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ARE YOU SELLING THE RIGHT COLOUR?

A Cross-Cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue

by

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ARE YOU SELLING THE RIGHT COLOUR? A Cross-Cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue

Abstract:
Should a marketer adopt a pancultural or a culture-specific approach in using colour in marketing? This paper reviews the psychological and sociocultural associations and meanings of colour(s) in a cross-cultural marketing perspective, and outlines its role as a marketing cue. It is argued that a cross-cultural perspective of colour research and application is imperative for developing global marketing strategies, and the cultural values, marketing objectives and desired customer relationship levels would dictate the choice of colour in corporate and marketing communications in the 21st Century. Identifying appropriate colour-culture clusters also facilitates the development of a colour theory in marketing.

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The choice between adopting global versus local approach in international marketing often determines the success of a venture. As companies selling products worldwide strive to maintain a consistent brand image through out their markets, there are very few truly global brands with a consistent global identity (Kotabe and Helsen 2001). The consumer needs and behaviour are often reflected in the *emic*-driven marketing strategies, and it is argued that when a product is "culture-bound" and different product attributes appeal to different cultures, standardisation is inappropriate (Dunn 1976; Shaw 1987; James and Hill 1991; Kanso 1992; Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos 1997).

Colour is an integral element of corporate and marketing communications. It influences consumer perceptions and preferences, purchase and consumption behaviour, and helps companies (re) position or differentiate from the competition. However, the notion of colour universality is fraught with risk. Sometimes companies fail simply because of inappropriate choice of product or package colours (Ricks 1983). Though sketchy business anecdotes are available, yet much of the practical questions remain unanswered. Bellizzi et al. (1983) suggest that a large part of colour research on products, packages and advertisements remains unpublished because of competitive concerns. A review of literature in the public domain also exhibits a largely western focus. Assuming a narrow western perspective of colours as 'universal' and applying it to alien markets has often led to cultural *faux pas*.

So, can different colours *alter* the meanings of objects or situations with which they are associated? Can colour preferences predict *future* purchase behavior? This paper reviews the sociocultural and psychological associations and meanings of colour(s) in a cross-cultural marketing perspective, and outlines its role as an intrinsic or extrinsic cue to the product, package, brand, or environment, or as a symbol of personality and self-image. Illustrations are cited where appropriate. It is argued that a cross-cultural perspective of colour research and application is imperative for developing effective global marketing strategies. Definitive (not anecdotal) colour associations and meanings such as on a universal versus culture-specific continuum, colour combinations, and the interaction effects between colour and the object/context need to be established. Differences in gender, age, ethnic preferences, and trends also need to be examined. The paper raises issues whether colour is a primary or a secondary quality of matter and whether it lies in the brain or in the external world, whether marketer adopts a universal or a localised marketing strategy following a pancultural or a culture-specific approach in use of colour, whether some colour combinations are optimal, and whether trade dress is classifiable as product design or package. A simple framework is proposed through which management can review the effects of colour and respond to consumer preferences.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Greeks, in the early 5th century BC, referred to the antithesis between black and white, or darkness and light, and introduced a scheme of primary colours, white, black, red and a range of mixes from red through yellow to green. Aristotle suggested that the intermediate colours were a mixture of light and dark. Later, Hippocrates put forward the four-colour theory: white, black, red and yellow, which led to the first conceptualization of primary colours, as black, red, yellow and green (Gage 1993).

The medieval and renaissance usage of colour denoted religious symbolism. It related the four elements of nature with four colours: scarlet (later red) -fire, white (later black) -earth, blue-air and purple (later white) -water. Mystical interpretation was given to these colours, for the blue denoted heaven, the scarlet charity, the purple martyrdom, and the white chastity and purity. For the colours of gold, crimson, scarlet, and purple were extracted from precious pigments in the ancient era, they indicated power, authority and opulence. In the western Europe, imperial purple (and sometimes ultramarine) was the colour of the robe worn by Madonna. Until the mid-15th century, the cardinals could only dress in purple robes with a red hat, when they were allowed to wear scarlet or crimson red robes with a

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vermilion hat. In the Netherlands, the Virgin was clothed in the scarlet. The senators in Rome would also wear scarlet or crimson violet. Note that the social dress code of Renaissance considered black, purple and scarlet as mourning colours and the modern distinction of purple and red was alien to those times (Gage 1993).

So the differences in colour associations are probably more of a difference in latent philosophical-religious attitudes than an innate difference in the perception of colours (Crozier 1996). For instance, orange is a sacred colour for Hindus and the Buddhist monks, but it is not even considered a separate colour by some Zambians (Tektronix 1998 cited in Madden et al. 2000). Similarly, in the beadwork of Xhosa tribe of South Africa, yellow is associated with new life and green with fertility, and the pregnant women wear yellow and green beads (Grieve 1991). To the colour-sighted, such cues are an important part of the social learning processes (Kaufman-Scarborough 2001).

Colour Perception: In the 15th C., colour was recognized as a perceptual function of light (Gage 1993). Newton (1730) was the first in establishing a colour wheel and describing a prismatic spectrum of seven colours linked in a circular arrangement, denying any primary set of hues rather claiming that all rays of refracted light were primary and homogenous, pioneering the concepts of colour complementarity and harmony. With some revision of the number and area of the component hues, this circular arrangement has remained standard in the colour theory until today, despite other colour order systems of Ostwald and Munsell. However, it is also argued that colour tone or hue can be a misleading predictor and that the variation in brightness and saturation play a far more important role in colour perception and association with human behaviour (Crozier 1996; Hupka et al. 1997). It is now understood that there are three primary colours (red, blue, green) and it is the interaction of their three basic attributes (hue, intensity and saturation) that produces various colours. Primary and secondary colours on the colour wheel (red, yellow, blue, orange, green and purple) are considered as *simple* colours, and all others (taupe, mauve, sea green, slate blue, maroon, pumpkin, etc.) are considered as *sophisticated* colours (Moser 2003).

