

## **Color Triggers**

Countless hours of research indicate that color does matter. Notice how fast food restaurants, schools, and professional sports teams all choose certain colors that “represent” themselves. We already know that colors can suggest a mood or attitude, but did you also know that color accounts for 60% of the acceptance or rejection of an object or person? These impressions don’t change overnight. We all have automatic color triggers and hidden associations about various colors. Color impacts our thinking, our actions, and our reactions. Armed with this knowledge, we must take into account the association of colors in our persuasion and marketing efforts.

Color is a great persuasive device. Since we don’t perceive what is happening, we don’t develop a resistance to persuasive color techniques. This process happens at a completely subconscious level. Color is critical in marketing, in advertising, and in product packaging. Colors are not just for appearance either – they have significance. The favorite food colors are red, yellow, orange, and brown. These colors trigger automatic responses in our nervous system and stimulate our appetite. Fast food restaurants decorate with shades of red, yellow, and orange. These hues are known as arousal colors because they stimulate the appetite and encourage you to eat faster. Compare these bright colors to the calming colors found in fine restaurants. These restaurants tend to use greens and blues in their design schemes, colors which encourage you to stay and linger.

Colors can also be used to attract our attention. The shades that grab our attention are reds and oranges. The challenge is that each color has multiple meanings and one person might draw one meaning while another person might conclude an entirely different meaning. Red can be exciting to one group and mean unprofitable to another. To others it could signal “stop” or “danger.” Red can denote boldness, aggressiveness, and extrovertedness, but it also represents anger, danger, sin, and blood. Yellow is known as a fast color and is the first color to register in the brain. Yellow causes you to be alert and watchful. The results of such research explain why new fire trucks and fire hydrants are being painted yellow.

An interesting study on the use of color occurred at the U.S. Naval Correctional Center in Seattle, Washington. The entire holding cell was painted pink, except for the floor. Many inmates at this stage of confinement were hostile and violent. The cell was painted pink to see if the color would have a calming effect on the prisoners. Each person was only held 10-15 minutes a day in these pink cells. After 156 days of constant use, there were no incidents of erratic behavior in the inmates.

What about the color of the pills you take? Research has shown that the color of medicine can change the perception or association of the pill. Scientists conducted a study looking at the drugs people took and the associations users formed of them based on their colors. They found that most people felt white pills were weak while black ones were strong. In another study, researchers gave blue and pink placebos to medical students, who were told they were either stimulants or sedatives. The students taking the pink pills felt more energy while the students taking the blue pills felt drowsy.

Color even enhances the perceived flavor and desirability of the food we eat. For example, orange juice with enhanced orange hue was preferred over naturally colored orange juice and was thought to be sweeter. This was also true for strawberries, raspberries, and tomatoes. The redder they looked, the more they were preferred.

In one experiment, the flavor of coffee was manipulated by the color of the serving container. Two hundred people were asked to judge coffee served out of four different containers – red, blue, brown, and yellow. All containers contained the same brand of coffee, yet the coffee in the yellow container was found to be “too weak.” The blue container coffee was dubbed “too mild.” Seventy-five percent of respondents found the coffee in the brown container to be “too strong” while 85% found the red container coffee to be “rich and full-bodied.” A similar experiment was also done with women and facial creams. Subjects were given pink and white face creams, which were identical except for their color. One hundred percent of the women surveyed said that the pink cream was more effective and milder on sensitive skin.

In another experiment, researchers gave subjects laundry detergent to test for quality. Of course, all of the boxes contained the exact same detergent, but the outsides of the boxes were different colors. The test colors were yellow, blue, and a combination of both. After a two-week testing period, the test groups reported that the soap in the yellow boxes was “too harsh” and the detergent in the blue boxes was “too weak.” The detergent in the combination yellow and blue boxes was “just right.” The findings indicated that the yellow represented strength while the blue represented antiseptic power.

Original research into Cheer Laundry detergent produced similar results. Louis Cheskin conducted research on three different color flecks in Cheer: red, blue, and yellow. Again, the detergent was the same, but the colors were different. As the research unfolded, subjects determined that the yellow flecks did not clean clothes enough, the red flecks were too strong, and the blue flecks were best for cleaning clothes. Colors play a large role in the success of a product, its packaging, or its persuasive ability. Color communicates and triggers emotions, moods, thoughts, and actions, all without words.

**Explore the following list to see some common color associations:**

**Red:** strength, power, anger, danger, aggression, excitement

**Blue:** coolness, truth, loyalty, harmony, devotion, serenity, relaxation

**Yellow:** brightness, intelligence, hostility, wisdom, cheerfulness, loudness,

**Green:** peacefulness, tranquility, youthfulness, prosperity, money, endurance, growth, hopefulness

**Orange:** brightness, unpleasantness, sun, warmth, bravery, invigoration, radiation, communication

**Purple:** royalty, passion, authority, stateliness, integrity, mysticalness, dignity

**White:** plainness, purity, coldness, cleanliness, innocence, hygiene

**Black:** desperation, wickedness, futility, mysteriousness, death, evilness

**Gray:** neutrality, nothingness, indecision, depression, dullness, technology, impersonality

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