TRANSCRIPT

Cultural Meanings of Colour

In the previous video, we talked about how colour affects you physiologically and psychologically. How it affects your mood and perception. Colours can also affect what you think because of the inherent meanings that we attach to them. These meanings are either learned or absorbed from our different cultures. And different cultures, have different colour meanings. These differences can be very distinct, and very important to understand.

One big example, is that, in Western cultures, the colour white is considered a colour of purity and innocence, and it's worn by brides on their wedding day. But in Asian cultures, this would not be the case. And to do so would be a huge faux pax, and possibly quite offensive. For example, my family is Chinese. My mother's family is originally from Shanghai, and my dad's family is from Taiwan. However, for about 50 years before 1945, Taiwan was occupied by Japan. And so we have a lot of both Japanese and Chinese influence from my grandparents, as we were growing up. So, as we were kids, you know, you wear these little barrettes in your hair. And I was always told that you can't wear anything white in your hair. No bows, no hair ties, no white hair clips, no hairbands, no ribbons, nothing white in your hair. Because, for many Asians and Buddhists, white represents death and it's a colour of mourning. You wear white to funerals, not to weddings. So, in Japan, wearing black is appropriate for wedding guests. That's just one example of how different cultures see colours.

Another example is blue. In North America and Western cultures, we associate trust, security, and authority with the colour blue. Think about all the logos of banks and financial institutions. They are almost all some form of conservative navy blue. Many years ago, there was sort of a renegade bank, called ING Direct. And they didn't have any physical bank branches. They were gonna be online only. And so their logo colour was a vibrant orange colour. They wanted to stand out from all the old school, conservative banks and their blue logos. ING Direct wanted to be seen as young, and fresh, and energetic, and innovative.

So, back to the colour blue. You know, in other countries like Turkey, Greece, Iran, Afghanistan, the colour blue is used to protect against evil and to be healing. In Eastern colours, blue often symbolizes immortality.

In the previous video, I also talked about how the colour green is associated with nature and freshness, spring and growth. We think about green, we think about St. Patrick's Day, the colour of clover, good luck, and Ireland. It's the national colour of Mexico. But green is actually forbidden in Indonesia. And, in China, green represents infidelity.

By contrast, Chinese people believe that the colour red represents luck and good fortune. And you can see red used to decorate everything to do with most Chinese holidays and celebrations. It's the red colour that is worn by Chinese brides on their wedding day. Similarly, in India, the colour red represents purity, and is also the colour of choice for Indian brides. It also represents fertility and prosperity. But then, in African cultures, the colour red symbolizes death and grief. And in Nigeria and South Africa, the colour red symbolizes violence and sacrifice. So, I suppose it could get very, very confusing, trying to figure out what different colours mean to different people.

When I worked as a graphic designer, it was really important to have sort of a cursory understanding or sensitivity to the different variations of meanings that a colour could have. And this was important when you're trying to

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translate a company's brand into a colour palette. And it's the same sensitivity that I use when I make colour pallettes for colours for Sweet Georgia. What kind of connotations to these colours have? What do these colours mean to people?

To help you with a very broad overview of sort of the basic hues and their meanings in different cultures, I tried to summarize this all in one little cheat sheet. So, I have provided a little one-page chart that has all of these sort of differences listed. I hope that this might come in handy for you as you incorporate colour into your work, as well.

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