But what is and where lies colour? In fact, the physical world has no colours. There are only light waves of different wavelengths. It is left to the retinal cones of the normal human eye to distinguish among such bands of light and make this world a rainbow for us. So is colour created in the brain to act as a perceptual tool for our visual-cognitive and -affective functions? In 1623, Galileo remarked that colour represented secondary qualities of matter that were perceiver-dependent, dispositional, laid in the minds of the observers and were not really a property of the object (Galileo 1989), initiating the debate on the psychological effects of colour and its relation with emotions. Cheskin (1957, cited in Garber et al. 2000) called it a vivid, affect-loaded and memorable stimulus, influencing both human behaviour and human physiology (Madden et al. 2000). Kosslyn and Thompson (2003) have argued that visual imagery and perception arises from activity in visual cortex as well as other areas of the brain, though long-term memory stores images that are reconstructed in visual cortex on exposure to a matching stimulus or object. Implying that exposure to a matching colour stimulus would generate images based on prior knowledge, social learning and associations. Biological effects of colour are beyond the scope of this paper and we shall limit to the psychological and sociocultural associations and meanings, especially in a cross-cultural marketing perspective.

STATE OF THE RESEARCH
There are two major schools of thought relating colour and human behaviour. Some scholars suggest that there is an innate functional relationship between colour and psychological responses, and colour signals the brain directly to trigger an affective reaction (Humphrey 1976 cited in Crozier 1996). Others suggest that colour preferences are learned over time as shared affective meanings, or as result of past experiences, or as conscious associations in myths, literature and language (Langenbeck 1913 cited in Hupka et al. 1997; Osgood et al. 1957). Researchers have attempted to explain and/or alter colour preferences of consumers on the basis of associative learning principles, arguing that these preferences are more likely to be learned in high-involvement purchases (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). It is posited that colour associations are likely to be based on Pavlov's classical conditioning or Human Evaluative Conditioning models, and instrumental responses are not likely to form durable colour associations.

Communicating via colours:
Colour forms an integral part of semiotics, non-verbal communication and spatial orientation (Bellizzi et al. 1983). It carries important symbolic and associative messages and acts as a potent cue for conferring meaning, contrast and novelty to the product and brand (Schmitt and Pan 1994; Garber et al. 2000). It is a vital part of products, services, packaging, logos, displays and collateral and a means of creating, sustaining and differentiating brand and corporate identities (Schmitt and Pan 1994; Madden et al. 2000), or consumer perceptions (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999).

Cultures differ in their aesthetic expressions as colours represent different meanings and aesthetic appeals in different cultures (see table 1 and figure 1), entailing careful use of colour in marketing.

For instance, *Blue* the American corporate colour is perceived as cold and evil in East Asia (Schmitt 1995), but stands for warmth in Holland, coldness in Sweden, death in Iran, and purity in India (Schiffman et al. 2001). It denotes femininity in Holland but masculinity in Sweden and the United States (Neal et al. 2002). Blue represents high quality in the United States, Japan, South Korea and China, and also means sincere, trustworthy and dependable in Japan, South Korea and the U.S. (Jacobs et al. 1991).

Red is perceived to be unlucky and negative in Chad, Nigeria and Germany but lucky in China, Denmark, Romania and Argentina (Schmitt 1995; Neal et al. 2002). It is a bride's colour in China but a masculine colour in the U.K. and France (Neal et al. 2002). It symbolises ambition and desire in India (Kreitler and Kreitler 1972, cited in Grossman and Wisenblit 1999), and love in China, Korea, Japan and the U.S. (Jacobs et al. 1991).

Yellow represents warmth in the United States but infidelity in France (Neal et al. 2002). It is associated with envy and jealousy in Germany and with envy in Russia (Hupka et al. 1997), whereas in China yellow is considered pleasant, happy, good taste, progressive and is associated with authority, royalty, and trustworthiness (Jacobs et al. 1991; Schmitt 1995). Yellow is also associated with happiness in South Korea and Japan (Jacobs et al. 1991).

Green represents danger or disease in Malaysia (Ricks 1984). In Japan, green represents love, happiness, good taste and adventure (Oyama et al. 1963, cited in Hupka et al. 1997; Jacobs et al. 1991), whereas it represents envy in Belgium and the United States (Hupka et al. 1997). In China, green connotes sincere, trustworthy and dependable. Green also represents good taste and adventure in the United States (Jacobs et al. 1991).

Purple is related to anger and envy in Mexico and Poland (Hupka et al. 1997). Japanese connect purple with sin and fear (Oyama et al. 1963, cited in Hupka et al. 1997). Purple is a colour of love in China, South Korea and the U.S. It is considered as expensive in China, South Korea and Japan but as inexpensive in the U.S. (Jacobs et al. 1991).

Black is associated with dullness and stupidity in Indian culture (Kreitler and Kreitler 1972, cited in Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). It represents grief and sadness in the western cultures (Hupka et al. 1997), but it is also a ceremonial dress for priests and justices and a dress of subservience for lower class such as waiters and servants. Japanese connect black with fear (Oyama et al. 1963, cited in Hupka et al. 1997), whereas in Germany it represents fear, anger and jealousy. In Russia and the U.S. black is associated with fear, anger, envy and jealousy, whereas in Mexico with anger, envy and jealousy and in Poland with fear, anger and envy (Hupka et al. 1997). Black is seen as powerful and expensive in the U.S., China, Japan and South Korea and as dependable in both China and Japan. The Chinese also associate black with being trustworthy and high quality (Jacobs et al. 1991).

