

Repercussions of the symbolism of color on today's fashion

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Abstract: *It is discerned that colors possessed symbolic values and meanings in cultures since early history. Colors were sometimes used as a means of expression in artworks and sometimes as a communication tool for expressing emotions and thoughts of individuals in the society and getting their messages across. Today, the color symbolism gave way to functional use and obtained a different dimension. Colors were always utilized for the expression of certain things since early ages. Of these expressions, the color phenomenon became one of the attention-grabbing elements in clothing habits. In several periods, colors and the concurrent use of these colors had symbolically distinct characteristics. How colors were interpreted and used by human beings in the past throughout history and also in what direction this usage change at present are quite important. In this connection, the study aimed to identify how those expressed by colors had symbolic meanings in the field of fashion design today. Symbolic values and meanings attributed to colors were evaluated through this study which would address how colors were reflected on today's fashion.*

Key-words: *culture; cultures; fashion; symbolism; symbolism of colors.*

1. Introduction

Color, which is one of art elements, shows semantic differences in different geographies and cultures. Colors have been used throughout history as a expression in art and culture, as well as a symbol for expressing people's thoughts. Colors with a cultural history dating back to ancient times have an important effect on human physiology and can convey a message alone and direct the behavior. People also used colors to reflect their desires, wishes, happiness and sadness in various parts of daily life. In mourning environment, people wear black color, blue color in the sky to give peace, white wedding dress to evoke innocence and cleanliness can be given as an example.

In today's society, both genders use color to enhance their visual and aesthetic appearance. The color use has become an important expression of who we are, how we feel and what we believe in.

Colors have many effects on people from past³ to present, both physically and psychologically. This situation can be seen most clearly from clothes that show the outward reflection of people's souls.

Fashion is a sector that affects the world economy. In this context, it acts for commercial purposes before reflecting cultural components. For this reason, rather than being mostly symbolic, he is interested in making it a commercial element by beautifying the symbolic one to the public's liking.

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³ See for reference the importance of color and decorative elements in one of the Medieval Romanian period - Ovidiu Filipov. 2019. "Brâncovenic style in the romanian religious architecture of the 17th-18 th centuries". In *Proceedings of the Xth International Symposium Învățămint, Cercetare, Creație - Education, Research, Creation*, Constanta, Romania, pp. 91 - 100.

The fashion industry needs tools to identify and predict color market demand. In Color Trend Forecasting Agencies, a team of researchers, designers, sociologists, psychologists, marketing specialists and other experts to analyze consumption and behavior, hypotheses about chromatic discretionary trends to devote time to industrial production.

Today it is believed that color cards no longer have an intrinsic prediction and orientation function, but always assume a valid function of highlighting specific themes among many themes that exist simultaneously in a more global, unstable and uncontrolled market.

The color function today is to give visibility, power, emotion and recognition to offers, as stated in Pompas and Luzzatto, to distinguish them from background noise, which consists in the positioning of mixed styles, hybrids, blends and visual relationships, and to assume an identity role between.

In addition to the fact that color, which is one of the art elements, has changed to the present day and contains different meanings and perceptions in different cultures, the repercussions of color symbolism in today's fashion has been discussed in this study. This study aims to examine the color use as symbol values in different cultures, which are the symbolic expression in thoughts and meanings, as well as being a means of expression in different geographies and cultures throughout history, and then its repercussions in today's fashion field.

2. Short aspects in color symbolism

Color, which is one of art elements⁴, shows semantic differences in different geographies and cultures. Colors have been used throughout history as a expression in art and culture, as well as a symbol for expressing people's thoughts. Colors with a cultural history dating back to ancient times have an important effect on human physiology⁵ and can convey a message alone and direct the behavior. People also used colors to reflect their desires, wishes, happiness and sadness in various parts of daily life⁶. In mourning environment, people wear black color, blue color in the sky to give peace, white wedding dress to evoke innocence and cleanliness can be given as an example.

The color symbolism remains one significant power in the chromatic universe. Since ancient times, objects have received chromatic associations from humans, and in turn colors have received associations in the human universe. Moments of the day, cardinal points, or deities are some elements that had a well-associated color.

The seven colors of the rainbow correspond to the seven musical notes, the seven heavens, the seven planets, the seven days of the week, etc. The symbolic meaning of colors contains universal-human elements, but also differentiating features, cultural-religious connotations. The power of color symbolization covers a very wide area, as colors can be associated, in different parts of the world, with the primordial elements, the space-temporal dimension.

3. Color Symbolism in Today's Fashion

Fashion is a living phenomenon that changes, develops, and experiences conflicts within itself. This phenomenon is influenced by people's psychological structures, demographics characteristics, cultures and can gain new dimensions while it continues to exist.

⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. 2012. *Theory of Colours*. Dover Publications, p. 26.

⁵ Faber Birren. 2016. *Color Psychology And Color Therapy; A Factual Study Of The Influence of Color On Human Life*. Hauraki Publishing, p. 192.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Within fashion, the color factor is one of the most important elements in the field of clothing. When we look at the history of fashion in the periods before 2000s, it is observed that a different color gained popularity and participated in the trend cycle in each period. Today, a single color is the fashion color of the period we are in or the symbolic color of this season is not enough expressions. The diversity of Colors has increased amid the evolving technology and the rapid flow of life.

