

Case Study: The Color of Emotion in Fashion Advertising

Overview

Studies have long shown that different colors impact people's moods and communicate different impressions. How does the use of color in advertising impact a person's emotional response to the ad? A qualitative study explored emotional response to color in fashion advertisements to better understand the dynamics of color's emotional impact.

Methodology

Focus groups incorporating the AdSAM emotional response measure were used to explore the emotional impact of color. Six different fashion ads were presented to a sample of three groups of ten girls in their late teens. Each group was presented six ads with four repeats, making it ten fashion ads. The repeats were presented in different colors from the original six. The colors used were grey, orange, red, purple, black, yellow, brown, white, pink, green, and blue. Participants were first asked to indicate their immediate emotional response to the ads using AdSAM, and then discuss their feelings with other participants and the moderator.

Results

The study revealed several interesting findings, particularly in respect to what people said versus how they truly responded emotionally. Not surprisingly, color evoked various emotional responses and had different meanings to different people. For example, when the color red was demonstrated through the Gucci ad, some respondents equated the color with anger and pain, whereas others associated the color with passion and joy. Interestingly, on numerous occasions the same individual often had different emotions for the same color.

What was revealing was that colors evoked emotions in individuals without them knowing it. The AdSAM results demonstrated that color is an influential component of advertisements, but in the verbal discussion not many respondents acknowledged color as an important component of the overall composition of the ad. When discussing their reactions and thoughts on color, some respondents felt that color had no effect on their emotions. However, when comparing their thoughts to their AdSAM responses it was clear that different colors evoked different emotions.

In addition, individuals often believed that color had no impact on their feelings toward the ads, but the results demonstrated otherwise. For example, a Ralph Lauren ad was shown in blue, yellow, and pink. Some participants mentioned that color was not

important and did not make them feel any differently towards the ad. However, the yellow and pink showed some emotional response of great pleasure and excitement, whereas the blue showed no response in this category, indicating that color does have an influence on emotional response to the ad.

An important finding was that participants often expressed their positive or negative feelings toward a color or ad but their AdSAM scores demonstrated the opposite feelings. For example, some participants said they did not like brighter colors, but their AdSAM scores indicated positive responses toward brighter colors.

The results of the study also indicated that the colors participants enjoy wearing may not evoke the same responses when seen advertised. The color black is an example of this; participants felt that black was a more versatile color, it made them appear and feel slimmer, more trendy, and gave them a more serious look and sharper image. However, when presented with a black ad, they did not feel the same excitement or interest in it.

Finally, colors need to be relevant to the product advertised. The same color can evoke positive and/or negative emotions depending on the type advertisement it is represented through. The overall composition of ads seemed to influence emotional response.

Implications

It is clear that colors evoke emotional responses that can impact the way people react to certain advertisements. These responses and their links to attitudes and preferences, however, are often subtle and not readily or even accurately acknowledged by people.

Methodologies that rely on people to verbalize their reactions may not fully or accurately uncover the impact that color has on a person's response to an ad. By incorporating the AdSAM measure, however, researchers can more effectively understand how the use of color can be leveraged and how it may impact consumer reactions. This type of information can be particularly valuable for creative development.