White symbolizes mourning or death in Japan, Far East and much of Asia (Ricks 1984), but happiness and purity in Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. (Neal et al. 2002).

The above description gives us a brief glimpse of the multiple meanings of colours in diverse cultural settings. In addition, local customs, taboos, demographic factors such as age, sex, education, income, family status, and ethnicity also influence colour preferences of the people (Choungourian 1968; Silver et al. 1988; Grieve 1991; Boyatzis and Varghese 1994; Hemphill 1996; Yang 2001). For instance, Choungourian (1968) found blue as the most preferred colour by males and blue-green by females across his subjects. Silver et al. (1988), whose findings were partly confirmed by Hemphill (1996), observed that colour blue and number seven were chosen most frequently by both sexes and races (whites or blacks) - supporting the blue-seven phenomenon.

Though differences remain, there are values that transcend national frontiers, making it possible to construct intermarket segments and country clusters on the basis of similarities in behaviour and shared cultural norms. The cultural clusters, as shown in table 1, are adapted from Ronen and Shenkar (1985) on the basis of language and communication similarities, and indicate meanings and associations to select colours in various countries. There can be disagreement with the composition of such clusters but it remains a useful tool in developing marketing communication strategies. It also underscores the need for exploring the meanings of colours within and without the cultures and between the social classes that could be shared or differentiated across cultures.

Colour	Culture					
	Anglo-Saxon	Germanic	Latin European	Nordic	Slavic	Hispanic American
	Australia, New Zealand, UK, USA	Austria, Germany, Holland, Switzerland	Belgium, France, Italy, Spain	Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden	Russia, Poland, Czech Rep., Slov., Hungary, Romania	Argentina, Chile Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela
White	Happiness, Purity, For Brides					
Blue	Dependable, High Quality, Corporate, Trustworthy and Masculine (USA)	Warmth, Feminine (Holland)		Cold, Masculine (Sweden)		
Green	Envy, Good taste, Adventure (USA); Happiness		Envy (Belgium)			
Yellow	Warmth, Happy and Pure (USA); Jealousy (UK).	Envy and Jealousy (Germany); Envy (Holland)	Infidelity (France) Envy (Italy)		Envy (Russia, Yugoslavia)	Death (Mexico)
Red	Masculinity (UK); Fear, Anger, Envy Jealousy, Love and Adventure (USA); Danger, Defiance, Hostile, Strength, Excitement, Lust	Fear, Anger, Unlucky, Jealousy (Germany)	Masculinity (France)	Positive (Denmark)	Positive (Romania); Fear, Anger, and Jealousy (Poland, Russia); Envy (Poland).	Positive (Argentina); Anger, Envy and Jealousy (Mexico)
Purple	Authority, Power, Progressive, Inexpensive (USA)				Anger, Envy and Jealousy (Poland); Envy (Russia).	Death; Anger, Envy (Mexico)
Black	Fear, Anger, Envy, Powerful, Expensive (USA); Despondency, Ceremonial	Fear, Anger and Jealousy (Germany); Despondency	Fear, Anger, Despondency		Fear, Anger, Envy (Poland, Russia); Jealousy (Russia)	Fear, Anger, Envy Jealousy (Mexico)

TABLE 1: THE CROSS-CULTURAL SPECTRUM OF MEANINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS OF COLOUR IN MARKETING

Colour	Culture						
	Chinese	Japanese	South Korean	Southeast Asian	Near Eastern	Indian	West African
	China, Taiwan Hong Kong			ASEAN states	Iran, Pakistan, Turkey		Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal
White	Purity, Mourning	Mourning, Death	Mourning, Death	Mourning, Death	Mourning, Death	Mourning, Death	
Blue	High Quality	High Quality, Sincere, Trustworthy	High Quality, Sincere, Trustworthy	Cold, Evil (Malaysia)	Death (Iran)	Purity	
Green	Pure, Sincere, Trustworthy, Dependable	Love, Happy, Good taste, Adventurous	Pure, Adventurous	Danger, Disease (Malaysia)			
Yellow	Pure, Pleasant, Progressive, Royal, Authority	Envy, Pure, Happiness, Good taste	Happiness, Good taste, Dependable		Envy (Turkey)		
Red	Happiness, Lucky, Love, For Brides	Love, Anger, Jealousy	Love, Adventurous, Good taste			Ambition, Desire	Unlucky, Negative (Nigeria)
Purple	Expensive, Love	Sin, Fear, Expensive	Expensive, Love				
Black	Powerful, Expensive, High Quality	Fear, Powerful Expensive, Dependable	Powerful, Expensive			Dullness, Stupidity	

TABLE 1 *(CONTD.)*: THE CROSS-CULTURAL SPECTRUM OF MEANINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS OF COLOUR IN MARKETING

(Multiple sources: Ricks 1984; Jacobs et al. 1991; Schmitt 1995; Hupka et al. 1997; Oyama et al. 1963 cited in Hupka et al. 1997; Kreitler and Kreitler 1972 cited in Grossman and Wisenblit 1999; Schiffman et al. 2001; Neal et al. 2002; cultural clusters adapted from Ronen and Shenkar 1985)

Note: Country's names in the parenthesis indicate that a specific research finding was recorded; where no individual country is mentioned the relationship observed is general and applies to the whole cultural cluster. Gaps indicate absence of any concrete research finding.

