

A Study on the Relationship Between Poster Background Colors and Purchase Intention of Korean and Chinese Gen Z Based on the SOR Model

Jia-zheng Sun, Eui-tay Jung

Hanyang University

ABSTRACT

In the advertising markets of China and South Korea, Generation Z has become a key consumer group, particularly sensitive to visual elements like color. Different colors in advertisements can significantly affect emotional responses and purchase intentions. However, due to cultural differences, Chinese and South Korean consumers may perceive and prefer colors differently, influencing the effectiveness of brand communication. This study explores how background colors impact the emotional responses and purchase intentions of Generation Z in China and South Korea, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and examining the moderating effect of cultural backgrounds. Focusing on Generation Z in both countries, the study compares their psychological reactions to colors in selected advertisements, using a questionnaire survey. The findings reveal that South Korean consumers prefer minimalist colors, while Chinese consumers tend to favor red. To boost brand competitiveness in cross-cultural markets, it is recommended that advertisement designs carefully consider color choices and adapt visual elements to cultural contexts, enhancing brand appeal and market influence.

KEYWORDS

Poster Background Colors; Purchase Intention; Stimulus-Organism-Response

1 Introduction

In the new media era, Generation Z has become a dominant consumer group, relying on digital technology and social media for decisions, with a strong focus on visual elements like color in advertisements. Color plays a key role in conveying brand information and influencing emotional responses and purchasing behavior. However, cultural differences between China and South Korea lead to varying perceptions and reactions to color, impacting advertisement effectiveness in both markets. This study explores how background colors influence the emotional responses and purchase intentions of Chinese and South Korean Generation Z, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. It also examines the moderating effect of cultural backgrounds.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Theoretical Foundation of the SOR Model

The SOR model originated from the behaviorist "stimulus-response" theory, first proposed by

psychologist John B. Watson. He viewed human behavior as a reaction of the brain to external stimuli. Scholar Jeon Sang-min further argued that external stimuli, such as product color, affect consumer emotions, which in turn influence behavior, leading to different consumer outcomes.¹ According to scholars Mehrabian and Russell, external stimuli impact individuals by triggering emotions, which then influence behavioral responses.²

2.2 The Impact of Color on Emotional Responses

Emotional responses refer to the internal emotions and feelings triggered by external stimuli. People's reactions to colors are primarily driven by emotions rather than rational thought. Since color directly engages the senses, emotional responses to colors are often unconscious and rapid. Thus, color acts as a "silent language," meaning individuals react intuitively to color without engaging in complex reasoning.

This emotional response to color implies that color stimuli can induce shifts in mood rather than simply producing visual effects that may be detached from emotional experience. For instance, red is a powerful and passionate color, typically associated with excitement, energy, happiness, and a sense of urgency.

2.3 The Relationship Between Color and Brand Image

Brand image is a crucial element in influencing how a company and its products are perceived by consumers. As a core component of brand visual identity, color plays a significant role in visually communicating a brand's personality and core values. Acting as a stimulus, color helps create strong memories and a sense of recognition among consumers. Through color, consumers can quickly identify a brand, making color associations essential in brand communication and marketing. In this context, brand image becomes a key determinant of brand loyalty, with color serving a vital function in shaping and reinforcing that image.

2.4 Consumption Characteristics of Generation Z in South Korea and China

Generation Z is typically defined as those born after 1995, growing up closely connected to digital technologies, making them true "digital natives." Compared to Generation Y, Generation Z places greater emphasis on consumption that meets their personal needs and are willing to pay for brands and products that resonate emotionally. Having used social media, digital technology, and e-commerce from a young age, they are highly sensitive to visual information, with bright colors and interactive design elements quickly capturing their attention. Thus, Generation Z is often described as a visually-driven generation. Due to cultural and socioeconomic factors, South Korea's Generation Z tends to be more attuned to soft, minimalist color schemes. These colors, such as light blue, beige, and soft pink, convey a sense of elegance and refinement, aligning with the Korean societal preference for "less is more" in its minimalist aesthetic. Their purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by the emotional cues that colors provide. These gentle color combinations are frequently used in lifestyle products, creating a clean, fresh, and premium feel. By balancing fashion with functionality, these designs cater to Generation Z's desire for both individuality and practicality.

