backs" and "emit their personalities through the colours they chose to convey themselves through their attire" (Kargere, 1979). In a colour experiment conducted by Birren (1950), people with extrovert personality traits preferred red, whilst people with introverted personality traits preferred blue. This supports the second hypothesis:

H2: Consumers will attribute personality traits to brands through the use of colour in the logo.

4.3   Hypothesis 3: Appropriateness of Logo Colour Choice

The definition of appropriateness used in this study is how well-suited a colour is to be used in a brand's logo. The appropriateness of colour selection has been researched in the past since marketers are thought to prioritise it when choosing brand elements (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). One of the most crucial elements in developing a pleasing and consumer-appealing commercial is the colour scheme. Additionally, when it comes to associations, those customers already have the greatest influence on whether a colour is appropriate. This forms the basis for the third hypothesis:

H3: When the brand personality and colour associations are congruent, the colour will be more appropriate for the brand's logo.

5   Research Methodology

5.1   Research Design

Utilising the questionnaire referenced from Ridgway (2011), built upon the Brand Personality Scale as developed by Aaker (1997), a survey was conducted to determine the consumer perception of different colours in the branding ecosystem. The respondents were faced with numerous questions centred on six colours-Red, Blue, Green, Purple, Pink and Yellow. Google Forms, a survey administration tool offered by Google was employed as the primary mode for distribution of the questionnaire.

The objective was to test whether consumers will associate a brand's logo's colours with traditional meanings, whether colour influences how people perceive a brand's personality, and whether consumers think colour is better suited for a logo when brand personality and colour associations are in line. These formed the basis of the hypotheses.

5.2   Sampling Procedure

Snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961), a widely adopted technique in data collection, was employed to gather valuable data for the study. As described by Babbie (2004), snowball sampling is a technique of gathering participants for a study incorporating a process of accumulation, as each located subject suggests another subject. Working like a chain reaction wherein initial participants reach out to their contacts (Goodman, 1961), this technique expands the sample size in a "snowball" effect. This procedure opted for the collection of data owing to its cost-effective nature and ability to reach a diverse and hard-to-reach population (Naderifar et al., 2017). Working was associated with educational programme participants and research study samples, hence snowball sampling procedure was considered the best fit, as suggested by Naderifar et al. (2017).

While Google Forms was the primary platform for the questionnaire, distribution or snowballing further took place majorly using platforms LinkedIn & WhatsApp. The link to the Google Form was posted to various individuals & groups, and participants were requested to fill out the questionnaire as well as share it further. Within one month, the message was sent out four times, with an interval of about a week each time, reinforcing participation.

5.3   Stimulus Development

A simple logo made up of primary shapes was taken. This was done to prevent the participants from concluding about the brand from information other than the colours utilised. Three geometric shapes-a circle, a triangle, and a square-were used to create the logo. Because geometric shapes are simple, this logo selection helped to eliminate shape distraction ensuring that focus lies primarily on the colour shown. The colours undertaken in the study are defined by the Pantone Colour Institute as Red (485C), Blue (2191C), Green (360C), Purple (2612C), Pink (213U) and yellow (3965C). These selected colours can be found and replicated in Pantone's colour database online at Pantone.com.

5.4 Survey Instrument

Demographic Questions: To better understand the traits of the sample, a set of demographic questions was added to the survey. Consent for participation in the study was acquired through a polar (Yes/No) question, followed by the Respondent's Name, Sex, Nationality, Age Group, Position/Designation (student or employed) etc of the respondent. A control question, or "colour blindness test," was included to see if the subjects could see the colours correctly. The participants were instructed to pick out a specific number from a picture made up of various coloured dots. The procedure is a well-known one for analysing colour blindness, and the survey's control image was obtained from the Colourmax test for colour blindness. Any respondent who could not correctly identify the number presented was subsequently excluded from the responses.

Section 1: The first section of the survey examined consumer associations with colours (H1). Participants were presented with a logo in a range of colours to test the first hypothesis (i.e., red, blue, green, purple, pink, and yellow). They were asked to choose from a list of five associations that they felt best matched the hue in the logo (e.g., Justice, Secure, Passionate, Energetic, Stable, etc.). The associations used were determined by Hyne's (2009) investigation into the relationship between colour and symbolism in logos.