In fashion, the subject of color is related to cultural events, chemical events as dyestuff and technical applications as application, as well as to the fact that color is pleasing to the eye and can be accepted and used in the consciousness of society.

When analyzed since the earliest times of history, it is seen that color has always been used to express things. In these expressions, the phenomenon of color has been one of the striking elements in their dressing habits. Various colors in various periods and the use of these colors together have distinctive characteristics in symbolic context.

It is difficult to talk about fashion in local and undeveloped societies. However, when examining color symbolism in fashion history the assessment of the clothes worn by more nobles or the wealthy class is due to the fact that they are more interested in fashion. The portraits, which are taken as examples for guidance, belong to the upper-class people belonging to the ruling class. When we look at the paintings portrayed by the people, there are no defining features about the symbolization of color in the context of fashion.

From the Renaissance onwards, the color of clothes has become more important. Some colors were worn only by the upper classes and Royals. Medieval Europeans developed peak laws that allowed only nobles to wear expensive colors such as purple extracted from the seashells of the Mediterranean⁷. In these laws specific colors are defined, the amount of color allowed, and when the color can be worn⁸.

Color has developed deep symbolic meaning that shows individuals' cultural learning, their place in the social hierarchy, and their economic status⁹. Color is a vital clue for sexual signaling, but it is difficult to predict what the preferred colors actually are in humans. No human sees color or experiences its effects in the same way, so color can cause different reactions to various situations¹⁰.

The five colors defined as black, white, red, yellow and blue primary colors and combinations of these five colors have been the most used colors from past to present. Red, black and white, especially in these colors, spiritual and spiritual values are more than symbolized by their appearance. The meanings attached to these colors in many traditions and world culture still exist.

In this sense, the dark symbolized by black is the color that modern-day fashion designers often use, some form entirely their collections. The color black, which is also defined as the lack of light at the end of life, is used in fashion, but also symbolize nobility. The description of the clothes within the environments where formality and seriousness were desired to be stated was mostly black.

Black is an easy color in clothing. It can be combined with almost any color, with a black dress it can go to most places, imperfections can be carefully covered, and with these a noble look can be achieved. Black color is known for its nobility and grace, but it can also take on a rebellious structure with its present form. Black may also appear in the messages that various ideas want to give.

⁷ J. Eckstut, A., Eckstut. 2013. *The Secret Language of Color: Science, Nature, History, Culture, Beauty of Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue and Violet*. New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, p. 29.

⁸ S. Faerm. 2010, *Fashion: Design Course*. Hauppauge: Barron's, p. 34.

⁹ E. Brannon. 2010, *Fashion Forecasting*. New York: Fairchild Books, p. 80.

¹⁰ T. F. Cash, K. Dawson, P. Davis, M. Bowen, C. Galumbeck. 1989. "Effects of Cosmetics Use on The Physical Attractiveness and Body Image of American College Women", in *Journal of Social Psychology*, 129, pp. 349 - 355.

Black used in the devil depiction in western culture has reflections on Gothic linked fashion. It is often observed that this thought structure, which means worshiping the devil, combines with fashion. Its symbol is an inverted star in a black circle and is usually seen in jewelry and accessories.

At the same time, as much as its place in beliefs, black as a color is associated with power, grace, formality, death, evil, and mystery. Black is considered a very formal, elegant and prestigious color, signifying strength and authority. In heraldry, black is a symbol of grief. In the words of Ara Kani, “wear black or stay naked”.



Figure 1. *Photo 1,2:* Balmain Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.balmain.com/us/balmain/ss20-women>

Photo 3: Isabel Marant Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2020-ready-to-wear/isabel-marant#collection>

It is very important in the energies transferred by colors. For example, red is the color of fire and blood, so it is associated with energy, war, danger, strength, determination, passion, desire, and love. Red as color is used in fashion to powerfully bring images to the fore. It is also used as a highlight color to encourage people to make quick decisions.



Figure 2. *Photo 1*: Jean-Paul Gaultier Collection, source of Image: <https://www.jeanpaulgaultier.com/en-us/springsummer-2019/>
Photo 2: Vivetta Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, Source of Image: <https://www.vivetta.com/spring-summer-20/>
Photo 3: Christopher Kane Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.christopherkane.com/uk/collection/spring-summer-2020>

Major fashion houses prefer to use orange and yellow to advertise their Spring Summer collections. Here, orange combines the energy from red and the yellow happiness. Joy is associated with sunlight and the tropical regions. Orange represents enthusiasm, admiration, happiness, creativity, determination, attraction, success, courage and stimulation. When someone is seen wearing oranges, it is felt to give off a sense of heat. It is notable if bright, pure yellow, though mostly associated with food.



Image 3: Balmain Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.balmain.com/us/balmain/ss20-women>

Blue as a color is often associated with depth, stability, trust, loyalty, wisdom, intelligence, faith, truth, and heaven. When used with warm colors such as yellow or red, blue can create vibrant designs with high impact. It is natural for someone wearing blue to feel very calm and safe in this regard.



