

Topic: The correlation between colours and interpretations in book cover illustrations

Inquiry Question: Could the use of colours in the illustrations enhance the interpretation of a book?

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Section: K

Could the use of colours in the illustrations enhance the interpretation of a book?

We live in a modern, colourful and contemporary world that is mainly governed by visuals and aesthetics that are representative of a brand or identity. The world as we know it is inundated with these aspects, whether it is on billboards, company logos, web designs or on book cover designs. These visuals create a bridge between the audience and the intention or motivation of an idea. The incentive of an illustration isn't merely to add a visual appeal or visual attraction to a notion, but to convey a connection between several other elements in context to arrive at a conclusion that is more convincing and revolutionary through a visual. Book cover designs, for example, play a crucial role in the incentive of the context of a book. Therefore, as a designer it is important to keep in mind the visual hierarchy, the colour schemes and plenty of other components that may set a precedent for the book.

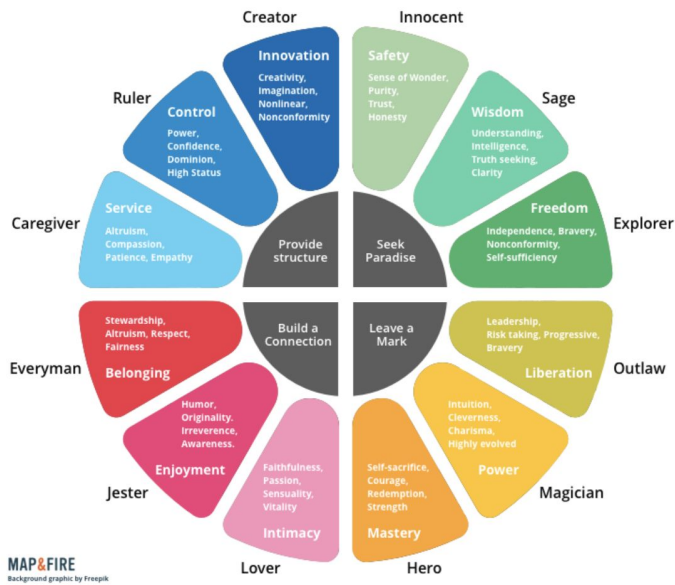
As an avid reader from a very young age, I always marvelled at the illustrations and designs on the covers of the books that I read, spending too much time trying to gauge the genre or premise of the book by the colour schemes and palettes of the illustrations displayed on them. As I grew older, I realised that the colours that make up these designs play a significant role in conveying meanings and messages that otherwise cannot be portrayed via an alternative, such as in written form. Furthermore, when it comes to these designs, a lot of thought is put to the colour schemes. In order to conduct this research, it is important to consider the symbolic meaning that colour theory possesses in the layouts of illustrations and what these may represent with regards to the genre, inference and textual content of the book. The purpose of this essay is to understand how different colours and combinations of several colours subconsciously exude motives, incentives, and evokes emotion in the audience for a book before even reading it. Colours in illustrations are equally an important facet in the making of the book and undertake a significant role in the visual inference of it, too.

Consumers buy books based on their personal genre preferences and needs. When it comes to picking out certain books that are appropriate for their taste, they are most likely to adhere to books with colours that exude a certain ambience for the book before reading it. This is where colour theory comes in. Colour theory in design context aims to provide an aesthetic appeal for the book as well as communicate a message on both, a psychological level and a visual level. Communicating motifs and ideas through colour theory enables designers to acquire harmony in their designs as well as radiate emotions and establish an idea of the book in order to create user experience. According to Bleicher (2011) there are five main colour schemes that influence the audience to buy books as well as help designers create harmony within their illustrations: Monochromatic, analogous, complementary, triadic and tetradic colour schemes. These colour schemes also have an emotional effect on the audience which creates an interaction between the audience, the designer herself, the textual content and the illustrations. This can also be referenced through Sir Isaac Newton's colour wheel (1704) that states three categories of the different types and combinations of colours: Primary, secondary, and tertiary ones. The significance of the five main colour schemes and Isaac Newton's colour wheel will be highlighted further in the essay along with several other corresponding ideas.

Argument 1: Certain colour schemes attributed to books can be representative of their genres

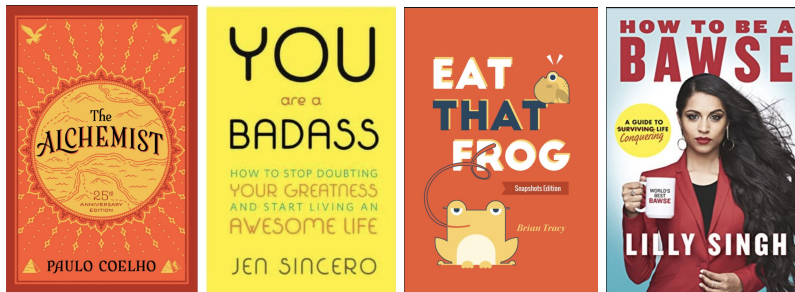
When creating brands, designers know that colour plays one of the most important roles and sets an example for what that brand has to offer. The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung proposed the Brand Archetype colour wheel, consisting of twelve different archetypes attributed to twelve different colours. He suggested that these colours are representative of certain moods and emanate a personality. By abiding by this colour wheel, one can understand how colours are strategically used in the book designing industry in order to create a visual plot.