Section 2: In this section, hypothesis two was examined. A question "If this logo represented a brand, please select personality traits that you feel would best represent the brand (Check all that apply)" was offered to participants along with the logo in one of the aforementioned colours. A list of 25 personality traits taken from the total 42 traits identified in the Brand Personality Scale developed by Aaker (1997) was presented to the respondents to choose from.

Section 3: The final section measured Hypothesis 3. Similar to the previous phase, the participants were shown the logo in the chosen colours, but this time they were also given a brief description of the brand. The description included two or three brand personality terms that were developed from the list of personality traits (Aaker, 1997). The personality terms were either consistent with the colour associations or inconsistent with them. The inconsistent colours were picked at random. On a 5-point Likert scale (1 being "Highly Disagree" & 5 being "Highly Agree"), participants were asked to rate the appropriateness of the colour selection for the logo. This scale was adopted by Bottomley & Doyle (2006).

6 SURVEY RESULTS

6.1 Sample Description

In total, 215 responses were received for the survey. Seven of these replies were eliminated because of failure of the colour vision test or the respondent being below 18 years of age, leaving 208 responses fit for analysis. The sample of these participants is briefly described here; giving a comprehensive demographic summary.

Table 1 shows that respondents consisted of 121 (58.17%) males and 87 (41.83%) females. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to over 55 years, with the majority belonging to the age groups of 18-24 with 125 participants (60.1%) and 25-34 with 55 participants (26.44%). Out of the total, 107 (51.44%) were students and 101 (48.56%) were working professionals/employed. Among the employed, the participants belonged to a variety of sectors across the industry, namely Domestic Business and start-ups (28%), Information Technology (23%), Banking and finance (14%), Tax and consultation (13%), Education (7%), Hospitality (6%), Healthcare (4%) and Other (5%). The respondents' highest educational qualifications were diverse, with 11.06% having completed higher secondary education, 46.15% holding an undergraduate degree, 41.35% having earned a postgraduate degree, and 1.44% having achieved a doctorate. Owing to the snowball method of sampling, responses were collected from 3 different countries. The majority of respondents (83.15%) were Indian, while some were from the USA (10.60%) and the remaining (6.25%) from Germany. Within Indian respondents, A diverse sample of Indian respondents was obtained for the study, with participants hailing from various regions across the country. The highest representation came from Delhi, accounting for 36.4% of the sample. Haryana constituted 23.7% of the participants, followed by Punjab at 12.2%. Uttar Pradesh contributed 7.6% of the respondents, while Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand each comprised 4.0% of the sample. Maharashtra had a representation of 2.4%, and Chennai accounted for 1.7% of the respondents. This diverse mix of participants from different regions provides a comprehensive perspective on the study's findings, ensuring a wide range of experiences and viewpoints are considered.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	121	58.17%
Female	87	41.83%
Other	0	0%
Age		
18 to 24	125	60.10%
25 to 34	55	26.44%
35 to 44	10	4.81%
45 to 54	10	4.81%
55 or Above	8	3.84%
Occupation		
Student	107	51.44%
Employed	101	48.56%
Domestic Business & Start-Ups (28%)		
Information Technology (23%)		
Banking & Finance (14%)		
Tax & Consultation (13%)		
Education (7%)		
Hospitality (6%)		
Healthcare (4%)		
Other (5%)		
Highest Education Level		
Higher Secondary	23	11.06%
Undergraduate Degree	96	46.15%
Post-Graduate Degree	86	41.35%
Doctorate	3	1.44%
Other	0	0%
Nationality/Regional Affiliation		
Germany	13	6.25%
United States	22	10.60%
India	173	83.15%
Delhi (36.4%)		
Haryana (23.7%)		
Punjab (12.2%)		
Uttar Pradesh (7.6%)		
Karnataka (4.0%)		
Madhya Pradesh (4.0%)		
Rajasthan (4.0%)		
Uttarakhand (4.0%)		
Maharashtra (2.4%)		
Chennai (1.7%)		

Hypothesis Testing and Observations Hypothesis 1: To test the first hypothesis, a chi-square test was undertaken. The rationale behind using a chi-square test was that the data was not normally distributed and was categorical rather than continuous (Ridgway, 2011; Chawla and Sodhi, 2015). Assuming a significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected if the observed p-value was below 0.05. Expectations were that consumers would apply conventional colour associations to colours that are used in a logo. Thus,

H0: Consumers will not apply conventional colour associations to colours used in a logo.