Purity — White (USA, UK, Aus, China) — Blue (India) — Green, Yellow (USA, China, Japan, SK) — Impurity

Marriage — White (USA, UK, Aus) — Red (China) — Blue (Iran) — Purple (Mexico) — Yellow — White (China) — Death

Happiness — Green, Yellow (China) — Yellow (USA, Belgium, China, Japan) — Red — Black — Grief

Lucky — Green (USA, UK, China Japan, SK) — Red (China, Denmark, Argentina) — Red (USA, Germany, France, Spain) — Unlucky

Masculinity — Blue (China, Denmark, Argentina) — Red — Blue (Germany, Nigeria, Chad) — Blue (Netherlands) — Femininity

Warmth — Blue, Yellow (USA, Sweden, UK, France) — Red — Blue (Sweden, Malaysia) — Cold

High Quality — USA, China, Japan, South Korea — Black — Black — Unreliable

Expensive — Black (USA, China Japan, SK) — Purple (China) — Beige (UK) — Pink (UK) — Gray (China) — Purple (USA) — Inexpensive

Good taste — Green (USA, Belgium, China, Japan, South Korea) — Yellow — Green (Malaysia) — Disease

Envy/Jealousy — Green (USA, Belgium, UK, Germany, Italy) — Yellow — Purple, Black (Mexico, Poland, Russia) — Red (USA, China, Japan, SK) — Love/Lust

Fear/Anger — Black (USA, UK, Spain, Germany, Mex, Pol, Rus) — Purple (Japan) — Hope/Calm

Strength — (USA, France) — Lethargy

Power/Authority — Black (USA, UK, China, Japan, SK) — Purple (USA) — Yellow (China) — Green, Black (India) — Weakness
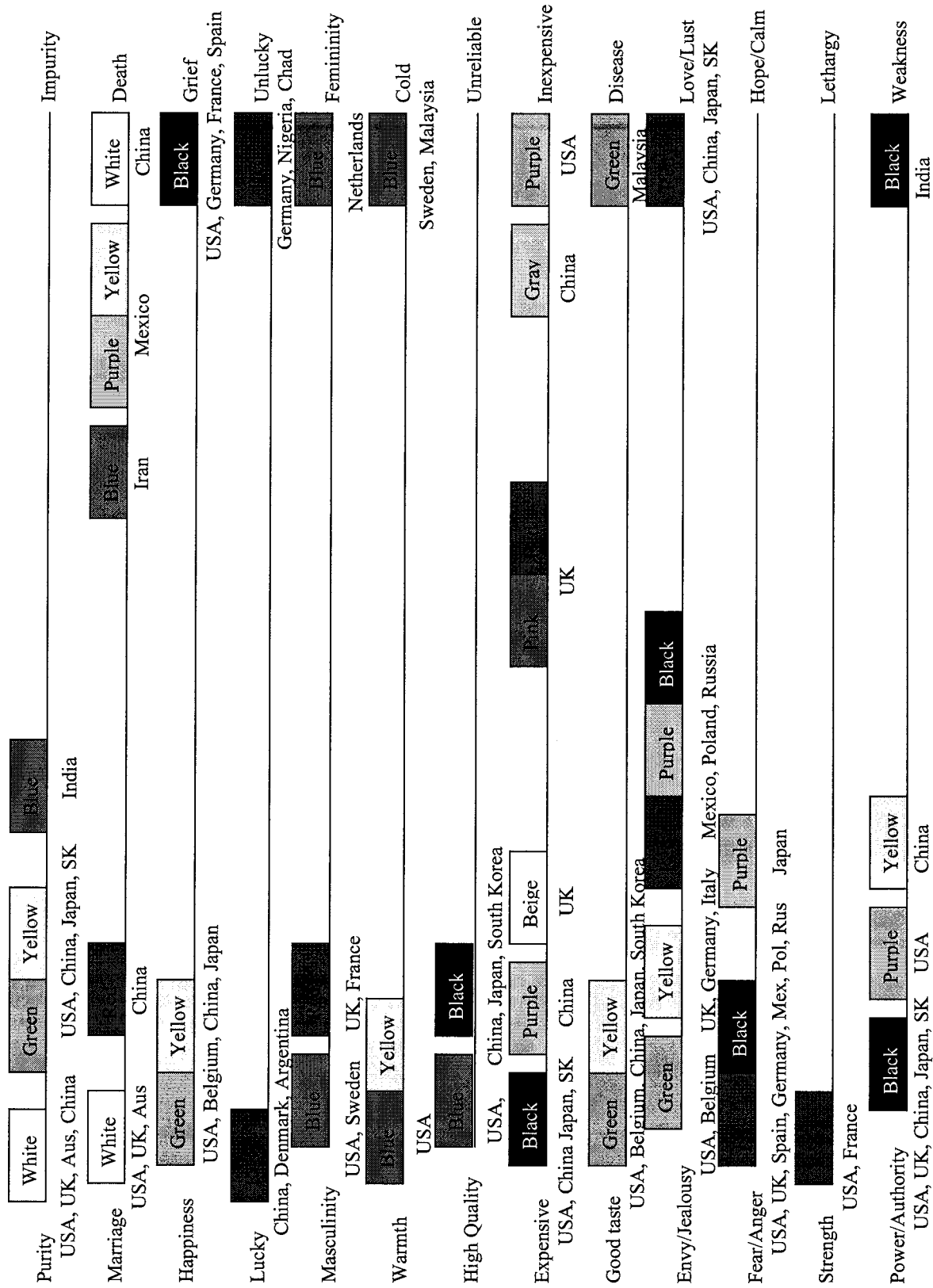
FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIAL CONTINUA OF CROSS-CULTURAL COLOUR SYMBOLISM IN MARKETING
(Based on hypothetical plotting of research data from table 1 along select variables.)

