



LH Color

ColorReality

From Color Language to the language of Color

Go on-line and key in 'color language'. The World Wide Web @ your service will soon take you through its endless maze of information.

You'll find that increased energy is directed today towards the definition of a color language as means to communicate color hue-value-intensity in accepted and shared ways across products, companies, and industries.

And while this mega-effort of constructing and somewhat purifying a shared color language is timely and very much needed it is also partial if we are to push color to the forefront of consumers' and manufacturers minds. How so you ask?

For us to better understand the impact of a color language we should first look into what language is and what purpose does it serve. At a definitional level some have claimed that language, any given language for that matter, serves a functional role of communicating our ideas. As such the use of language is often called 'referential', 'propositional' or 'ideational' – it is the kind of language people use to refer to things in the world, propose relationship or exchange ideas when interacting with each other. If we are to follow this view of the *function* of language then the effort currently directed towards defining the color language is justified and sufficient.

But there is more to languages than just communicating ideas. Philosophers of language have pointed to the role language plays as a vehicle for emotional expression, social interaction, recording of facts, the expression of identity, and finally the controlling and shaping of reality. With regard to the latter, the deliberate construction of specific reality, these philosophers would ask – *can something exist in the world if you can not express it through language means be it a word, a sign, a sound or a color?*

And if all that exists around and inside us is contingent on language expressions – then language *creates* and *controls* the way reality is being shaped, experienced and enacted.

Going back to our original question – the building of an accepted and shared color language takes care only of the development of tools for people, consumers and

manufacturers alike, to converse and exchange color ideas and facts. *It doesn't address however the question of how color forms/shapes reality.* To do that we should move [conceptually first and practically later] **from color language to the language of colors**, a shift from defining color to defining meanings using colors, a shift from defining what 'dusty pink' is [red hue, light in value, low intensity] to defining/shaping emotions using the color dusty pink. It is this shift that serves as the focus of this discussion.

From Grayness to Greatness

Becoming fluent in the language of colors is a non-trivial mission. The knowledge underpinning of this language continues to grow but nevertheless it is still fragmented and inconsistent at times. And although research on color and emotions and/or cross-cultural meanings continues to amass this valuable information and insights is still highly contextual and is not readily available to all interested users. Being in this infancy stage, the language of color is practiced only by some and the difference in fluency is notable.

Take for example the transition shown in the computer hardware industry: For IBM color serves in the background attempting to draw minimal attention away from their desktop. The use of color here is passive, dull and marginal. For Dell on the other hand, color allows for greater interaction with the environment and more specifically with customer preferences. Dell establishes a 'customer – PC' bonding by selling a 'do it yourself kit' that enables the customer to 'dress up' the PC in various colors based on personal preference. This customer-centric solution draws on color to evoke customers' feelings of personal satisfaction commitment and choice, to personalize the client-Dell relationship reality. But even the most beautiful 'Dell-dress' looks pale when juxtaposed against the envious Apple I-Mac series with its strong color statement. Apple has taken color to a level where it serves as a lever for changing customer perception, shaping emotions of renewed loyalty, admiration, fun, and optimism! In essence, Apple is consciously speaking the language of color in the aim of shaping the mindset and consumer-behavior of the computer hardware community.

As the color industry emerges to become a playfield where various related industries and product lines intersect, fluency in the *language of color* becomes a central *competitive capability*. Individuals and

companies choosing to participate as players in the color field can assess their language of color use and/or readiness by reflecting on how passive or active they have been as players in this field, and by articulating their preference to establish continuity or alternatively, entertain divergence of color impacts and meanings.

Language of Color Fluency

The profile that emerges from addressing these questions identifies players in the color field based on their choice to passively or actively contribute to the development and execution of the language of color on its established as well as new horizons.

Four types of positions emerge to characterize the language of color fluency:

The absorbing type – this profile represents a follower, a company or an individual, conforming to existing practices in the color field and by so doing reinforcing established understandings and meanings. For example the Mentos green-yellow-orange-pink-white palette is capitalizing on existing color-taste associations.

The resisting type – this is a case of a company or an individual that becomes gradually more aware of the language of color and its impact but when confronted with language changes and aroused new meanings they refuse to acknowledge and incorporate the newness into their current vocabulary. Take the color blue. Traditionally linking blue and food prompted associations of decay, mold, or rot. The Blue M&M attempted to change that perception positioning blue food as a cool. This newly defined meaning was accepted by Trident with their Trident for Kids gum but was resisted by many other players in this field, for example Tic Tac and Lifesavers.

The cultivating type – a company or an individual assuming a central role in enhancing the use of the language of color, using existing insights and understandings. Oreo and M&M represent this type when both actively customized their product presence based on existing color-holiday associations. In these examples the widely accepted color-taste association is overridden by color-event mental schema.

The leading type – this type is committed to continually developing the language of color from its research to its execution ends and push the language to the forefront of strategic choice and customer awareness. Take for example the new Ketchup product line extensions Blastin' Green and Funky Purple. Can Ketchup be purple? This color-product association is not trivial but for Heinz the answer is YES. As purple is currently trending high introducing the purple ketchup is used to drive sales [or mothers – crazy]. Heinz, like Apple is bringing a new color + a new meaning into an existing product context to drive the bottom line.

MEANING/ MIND-STATE	PASSIVE	ACTIVE
ESTABLISHED	ABSORBING	CULTIVATING
NEW	RESISTING	LEADING

So what have we discussed so far? We've put forward three presuppositions:

- First, that it takes language to shape reality.
- Second, that color is considered a language with which reality is shaped.
- And finally that speaking the language of color and color leadership are two strongly connected phenomena.

How does one navigate from passively absorbing the language of color to actively developing this language, and thus establishing a color leadership position?

ColorReality™ II addresses this question drawing on examples from the life of color leaders.