H1: Consumers will apply conventional colour associations to colours used in a logo.

As in the results below for all six colours, the observed p-values were less than the set level of significance for obtained values of the chi-square statistic ($X2$), concluding that there is a statistically significant association between each colour & at least one of the corresponding five trait associations. The majority of participants selected the colour association that is most frequently used to describe that specific colour, supporting the first hypothesis. Findings imply that there is a substantial difference between the proportions of the groups. For red, most respondents selected Passionate (48.1%) as the closest association, for blue, trustworthy (57.2%) was the most common association. Healthy (62.02%) was nominated for green, Playful (34.6%) was selected for purple, fun (32.7%) was chosen for pink & finally Energetic (45.2 %) was associated with yellow. It is highly noteworthy that the highest frequencies of trait associations chosen by respondents for each of these colours coincided with the results of Ridgway (2011). These similarities observed in colour-trait associations further strengthen the claims of the hypothesis. Table No. 2 contains the results representative of this:

Table 2. Chi-Square Analysis Results for H1*

Colour	Association	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	X2	p
Red	Justice	29	13.9 %	17.65	0.001
	Secure	52	25.0 %		
	Passionate	100	48.1 %		
	Energetic	12	5.8 %		
	Stable	15	7.2 %		
Blue	Trustworthy	119	57.2 %	17.37	0.001
	Warm	17	8.2 %		
	Happy	27	13.0 %		
	Energetic	9	4.3 %		
	Playful	36	17.3 %		
Green	Protective	47	22.60 %	13.06	0.001
	Healthy	129	62.02 %		
	Passionate	12	5.77 %		
	Dynamic	13	6.25 %		
	Exciting	7	3.37 %		
Purple	Secure	36	17.3 %	27.43	0.001
	Playful	72	34.6 %		
	Justice	26	12.5 %		
	Stable	22	10.6 %		
	Fun	52	25.0 %		
Pink	Fun	68	32.7 %	3.64	0.000
	Trustworthy	18	8.7 %		
	Passionate	47	22.6 %		
	Prestigious	26	12.5 %		
	Reliable	49	23.6 %		
Yellow	Energetic	94	45.2 %	18.69	0.000
	Trustworthy	33	15.9 %		
	Secure	37	17.8 %		
	Healthy	10	4.8 %		
	Protective	34	16.3 %		

N = 208, df = 4

Hypothesis 2: The second hypothesis was examined using descriptive statistics (Ridgway, 2011), which is a convenient way of looking at different values of variables (Malhotra, 2021). The top six variables with the highest number of frequencies in the responses were calculated as a percentage of the total frequency of those individual responses and listed alongside their Dimension as per the Brand Personality Scale (Aaker, 1997).

By observing the frequencies by which respondents associated each of the 42 personality traits identified by Aaker with the presented six colours, the following results were observed. Out of the presented personality traits as per the Brand Personality Scale, respondents could select as many trait associations they perceived were correct for a given colour. These associations were then summed to arrive at the final frequency which was used to calculate percentages of each trait perceived to be representative of the colour.

Table 3. Observations for the Colour Red

RED			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Daring	119	11.72	Excitement
Spirited	86	8.47	Excitement
Confident	82	8.08	Competence
Tough	77	7.59	Ruggedness
Hard Working	58	5.71	Competence
Masculine	48	4.73	Ruggedness

Table 3 shows observations for the red colour, out of 1015 total associations selected by respondents, daring was the most observed association among all. A sum of 119 responses accounted for 11.72% of the total frequency that associated the colour Red with the feeling of daring under the brand personality dimension of Excitement.