The Brand Archetype Colour Wheel



As displayed on the left, colours have the capability of possessing an identity. They convey a character and personify those characteristics in the form of colour schemes that impart textual knowledge and information in a book. Therefore the relationship between a particular genre and the colour palette of the illustrations on them can be bidirectional. For example, when considering the genre of self-help books, the main incentive and motive of the author, as well as the designer is to make sure the consumer has the full user experience. Self-help books are supposed to make you feel good about yourself and make you want to better yourself in a way, therefore the two archetypes that could be attributed to this genre could be “Hero” and

“Magician”. These colours, as expressed on the brand archetype colour wheel exude the characteristics of someone who wants to emanate and embody the role of a courageous and strong person through their highly evolved power and charisma. Therefore the colours of this genre could encompass hues that vary from orange to yellow. Needless to say, some of these colour schemes also overlap with others in the colour wheel like the blue in the archetype of the “Ruler”. This archetype qualifies as a personality that exudes control over oneself and leadership, which can also be attributed to a self-help book. As you can see, below are a few examples of the book cover designs of the best self-help books in the span of the past decade that abide by these colour schemes:



Incorporating other colours such as pink, green or purple shades would not have done justice to this genre and therefore would not have been able to encompass the premise of the books in a more coherent manner. Similarly, in other genres such as romance, designers tend to involve colours like pink and red that conform to the archetypes of “Jester” and “Lover” as these books convey the themes of romanticism, passion and vitality. Below are more examples of some of the bestselling books published in the past decade encompassing the genre of romance:



These colour schemes make the book look more cohesive and holistic in nature as its representative of its archetype and genre.

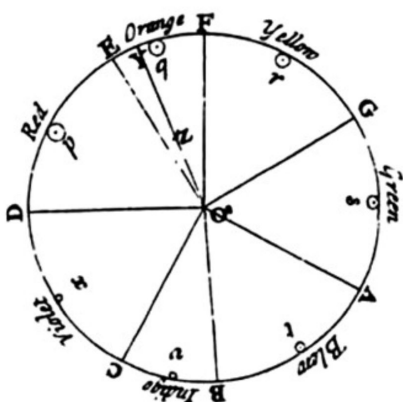
Argument 2: Colours on book illustrations set an ambience and evoke emotions

Colour as a component of book cover designing plays a vital role in the interpretation of the emotions it can evoke in the audience. Warm colours and cool colours create contrasting effects on the audience as well as bright colours when compared to muted ones, hence colour can impact people’s mood and perceptions in staggering manners. For example, darker shades as the dominant colour scheme tend to create a more authoritative, serious or mystical vibe for the book, whereas vibrant colours tend to attract the younger audience more. A psychological study conducted by Kleijnen, J et. al. in 1996 found that patients who consumed warm colored placebo pills reported it to be more effective than cool coloured pills. Another study conducted in Tokyo showed that by merely installing blue street lights in the city showed shocking results in the street crime rates as they dropped, because blue exudes a peaceful and mellow ambience. Furthermore, research conducted by psychologists Suminas et. al. at Vilnius University’s library found that people between the ages of 18-35 prefer book covers with cool colours whereas men from ages 56+ tend to choose book covers with warmer colors. Additionally, the more graphically colorful and well thought out the color scheme, the more likely it is for people between the age of 18-35 to choose the book. This shows that the reader’s choice of book selection is at least partially influenced by the colours it has. It’s because these colours exude a type of mood psychologically. For example, red can represent energy, passion and enthusiasm, whereas pink can portray youth, emotion and innocence.

Argument 3: The role of colour theory colour schemes in book cover designs is crucial in order to create visual balance

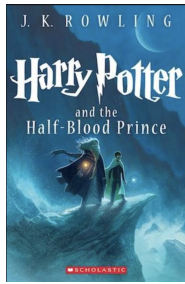
The concept of colour theory was created by Sir Isaac Newton in 1704. The theory suggested a series of rules and principles of colour that enable harmony and balance within designs and illustrations. The colour wheel that he proposed establishes a relationship between the colours and how they interact with each other to create visual equilibrium. He suggested three combinations of colours on the wheel that eventually end up creating a series of different colour schemes: primary colours, secondary colours and tertiary colors.

Sir Isaac Newton’s Colour Wheel



On the left, we’re able to understand how the colour wheel organises its colours. There are five main colour schemes. Monochromatic colours scheme uses multiple shades of one colour, complementary colour schemes are made of two colours that are opposite to one another on the wheel, analogous is made up of colour adjacent to one another on the wheel; triadic involves three different colour equally spaced

out on the wheel and lastly, tetradic colour schemes involves two pairs of complementary colours. Below are examples of each colour scheme on the covers of books.



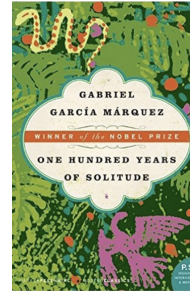
Monochromatic



Complementary
(Red and Green)



Analogous
(Shades of orange)



Triadic



Tetradic

Because of the obvious balance and harmony among the colours in each of these colour schemes, it is easy for the viewer to not be distracted or overwhelmed by too many elements on the cover, the colours create a visual effect that allows them to perceive all the colours on the illustration as one cohesive element instead of several scattered elements.

In conclusion, with these points, we can conclude that colour as an aspect of book cover designs and illustrations plays a vital role in creating an atmosphere, visual appeal and visual balance and style within the novel. It sets a precedent, exudes moods, harmony, and emotion, all subconsciously and psychologically. Certain colours schemes have higher recall value and create better mental representations in the audience, hence attracting a wider population. Colour is everywhere, interrelated in our lives, it helps us make decisions, guides us and creates an ambience. The impact of colour as an element is more impactful than one can decipher.

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