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS OF VARYING COLOUR PERCEPTIONS

Colouring the Product:

Revealing the product: Colour reveals product attributes. Kotler (1974) argues that the *tangible* product is only a small part of the total consumption package, and buyers respond to the *total product* including pleasantries, imagery and collateral. Cheskin and Masten (1987) hold that while product quality is the ultimate determinant of consumer satisfaction, imagery is the vehicle that generates interest via 'sensation transference' among target population. They assert that each imagery generates an emotional response: books *are* judged by their covers, corporations are judged by their images, and products are judged by their packages. Also, the Lanham Act in the U.S. protects product colour as trade dress, provided it confers "secondary meanings" (Kilmer 1995; Madden et al. 2000).

For the merchandise colour signals product's physical features, influencing perceptions about price, quality and wider image of the retail offer (Kerfoot et al. 2003), colour is the least expensive way to change the product (Parmar 2004). For instance, consumers identify the quality of detergent by colour cues and many detergents are blue with the hope that housewives would associate it with the 'blue bag' used by their grandmothers (Schiffman et al. 2001). In Britain, white is perceived as "crap" and below average, neutral or beige as "boring and dull" but expensive and "for a mature person", whereas pink perceived as "look young" and red as "garish and tacky" are both considered as average priced (Kerfoot et al. 2003). Darker colours are often associated with richness and value in the United States as evident in the dark gray colour used for expensive, high technological products (Stanton et al. 1994). By contrast, it was found that colour gray was perceived to be inexpensive in China. In Asian countries, purple was associated with expensive (Jacobs et al. 1991). Colour is a key attribute of casual wear for Chinese consumers, showing geographic and demographic differences in perceptions (Zhang et al. 2002). Colour sells running shoes too, and white is the major colour for sport shoes in men and women, though men also wear non-white shoes. Choice of colour changes with the season, and consumers prefer darker coloured shoes in winter (Trinkhaus 1991).

Similarly, in regard to food, the colour we see foretells the flavour we would taste. In ancient Egypt, candy makers used to add natural extracts and wine to improve product appearance and enhance consumer appeal (Downham and Collins 2000). Consumers often perceive the flavour of ice cream or cake by their colour. In an Argentinian study, colour was found to be an important factor affecting the acceptability of cracker type biscuits (Martínez et al. 2002). Food colour affects the consumer's ability to correctly identify flavour and form distinct flavour profiles and preferences, and dominates other flavour information sources including labelling and taste (Garber et al. 2000), implying that altering the food colour could affect consumer preferences. However, it is not known how effective novel food colours could be in the international markets.

Colours evoke strong product associations and category imagery. In the U.S., blue is associated with toys, health foods, dairy foods, desserts, and financial services; red is related to toys, pizzas, meat entrees; silver is related to dairy foods; green to health foods, vegetable entrees, toys and financial services; yellow to dairy foods, health foods, desserts, toys; and pink to cosmetics and Barbie doll (Cheskin and Masten 1987). Trends in colour preferences have shown undulation over time (cf. House & Garden 1970; Cheskin & Masten 1987) though it is not clear if the reported changes were fashions or fads or new temporal associations shown by the consumers. Remember that today's sensation can become tomorrow's blank stare.

Colour is useful in product differentiation and in creating a different value from the environment or the competition. A marketer could launch a product colour that is typical of the product category, or differentiate from the category by using additional colour cues or delinking the relationship between colour and the product's perceived quality or flavour. Gatorade has used this effectively by launching novel coloured product lines such as Gatorade's Blue Raspberry Drink in blue, Glacier Freeze in a strong blue, Whitewater Splash in a clear strong green and Alpine Snow in a semi-translucent white (Garber et al. 2000). Pepsi has left the traditional red colour associated with the soft drinks and tried to create new colour associations by choosing blue as its colour (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). Apple has differentiated itself in the personal computers by first launching a teal iMac in 1998, and then a range of five fruity colours (grape, lime, tangerine, blueberry, strawberry) in 1999 to address the psychogenic heterogeneity of its target market (Madden et al. 2000; Parmar 2004). In 2002, Masterfoods ran an online global colour vote participated by 10 million people around the world, to add purple to its existing mix of red, orange, blue, brown, yellow, and green chocolate candies-M&Ms (Parmar 2004).

Though transparent products are intended to be associated with more favourable attributes such as purity and mildness, yet they run the risk of being perceived as little more than water. In the 1990s, some firms attempted to

seek a competitive edge by eliminating colour in their products. Palmolive launched a transparent Palmolive Sensitive Skin Liquid Washing detergent, Pepsi introduced Crystal Pepsi while Coca-Cola countered with Tab Clear (Stanton et al. 1994). Crystal Pepsi was identical to regular Pepsi in all respects but PepsiCo ignored the possible interaction of colour and flavour. Clearness meant "non-cola" flavour expectations for the cola-drinkers and the experiment was unsuccessful. Thus, it is advisable to select, modify, intensify, or standardise the colours *commonly* associated with particular products, such as green for peppermint and brown for cola (Garber et al. 2000). Marketers must remember that social conformity is an important factor in consumer decision-making. Research confirms that consumers often follow the subjective norms in their colour choices for specific product categories, particularly in high involvement decisions (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999).

