

A Social Semiotic Study of Color Psychology in Junk Food Restaurant Posters

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ABSTRACT

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Posters are a visual medium that can quickly capture the attention of a target audience, convey key information, and leave a lasting impression. They can be a highly effective means of advertising and promoting a product, service or event. There are different signs in every poster. This study is concerned with analyzing the psychological effects of colors in junk food restaurant posters. It aims to explore the potential uses of color psychology in junk food restaurant posters. In turn, the data are taken from the official websites of KFC, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Wendy's and Subway fast food restaurants. Colors have a positive role on the feelings and mood of the customer. Consequently, junk food posters employ different colors to convey a message that will attract consumers to try the product.

KEYWORDS: Social semiotics, Semiotics, Posters, Junk food, Color psychology

1. Introduction

People use language as a media of their communication. Both words and signs are used by people to interact with each other. Semiotics studies the sign and symbols. According to Barthes (1967:87), the term "semiotic" refers to any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits, images, musical sounds, gestures, objects and the complex connections between all of these, which form the ritual or public entertainment's content. Wardaugh (1972:3) states that "everyone could express their opinions and their knowledge through the language". Images used in advertising are referred to as advertisements.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Semiotics

Etymologically speaking, the term "semiotics" stems from the Greek root "seme", as in semeiotikos, which means an interpreter of signs. Semiotics is a science that focuses on the interpretation of signs and how these signs work (Cobley and Jansz, 1999:4).

Semiotics is the field that studies the life of signs within society. It would be a part of social psychology and hence of general psychology. It is termed semiology (from Greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology, in turn, would elucidate what constitutes signs and what laws govern them. Since science does not exist yet, no one can say what it would be, but it has a right to exist, a place staked out in advance (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran, 2016:17). Besides, Saussure clarified that the study of signs can be divided into two branches: the synchronic and the diachronic. The former refers to the study of signs at present and the latter to the analysis of how signs change in form and meaning over time (Beasley and Danesi, 2002:26).

Semiotics is concerned with the study of sign systems. There are no big differences between semiology and semiotics. The former emerged from the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the latter is associated with the work of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who gave it the name "semiotics" (Lyons, 1978:96). Eco defines semiotics as "everything that can be taken as a sign" (1976:7).

It is devoted to the study not only of what individuals refer to as "signs" in everyday communication, instead, it involves anything which "stands for" something else. However, contemporary semioticians do not study signs in isolation. For them, sign is a part of semiotic "sign – systems" (such as a medium or genre). They study how

meanings are formed and how reality is represented. Besides, signs can take different forms such as images, sounds, words, gestures, and objects (Chandler, 2007:2).

2.2 Social Semiotics

Social semiotics is a term used to represent an analytic tradition that derives from the works of the linguist Michael Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic* (1976) and cultural theorists Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress' *Social Semiotics* (1988). It is used to refer to several approaches which associate semiotic range with social dimensions. In turn, such approaches can be used to analyse the full range of signifying systems and practices that establish all forms of culture (Bal, 1991:73).

Social semiotics is a synthesis of several modern approaches which aim to study the social meaning and social action. The most common one is semiotics. Semiotics aims to study our social resources that can be used to communicate meanings. It was established as part of the effort to find a scientific basis for linguistics. It is used to study all systems of signs and symbols (including gestures, pictures, even hairstyles) and how such systems can be used to communicate meanings. Linguistics covers one special case of language and so is part of semiotics. The name "social semiotics" is used to recognize the new synthetic theory from more traditional approaches to semiotics which is termed formal semiotics. In turn, formal semiotics is primarily interested in the systematic study of the systems of signs themselves. Social semiotics includes formal semiotics and goes on to ask how individuals use signs to create the life of a community. Social semiotics is not new in trying to unite the study of human behavior, specially meaning-making behavior (speaking, writing, reasoning, drawing, gesturing, etc.), with the study of society. There is a long tradition of doing this in cultural anthropology and ethnography. Although many anthropologists and ethnographers have taken the role of language too much for granted, they have still made great contributions to the study of symbols and symbolic actions (Lemke, 1990:183).

Social semiotics is the study of the social dimensions of meaning, and the power of human processes of signification and interpretation (known as semiosis) in shaping individuals and societies. Social semiotics focuses on social meaning-making practices of all types, whether visual, verbal, or aural (Thibault, 1991:54). These different systems for meaning-making or possible "channels" (e.g. speech, writing, images) are known as semiotic modes (or semiotic registers). Semiotic modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural, and musical resources for communication. They also include various "multimodal" ensembles of any of these modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001:80).

2.3 Color Psychology

Color is a form of non-verbal communication. It is mainly related to an effect. It appears to be the first thing the customers notice. It is used to represent people, places, and things. It is also used to denote classes of people as well as more general ideas (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:229). They influence a person's mood, emotions, feelings, sensations, perceptions and even certain actions.