Image 4. Photo 1,2: Balmain Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.balmain.com/us/balmain/ss20-women>
Photo 3: Jean-Paul Gaultier Collection, source of image: <https://www.jeanpaulgaultier.com/en-us/springsummer-2019/>

On the other hand, purple combines the balance of blue and the energy of red. It symbolizes power, nobility, luxury and passion. For purple, the symbolic meaning that we often encounter in history is nobility and nobility. It was especially adopted by palace members and adopted the color of the Royal nobility. In the West, it was the nobility color as well as the color of the religious leaders. It is used by women as the color of mourning in eastern culture, especially in Thailand. Today, the color purple is used every season by many designers. It is requested every period due to its symbolic meaning.

However, white represents safety, purity and cleanliness. Unlike black, white has a generally positive connotation. White can represent a successful start. It depicts white faith and purity in heraldry. In this context, the answer to why the Queen of England wears mostly purple, white and blue is relevant to the situation in which the colors she uses give or symbolise her message¹¹.

¹¹ Anonymous. *The Meaning of Colour in Fashion*. Retrieved January, 27, 2020, from <https://www.thestandard.co.zw>.



Figure 6. *Photo 1,2*: Serkan Cura Collection, source of image:

<http://www.hautecouturenews.com/2014/exclusives/serkan-cura/>

Photo 3: “Legend” collection backstage, Paris Haute Couture week (Jan. 2017. Photo: Courtesy Guo Pei), source of image: <https://www.vogue.com/article/guo-pei-yellow-is-forbidden-documentary-rihanna-met-gala-2015>

Normally, as Battaiola¹² refers to, designers associate colors with emotional effect only with consumer appeal, but colors also add to a range of emotions (calm, anger, arousal, etc.) can cause. At the same time, in fashion, people use their clothing colors to express who they are, how they feel and what they believe. In this regard, the repercussions of color symbolism in fashion is very important and color is now used in many different areas with its symbolic side in mind.

Pantone, which has designated the color of the year every year for over 20 years, has chosen the 2020 color as “classic blue”. Pantone, an organization founded in the United States in 1962 that provides services on color, paint, fabric, cosmetic, plastic coloring, has global color standards that are accepted worldwide. Classic blue, which was determined as the color of 2020 by the color authority; It quickly takes place in many areas of the industry, including fashion, home textile, decoration, packaging, graphic design.

There are special codes defined for each color in the Pantone color catalog. The part indicated by the number represents the color location on the scale, while the letters found at the end represent the color appearance.

¹² A. L. Battaiola. 2006. “Adding Other Values to Colors Besides Fashion”. In *AIC South Africa 2006 - Colour in Fashion and Colour in Culture*, Proceedings of the Interim Meeting of The International Colour Association, 24 - 27 October 2006, Misty Hills, South Africa, p. 111.



Figure 6. Color of The Year 2020, source of image: <https://www.pantone.com/color-intelligence/color-of-the-year/color-of-the-year-2020>



Figure 7. *Photo 1:* MSGM Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: <https://www.msgm.it/en/>

Photo 2: Giorgio Armani Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: https://www.armani.com/us/armanicom/women/giorgio-armani/fashion-show-spring-summer_all_runway_looks_section

Photo 3: Alberta Ferretti Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, source of image: https://www.albertaferretti.com/gb_en/world-of/collections/spring-summer-2020.html?listFor=4

The main color theme chosen by Pantone is that it best sums up the period in which he was present and the mood in the period. While selecting the color for the year 2020, it was affected by the depression in the current period and blue, which symbolizes calm, was chosen as the color of the year. It is possible to say that the selected color is quickly featured in the 2020 fashion collections. It is seen by many fashion giants and brands in Photo 7, where the color 2020 is used in collections and frequently featured in fashion shows and fashion shows.

Following is a return to the past after briefly examining the color of the year 2020 and the colors chosen by Pantone over the past 10 years.



Figure 8: Colors of The Year Selected by Pantone,
source of image: <https://www.pantone.com/color-intelligence/color-of-the-year/color-of-the-year-2020>

These colors have often been used in the fashion field in the current years and have been widely preferred in terms of the meanings they symbolize.

4. Conclusions

The colors around us influence our emotions and our mental state. Certain tones can irritate us or, on the contrary, can relax and calm us down, but all the colors have the power of sending us different signals. According this, many brands design their logos taking into account the colors they use, because they want to send a clear message to the consumer. When a new store is decorated, for example, it is also appreciated depending on what colors are used, as it is almost a necessity for people to feel the desire to buy when they are in the store.

As we can see, color is a non-verbal way for artistic or psychological expression. Without even realizing, most time, the way we choose colors for clothes, interior design or personal items, can give us a direction on what we feel at the subconscious level.

Each human being has at least one favorite color, which gives us a state of well-being, relaxation and comfort, which for others can mean anger or anxiety.

Thus, each of us perceives the colors and their significance in a personal way, but there are certain general principles that we can consider, when we need to decide on a shade.

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