The cultural context of the product's colour often gets lost in this process. Many of the Americans associate red with soft drinks whereas yellow is related to soft drinks in Korea and Japan, and brown in China (Jacobs et al. 1991), explaining to some extent the marketing problems faced by Coca-Cola in these countries. A firm of water sports products failed in Malaysia because the company's key colour, green, was associated with sickness and danger. Pepsi lost its dominant market share in Southeast Asia to Coca-Cola when it changed the colours of its coolers and vending equipment from deep "regal" blue to light "ice" blue, a colour associated with death and mourning in Southeast Asia (Neal et al. 2002). In the early 1990s, Samsonite offered suitcases in purple and black in the Mexican market where both are associated with death and mourning (Parmar 2004). Similarly, when United Airlines inaugurated its concierge services for first-class passengers on its Pacific routes, each concierge wore a white carnation - an oriental symbol of death that shocked most of the Chinese business travellers (Neal et al. 2002).

Revealing the self: Colour signals individual personality and self-image. People choose the colours of their cars, homes, clothes and even sport shoes depending on how they wish to present themselves (Trinkaus 1991). The colour choice could be consistent or complementary to the desired self-image, and colour effects must be considered in new product- or brand development (Madden et al. 2000). Kerfoot et al. (2003) observed that the choice of colour was also related to the multiplicity of purchases being made. However, to what extent does a product package or brand colour influence a customer's self-image and trial or adoption of a product remains to be explored further.

Colour represents local customs and taboos in some cultures and exercises potent socialization effects. There are colour associations with festivals, holidays and consumer rituals. Blue is associated with Hanukkah, New Year; red with Christmas, New Year; green with Christmas; black with Halloween; orange with Halloween and Thanksgiving (Cheskin and Masten 1987), red and pink with the Valentine's Day, and team colours with sports events (Kaufman-Scarborough 2001). In most Asian countries, white skin is associated with positive values such as beauty, class and an upscale lifestyle whereas black skin is related with hard labour and toil. This colour association with consumer self has been seized by multinationals such as Avon, Beiersdorf and Unilever in India, causing an annual growth rate of about 20% in the Indian skin whitener market (Kotabe and Helsen 2001). Conversely, when Pepsodent tried to sell its toothpaste in Southeast Asia, it stressed that the toothpaste helped enhance white teeth, ignoring that in this region chewing betel nuts and keeping darkly stained teeth was socially prestigious and a status symbol. As a result, the advertisement was ineffective and the colour connotation in its slogan "Wonder, where the yellow went" was viewed by many as a racial slur (Schiffman et al. 2001). It is vital that the colours of products, packages, advertisements and slogans convey correct meanings in the target countries.

Revealing the Country of Origin: Choungourian (1968) has shown that colour associations are not identical in all nationalities. He found that red was the most preferred colour by Americans, green by the Lebanese and blue-green by Iranians and Kuwaitis. Jacobs et al. (1991) found red to be most strongly related to China, purple to France, green to both France and Italy, and while the American subjects associated the U.S. with blue, other Asian subjects related her with red. Similarly, orange is the favourite colour in the Netherlands, for her monarchy is the House of Orange.

Colour combinations or specifically coloured packaging are often used in highlighting the country of origin of products in the foreign markets. Madden et al. (2000) found that colours are paired with other colours of consistent or complementary meanings in different cultures. Green was paired with yellow in Canada, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, with blue in Colombia, with white in Austria and also with red in China and Taiwan. Blue was paired primarily with white and yellow in the aforesaid countries. Such colour combinations could be useful in making appropriate branding, packaging, or other promotional decisions in the target markets. However, contemporary research on use of colour pairs and associating national colours to products (packages) or brands is limited.

Winning with the right package: Adapting package design to the local culture is useful (Berg-Weitzel and Laar 2001), and colour associations to packages may travel across countries. For instance, it was found that most consumers in the U.S., Japan, South Korea and China associated green with a can of vegetables and yellow with a box of candies or laundry detergent. However, there was little agreement on products such as soaps, cigarettes and headache remedies. Most Americans perceived a cigarette pack to be black, whereas Chinese viewed it as brown and South Koreans and Japanese viewed it as gray (Jacobs et al. 1991). A brightly coloured package is likely to receive more attention than a dull package (Neal et al. 2002), and it was observed that packages for deodorants for women in Hofstede's (1991) feminine cultures used greater contrast and brighter colours, whereas they used soft and harmonious colours and low contrast in masculine societies (Berg-Weitzel and Laar 2001).

Colouring the Brand Identity and Corporate Image:
Colour makes the brand. Moser (2003) illustrates that three factors namely the level of sophistication of the colours, distinctiveness within category, and ability to elicit emotional response influence the colour choices. *Simple* colours are vibrant and intense as seen in their use as traffic signs and by Toys "R" Us and McDonald's, while *sophisticated* colours denote elegance and intimate communication as seen in their use by Laura Ashley, Armani, Tiffany and Jaguar. Colour distinctiveness within category or '*visual branding,*' allows the product to stand out from the crowd. Oil companies, car rental companies, and package-goods companies use their corporate colours for visual and brand differentiation, such as Chevron uses red, white and blue, British Petroleum uses green and yellow, Shell uses yellow and red, Union 76 uses orange and blue, and so is the signage of car rentals such as Hertz, Avis, National and Budget. Also, colour facilitates '*emotional branding,*' and companies could use colours associated with specific emotions to make the consumers feel in a particular way.

Colour communicates the corporate position. For instance, blue stands for solid, responsible, financial services, green for innovative, caring organisations and yellow for young, bright and exciting firms in the United States (Cheskin & Masten 1987; Kaufman-Scarborough 2001). Whereas blue is the corporate colour in the U.S., red is the winning business colour in East Asia. Enterprises such as Singapore Telecom, Singapore Technologies, Wuthelam Holdings and Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore use red. Blue is limited in logos of companies doing business related to sea, such as the logo of Sembawang Group and Singapore Navy. Others use professional blue in the corporate name but not in the actual logo. For instance, the name of Singapore Airlines is written in blue but the crane logo is in brownish yellow (Schmitt and Pan 1994).