Color psychology is a science that studies the relationship between colors and human psychology (Minxhozi, 2016: 78). It helps to understand how certain colors affect human behavior, mood and physiological processes (Bailey, 2019: 65). It focuses on how individuals understand color and how it makes them feel. The colors that are used in junk food restaurant posters have specific denotation. The red color tends to encourage happiness. It is also an attention grabber and stimulates the appetite. (ibid)

The yellow color is the color of success, achievement, and triumph. It is associated with abundance and prosperity, luxury, prestige and sophisticated value, and elegance. Yellow is the color of optimism, a completing color that conveys youthful and fresh energy. It is also an appetite stimulant, just like red. White is the color of purity, innocence, wholeness, and completion. Green is the color of balance and growth. It is an emotionally positive color, giving receivers the ability to love and nurture themselves and others unconditionally. Black denotes strength and authority. It is considered to be a very formal, elegant, and prestigious color. (ibid)

3.Data Collection and Description

The sample of the present study is limited to five junk food restaurant posters. The researcher used a qualitative method to analyze the data in this research. The data are taken from the official websites of KFC (<https://www.kfc.com/>), McDonald's (<https://www.mcdonalds.com/>), Pizza Hut (<https://www.pizzahut.com/>), Subway (<https://www.subway.com/>) and Wendy's (<https://www.wendy.com/>) fast food restaurants to reflect the

psychological effects of colors on customers' mood. Such posters are known to be rich material for linguistic conventions and socio-cultural behaviors which are visually employed within those signs. They are used to attract consumers to try the product. As such, these posters are taken to be analyzed in the current study. The other interesting reason is the availability of such data for analysis.

4.Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of five junk food restaurant posters.

Data 1



Figure 1: Wendy's Poster

The poster shown in data 1 shows Wendy's product. Wendy's is one of the American international fast food restaurants that was founded by Dave Thomas. The poster contains several colors. Color is the most important product-intrinsic sensory cue when it comes to setting people's expectations regarding the likely taste and flavor of food and drink. Red is the most dominant color utilized in the above poster. It is used to stimulate the appetite. It is also effective at grabbing attention. Fast food chains utilize various colors to influence potential customers on a psychological level. The red color tends to make people feel more hungry and impulsive. The red color also increases our heart rate, which raises your blood pressure and metabolism. Accordingly, the increased metabolism makes you hungrier, that is why major fast food chains have red color schemes. The red color can also be associated with passion and love. Hence, it is frequently used by marketers and branding experts across many different brands.

Data 2



Figure 2: Subway's Poster

Subway is an American multinational fast food restaurant franchise that specializes in submarine sandwiches (subs) and wraps. The Subway slogan "Eat Fresh" is intended to indicate that their toppings are indeed fresh. The poster shown in data 2 shows Subway's product. It contains several colors. The most dominant color is green. The green color is the main color associated with being fresh, healthy, natural, organic or vegetarian, and is now a symbol of health and well-being. It is the most common color in the natural world. It is a soothing shade representing freshness. It increases relaxation and contentment. It is associated with plants and nature. It is used to ensure that the product is made from healthy components. Accordingly, subway fast food restaurants use this color to ensure that their product are fresh and it is made from healthy component or ingredients.

Data 3



Figure 3: Pizza Hut's Poster

Pizza hut is an American restaurant chain and international franchise that offers different styles of pizza along with side dishes including salad, pasta, buffalo wings, breadsticks, and garlic bread. The poster shown in data 3 shows Pizza hut's product. It contains several colors. The most dominant color is yellow. It is the fastest color to be processed by the human brain. Yellow connotes different meanings. It is an appetite stimulant. It also has a very optimistic feel to it. It transmits a sense of positivity and happiness because of its resonance with the sun's electric energy. It can also stimulate appetite and generate excitement. Besides, it can increase energy and trigger feelings of happiness. As such, the purpose of using this color is to convey the message that the product is delicious and make the customers feel happy when they taste it.

Data 4



Figure 4: McDonald's Poster

The McDonald's poster shown in data 4 contains several colors. The most dominant color is black. The color "black" evokes a range of emotions in humans. For some people, black evokes mystery or fear, whereas others may associate it with power and sophistication. Black connotes ideas of luxury and exclusivity. Higher-end brands tend to use black in their products as to connote elegance. black portrays a sense of simplicity and sophistication. It increases people's perception of value and high quality. It is used in McDonald's Posters to convey the message that the product has high quality. Black can also mean security. So, for companies that are trying to portray a sense of security to customers, a simple black could be beneficial. As such, McDonald fast food restaurants use this color to ensure that the product is made by someone who has knowledge of the good components of the product.

Data 5



Figure 5: KFC's Poster

KFC is one of the most famous fast food restaurants in the world. The first KFC restaurant was built in Corbin street, Kentucky. Besides selling fried chicken, KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) also sells burgers, but they have a unique burger with a different taste from the other burger. The poster contains several colors. The

most dominant color is White. The color white emanates purity, cleanliness, simplicity, and transparency. In food advertising, it's commonly used to convey freshness and a clean slate. White plates, dishes, and backgrounds in food photography highlight the food's natural colors and make it look pristine.

5. Conclusions

Generally, Color psychology is a branch of science that studies how a particular color affects people, what emotions it evokes and what actions it encourages. Colors are powerful communication tools that can be used to signal action, influence mood, and even influence physiological reactions. Using color effectively in all kinds of imagery is a great tool to enhance non-verbal communication. It adds meaning to communication as it vitalizes the visual message, delivering an instant impression that is universally understood. It also can be used to denote specific people, places, things, classes of people, and more general ideas.

In marketing, this branch of science explains how colors influence consumers' impressions of a brand and whether they persuade consumers to pay attention, remember or buy certain products or services. Junk food restaurant posters employ different colors to convey the message that will stimulate consumers' interest in trying the product. Colors have the power to evoke different emotions through associations, which can also influence consumer behavior. All this proves that the right choice of color can help to achieve business objectives, such as increasing sales.

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