It was further noted that the top 6 variables with the highest recorded frequencies belonged to three dimensions namely Excitement, Competent and Ruggedness, showing strong colour perception by customers. Both of the top two variables belonged to the Excitement dimension, further correlating the associations between the colour and the feeling.

Table 4. Observations for the Colour Blue

BLUE			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Honest	91	8.93	Sincerity
Wholesome	87	8.54	Sincerity
Down-to-Earth	86	8.44	Sincerity
Reliable	70	6.87	Competence
Sincere	60	5.89	Sincerity
Cheerful	58	5.69	Sincerity

The data reflects that the colour Blue is predominantly associated with the brand personality dimension of Sincerity. Among the 1019 total associations selected by respondents, the top three variables with the highest recorded frequencies were Honest (91 responses), Wholesome (87 responses), and Down-to-Earth (86 responses), which together accounted for almost a quarter of all responses. These three variables make up 25.9% of the total frequency, demonstrating a strong connection between the colour Blue and Sincerity. Furthermore, it was observed that out of the top six variables with the highest recorded frequencies, five belonged to the Sincerity dimension and one to Competence. This further confirms the strong perception of consumers of the colour Blue with positive brand values of honesty, wholesomeness, reliability and more. The data also reaffirms the arguments given previously in Case 3 in support of the colour.

Table 5. Observations for the Colour Green

GREEN			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Down-to-Earth	95	10.12	Sincerity
Outdoorsy	70	7.45	Ruggedness
Wholesome	58	6.18	Sincerity
Reliable	58	6.18	Competence
Imaginative	55	5.86	Excitement
Spirited	53	5.64	Excitement

The data shows that customers associate the colour Green with multiple brand personality dimensions. Among the 939 total associations, the top variable associated with the colour Green was Down-to-Earth, which received 95 responses and accounted for 10.12% of the total frequency. The next two variables with the highest recorded frequencies were Outdoorsy (70 responses) and Wholesome (58 responses), which are associated with the Ruggedness and Sincerity dimensions, respectively. Reliable and Imaginative received an equal number of responses (58 each) and were associated with the Competence and Excitement dimensions, respectively. Spirited was the sixth most commonly cited variable associated with the colour Green, with 53 responses and a percentage of 5.64%, also linked to the Excitement dimension. The data reveals that the associations between the colour Green and brand personality dimensions are not as strong and focused as those seen with Red or Blue. Instead, customers associate Green with a mix of dimensions. Yet at the same time, Down-to-Earth and Outdoorsy were the most commonly cited variables associated with Green, which suggests that customers associate the colour Green with natural qualities.

Table 6. Observations for the Colour Purple

PURPLE			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Spirited	58	6.03	Excitement
Upper Class	52	5.41	Sophistication
Confident	52	5.41	Competence
Daring	51	5.30	Excitement
Trendy	51	5.30	Excitement
Charming	50	5.20	Sophistication

Out of the total 962 associations selected by respondents, Spirited was the most commonly cited variable associated with Purple, with 58 responses accounting for 6.03% of the total frequency. Daring and Trendy followed closely behind with 51 responses each, suggesting that customers associate Purple with exciting and daring qualities. However, it is noteworthy that other associations recorded for the colour recorded a similar percentage of frequency of about 5% each. Excitement was the most prominent dimension associated with Purple, with three of the top six variables belonging to that dimension. This is similar to the associations observed with the colour Red, where the Excitement dimension also dominated. However, unlike Red, Purple also had significant associations with the dimensions of Sophistication and Competence. Overall, the data suggests that customers hold different perceptions of the colour Purple and associate it with multiple brand personality dimensions.