Colours are powerful cues that facilitate brand recall (Tavassoli and Han 2002). For instance, red is associated with Coke, Sara Lee, Mickey Mouse; blue with IBM, Pepsi, Kenner toys, Nabisco desserts; pink with Barbie Doll; green and white, and silver with Schweppes and Canada Dry; and green with 7-Up (Cheskin and Masten 1987). Colour could be an effective independent variable in managing image consistency, and strategic use of colour could create specific associations across markets (Madden et al. 2000). Nevertheless, colours have muted associations with top clothing brands and it is difficult to use colour as a cue to recognise a particular fashion brand (Kerfoot et al. 2003).

It is suggested that visual brand identifiers are integrated in memory more easily with Chinese brand names, whereas auditory brand identifiers are integrated in memory more easily with English brand names. Accordingly the Chinese consumers are reported to be more sensitive to visual features of the written words and are influenced more by a colour match among brand names. Such visual features create associations between brands, between the parent brand and its extensions, and in case of piracy between two distinct brands (Tavassoli and Han 2002).

Visual-auditory synesthesia (cf. Marks 1997) could have powerful application in marketing. Implying that if a natural relationship exists between colours and sounds or particular musical instruments, or if verbal arousal could lead to visual arousal and particular colour imagery is evoked through words *(coloured vowels)* or auditory cues such as music or sounds *(coloured music or hearing)*, then it is likely that matching words in the body-copy or package or signage, or jingles act as stimuli or prompts, generating positive imagery and affect in the consumers. Experimental synesthesia may be induced with visual or auditory stimuli to trial its impact on affect and purchase intent, and should reveal if particular consumers or products exhibit synesthetic effects via visual or auditory route.

Colouring the Atmospherics:
The choice of colour is important for service and retail marketers. The aesthetic factor of atmospherics is the silent language in marketing communication and colour constitutes an essential visual dimension thereof (Kotler 1974; Kerfoot et al. 2003). Grieve (1991) argues that colour association is context bound and varies from one person or

situation to another. Moser (2003) suggests that certain colours trigger emotional responses, such as pink in hospitals and schools has a passive, soothing effect, green rooms have a calming effect on talk show guests, and red has an intense, gripping effect. In a cross-cultural study, Jacobs et al. (1991) observed that brown was most often associated with restaurants and gray with hospitals, factories, government buildings and museums. Though some colours such as avocado/lime green rage are known to induce nausea and forbidden from aircraft interiors, it is not certain if the spatial effects and associations of colour are biological, social, or simply conventional in origin.

Colours act as surrogate cues in the retail environment. For instance, outdoor colours such as blue and green are associated with sports goods stores and red is deemed inappropriate for stimulating the approach behaviour in that context (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). The store personnel or the staff in their appearance and apparel also carries the message. Visual imagery is critical in positioning of banks, hotels, airlines, health, legal and other professional services. A cross-cultural understanding of colour relationship to merchandise display, point of sales or architecture of the retail environment is essential as the services sector expands to the foreign markets.

Store interiors and exteriors can be designed to cue or reinforce purchase behaviour and brand identity. It has been found that colours influence consumer's physical attraction to the store exterior as well as reaction within the store. *Warm* colours such as red, orange and yellow are said to be physically stimulating and arousing, whereas *cool* colours such as blue and green are calm and relaxing (Bellizzi et al. 1983; Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). An apt example is the use of red colour by casinos to stimulate gambling (Grossman and Wisenblit 1999). Bellizzi et al. (1983) have found that warm colours are better than cool colours in attracting the customers physically into a retail store or display area, and are particularly suitable for store windows, entrances and point-of-purchase displays, but are viewed as tense, threatening and disruptive for the consumer decision making inside the store. By contrast, cool colours go well with the display and are more appropriate when customers face difficult purchase decisions.

Colouring the Advertising Messages:
Colour is instrumental in attracting consumer attention to media advertisements. Rossiter and Bellman (2004) have argued that colour in print messages strongly reinforces attention, and a full-colour newspaper Ad has almost the same probability of attention as a 30-second TV commercial (0.65). Hornik (1980) argues that the creative part of advertising should be adapted to the culture and marketing mix for each foreign market. Research has shown that it is effective to adapt execution of advertising to local preferences as cultural dimensions influence the way people perceive and accept different advertising forms (Berg-Weitzel and Laar 2001). Sparkman and Austin (1980) suggest that median sales gains, on reduced price items, of around 41% might be realised by addition of one colour to black and white in retail newspaper advertising. Lee and Barnes (1989) have observed that advertisers tended to show products in similar colours in certain categories and avoided creating any incongruence. They found that product and colour of the print advertisements, and product and type of the magazine were correlated. It was also found that there was difference in use of colour in racially oriented magazine advertising but not so between gender-sensitive magazines. Note that colour advertisement is expensive and the choice of a colour copy would depend on the size, position, contrast and nature of the message, as well as the product, the target audience, and the medium itself.

Colours reflect consumer values in advertisements. For instance, Volkswagen showed a black sheep in a flock in Italy to portray the VW Golf owner as an independent self-assured person. A black sheep in Italy is the symbol of independence and going one's own way whereas in other cultures it is a symbol of the outcast (Schiffman et al. 2001). An example of using colour to create a universal appeal is provided in the global Ad campaign "The United Colors of Benetton." Though the kids vary in their clothes and skin colour, Benetton shows a picture of three children, a black, a caucasian and an oriental, all sticking out their tongues, implying that despite different skin colours the children exhibit the same universal trait as all have pink tongues (Blackwell et al. 1993). Similarly, the 2004 Ad launch of iPod in Australia has used several bright colors aimed at pulling the younger audience.

DISCUSSION
Gaps in table 1 and figure 1, and the preceding paragraphs indicate that good work lies ahead in this area to energize marketing communications in the 21st Century. The meanings given to some colours may be pancultural, some regional and some unique to specific cultures (Madden et al. 2000), and it is imperative to investigate the meaning and importance of chosen colour in the target market before launch of the product or a promotion campaign (Jacobs et al. 1991). An interpretative model of colour application in marketing is proposed (figure 2). Definitive colour associations and meanings, differences in gender, age and demographic preferences, and the interaction effects

between color and the object/context would have to be determined. Conjoint analysis, word association, semantic scales, projective techniques, eye tracking, and focus groups are just some of the tools that could be employed.

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┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ COLOUR   │◄────►│ OBJECT/CONTEXT           │
└──────────┘      │ Product, Brand/Logo, Package,│
     │            │ Advert, Store layout     │
     │            └──────────────────────────┘
     │
     │            ┌──────────────────────────┐
     │            │ SUBJECTIVE NORMS         │
     │            │ Values-Aesthetics-Lifestyle│
     │            │ Referents & Social Groups│
     │            └──────────────────────────┘
     │◄───────────
     │            ┌──────────────────────────┐
     │            │ DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS      │
     │            │ Language; Religion; Gender;│
     │            │ Age                      │
     │            └──────────────────────────┘
     ▼
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ PERCEPTION   │◄─│ PHYSICAL:                │
└──────────────┘  │ Colour-sighted or Colour-blind│
     │            │ PSYCHOLOGICAL:           │
     │            │ Meaning & Association    │
     │            └──────────────────────────┘
     ▼
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ PURCHASE &   │─►│ Sales Revenue; Brand Equity;│
│ CONSUMPTION  │  │ Corporate Image          │
│ BEHAVIOR     │  └──────────────────────────┘
└──────────────┘
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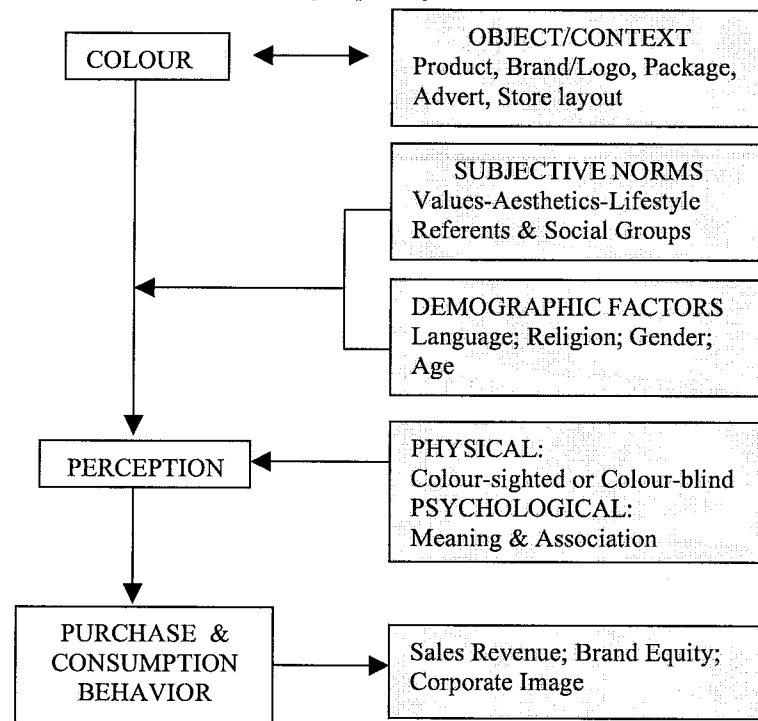
FIGURE 2: A HYPOTHETICAL MODEL OF COLOUR APPLICATION IN MARKETING
(Arrows show the direction of influence)

Discovery of right colour-culture clusters to match consumer associations, identify potential intermarket segments, and develop a cross-cultural interpretative colour theory in marketing is essential. Thus, it is propositioned that, a.) cross-cultural perspective of colour research and application is imperative for developing global marketing strategies, b.) the choice of colour in making global or local marketing decisions is determined by the cultural values, marketing objectives and desired customer relationship levels in the target market(s), and c.) culturally and structurally stable branding and packaging models maximize marketing goals of the firm.

Colour enables an individual to discriminate among competing sensory stimuli and the case of a colour-deficient consumer deserves mention here. Marketers have often ignored genetic or acquired colour deficiencies that may render the use of colour as an ineffective cue (Kaufman-Scarborough 2000, 2001). Kaufman-Scarborough (2001) has argued that a message with colour-coded information would be irrelevant for colour-deficient consumers, especially in electronic and digital media, suggesting that messages should be easy to decode and free of reliance on consumer's colour vision abilities, and where it is necessary to provide information in colour, it should be done in print. It remains to be seen how best the marketers could reach out the colour deficient consumers.

With the internationalisation of markets and growing consumer demand in the emerging economies, increased competition is likely to emerge from native businesses that enjoy a better understanding of the local environment and could upgrade or expand their nature and quality of operations in future. The discussion on nature, perception, meanings, associations, and effects of colour in marketing is likely to grow and the decision to pursue a customised or a standardised marketing strategy may rely on whether the meanings or associations of colour are similar or different across cultures. A dynamic culture-sensitive approach in colour research and its strategic use will enhance corporate image, predict purchase behavior and reinforce customer relationships, allowing foreign businesses to establish value-based marketing systems and develop a competitive advantage in the emerging markets.

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