Table 7. Observations for the Colour Pink

PINK			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Feminine	104	9.88	Sophistication
Cheerful	89	8.45	Sincerity
Charming	69	6.55	Sophistication
Imaginative	58	5.51	Excitement
Wholesome	54	5.13	Sincerity
Spirited	50	4.75	Excitement

Among the top variables, the most commonly cited association with Pink was Feminine, with 104 responses accounting for 9.88% of the total frequency. Other frequent associations with Pink include Cheerful and Charming, which suggests that customers view Pink as having sophisticated and sincere qualities. However, it is to be noted that out of the 104 responses, only 40% were from female respondents and the rest from males. This may reflect the predominantly feminine image of the colour pink in the minds of consumers, which has been a topic of controversy for a long. Yet at the same time on the opposite side, Blue was associated with Masculine by only 6 responses (<1%) and Feminine by 19 responses (1.8%), giving a contradicting image from common beliefs of the society. This data comparison can be instrumental in concluding that current consumer perception of colours has evolved and is not confined to traditional colour associations of colours and genders.

Table 8. Observations for the Colour Yellow

YELLOW			
Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Dimension
Cheerful	73	7.48	Sincerity
Spirited	63	6.45	Excitement
Exciting	56	5.74	Excitement
Imaginative	55	5.64	Excitement
Outdoorsy	51	5.23	Ruggedness
Wholesome	49	5.02	Sincerity

Among the top variables, the most commonly cited association with Yellow is Cheerful, with 73 responses accounting for 7.48% of the total frequency. This is consistent with the previous findings of ?, which also observed maximum associations of the colour yellow with being cheerful. Other frequent associations with Yellow include Spirited and Exciting, which suggest customers view Yellow as an exciting and imaginative colour. Overall, the data suggests that customers associate the colour Yellow with cheerful, exciting, and outdoorsy qualities, with some level of imaginative and spirited elements. The associations with Yellow are somewhat similar to those observed for the colour Pink, in that both colours are frequently associated with the brand personality dimension of Excitement. However, Yellow received more associations with the dimension of Ruggedness than Pink did, which highlights the different brand personality associations that each colour can evoke.

Hypothesis 3: For the third hypothesis, statements presented to respondents and their perception of its appropriateness were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (Ridgway, 2011; Likert, 1932). On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents rated the appropriateness of the colour selection for the logo given along with brand descriptions, with 1 being "Highly Disagree" & 5 being "Highly Agree". Four out of the six question statements with personality terms agreed with the colour associations (red, blue, green, yellow) and the remaining two (pink, purple) were chosen to have inconsistent colour associations and brand descriptions. The following results were observed for the set of questions:

Figure 1. Appropriateness of Logo Colour Choice
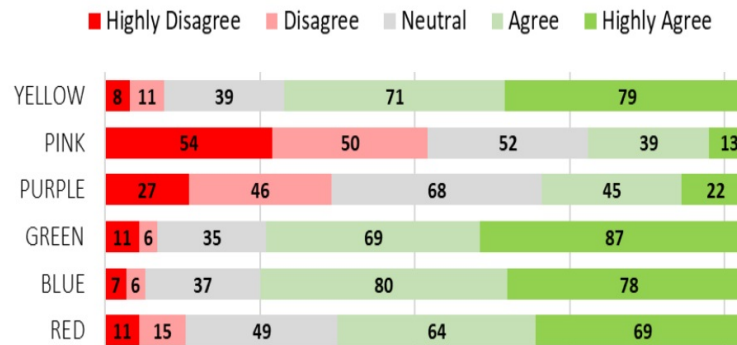
Table 9. Colour Associations with Brand Descriptions

	Highly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Highly Agree
RED - Exciting, Daring	11	15	49	64	69
BLUE - Honest, Sincere, Reliable	7	6	37	80	78
GREEN - Down-to-Earth, Outdoorsy, Wholesome	11	6	35	69	87
PURPLE - Small-Town, Sentimental	27	46	68	45	22
PINK - Masculine, Tough	54	50	52	39	13
YELLOW - Cheerful, Friendly	8	11	39	71	79

Observations were again significant and coincided with previous findings. Pink (50%) and purple (35%), given their incongruent colour associations recorded the highest levels of disagreement with their respective brand statements. The remaining four colours i.e., Red (12.5%), Blue (6.25%), Green (8.2%), and Yellow (9.1%), with congruent associations with their brand statements recorded significantly low levels of disagreements from respondents. Participants indicated Red being appropriate for an exciting and daring brand; Blue as an honest, sincere, and reliable brand; Green as a down-to-earth, outdoorsy, and wholesome brand; and Yellow as a brand with a cheerful and friendly disposition. At the same time, Pink was not found to be associated with brand personality traits of masculinity or toughness and neither was Purple associated with being small-town or sentimental. Most conflicting responses were received for the colour pink due to the generally accepted trait associations and the statement presenting an opposite image. The colour is generally associated with being feminine (as seen in hypothesis 2 results).

7 Conclusion

When employed effectively, colour, being pervasive and a source of knowledge, can be used to symbolize a brand and has the power to significantly alter consumer perception of brands. Prudent use of colour can influence perceptions toward certain products by affecting moods & feelings as well as differentiating them from those of competitors. This investigation has far-reaching implications, both theoretical and practical, for the domain of branding. These implications have been evidenced through the examination of real-world brand examples, as discussed in the cited cases, thereby affirming the significant influence that colour exerts. The study explored diverse dimensions associated with colour, including its importance, its effects on perception, and the imperative to legally safeguard colours. To achieve this, the study began by revisiting fundamental concepts and disambiguating commonly misunderstood terms, establishing their interrelationships. The study also referred to previous research and cases concerning different aspects of colour, using them to reinforce its central objective.

The first hypothesis resulted in a majority of participants selecting the colour association that is most frequently used to describe that specific colour. Findings implied substantial differences between colour perceptions: Red was perceived as passionate, Blue as trustworthy, Green as healthy, Purple as playful, Pink as fun and at last, energy for Yellow. These associations of perception were congruent with previous studies, especially with Ridgway (2011) reinforcing the claims of

the hypothesis. This listing alongside their dimension as per the Brand Personality Scale further painted a clear picture of colour-trait perception associations in the minds of consumers. Empirical evidence on the effects of colour, its marketing importance, and its association with consumer behaviour all substantiated the claim that colour wields a substantial influence. Examining the cases of Louboutin and Tiffany & Co. reinforced the necessity for brands to legally protect colours that have become synonymous with their brand identity. Additional case studies investigated the varied effects of specific colours and their utilization by brands, emphasizing the importance of simplicity and the relationship between a colour and a product when selecting an appropriate colour scheme.

The study reveals that the potential applications of colour in marketing are seemingly limitless, and the understanding of its multifaceted nature is vital to developing a successful brand strategy. The research underscores the importance of comprehensively investigating colour and its various dimensions to create a holistic understanding of the role it plays in branding. A brand that seeks to engender deep engagement and lasting relationships with its customers and stakeholders must recognize the complex dynamics of colour and use them to shape perceptions effectively. Such an understanding will undoubtedly aid in creating a distinct identity that resonates with the target audience and contributes to achieving long-term success in the market. Therefore, the study highlights the need for brands to conduct thorough research to gain a more nuanced understanding of the various dimensions of colour and their potential utility in crafting effective brand strategies.

8 Recommendation

This study reinforces that branding is nothing but a battle of perceptions where colour plays an intrinsic role. The research lays down the groundwork for research to build upon and expand on this influence of colour. Based on the findings, several areas of further research can be explored to expand upon the role of colour in creating distinct brand identities and influencing consumer perceptions. Further research can investigate the impact of colour on customer behaviour, including purchase intention, brand loyalty, and product satisfaction. This study was carried out in a particular cultural & demographic setting, and it would be interesting to see further studies compare these colour associations with different contexts to ascertain if they are universal or culturally specific. Other factors like consistent colour-branding across various platforms, use in content creation and digital marketing, specific colour packaging to induce a purchase, legal implications and challenges associated with legal protection for these colours etc. are just some of the suggestive investigations that can branch out from this study. In the end, this study can effectively be employed by brands to have a better understanding of consumer perceptions and colour preferences can be set to create a synergistic effect between the identity the brand wants to create for itself in the market and the branding strategies to achieve the same.

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