1 Jeon, S.-M. (2015). Consumers' negative emotions and behavioral responses to personal information leakage. *Korean Journal of Psychology: Consumer and Advertising*, 16(1).

2 Mehrabian A, Russell J A. The basic emotional impact of environments[J]. *Perceptual and motor skills*, 1974, 38(1): 283-301.

In contrast, China's Generation Z, shaped by rapid economic growth and a multicultural environment, exhibits more personalized consumption preferences and color choices. They place a high value on using products and brands to express their individuality and tend to favor bold, vibrant, and trendy color schemes. With the backdrop of China's economic boom, Generation Z is highly attuned to global brands and fashion trends, especially in areas such as fashion, technology, and lifestyle. Bright colors like gold, orange, and purple are often featured in advertisements symbolizing innovation and vitality, effectively stimulating their purchase intentions.

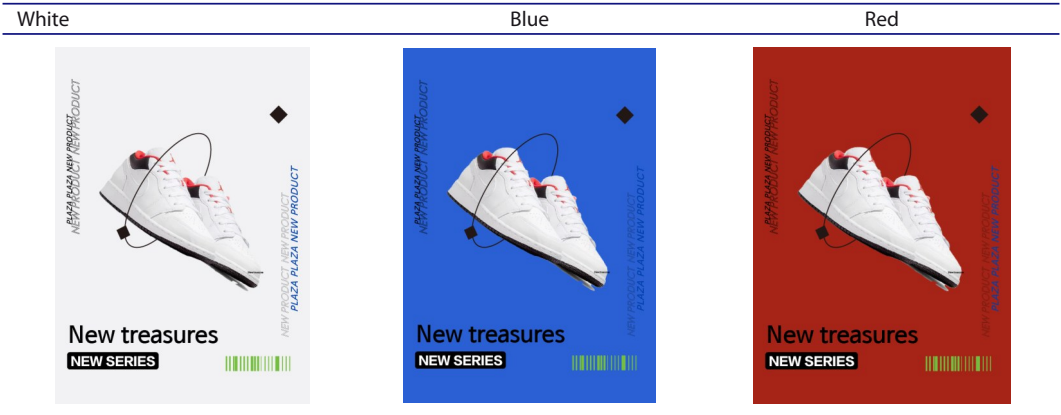
3 Questionnaire Survey and Results Analysis

3.1 Questionnaire Survey

Based on the SOR model, an analysis of existing poster colors yielded the following conclusions: (1) Color, as a visual stimulus (S), can significantly impact consumers' emotional responses and brand perception (O), which in turn influences their purchase intentions and behaviors (R), particularly among Generation Z. Different colors help brands reinforce their core values. For instance, Nike uses red to convey the spirit of "Just Do It" and determination, Starbucks utilizes green to emphasize health and environmental consciousness, while Tesla employs white to highlight technology and futuristic appeal.

These examples clearly demonstrate that color is not only a tool for brands to convey information but also an essential factor in fostering emotional connections and driving consumer behavior. Based on these findings, this study selected white, blue, and red as the primary colors for research. To ensure the scientific validity of the study, brands with weaker color associations in both the South Korean and Chinese markets were chosen. Posters were designed with different background colors for this purpose, as outlined in the following table:

Figure 1 Posters with Different Background Colors



The survey was conducted from September 1 to September 20, 2024, using the online platform "Wenjuanxing." The primary participants were Generation MZ from South Korea and China. Survey respondents were randomly divided into three groups based on different background colors. A total of 190 valid questionnaires were collected, with a response rate of 87%. The collected data were organized and analyzed to test the hypotheses presented earlier in the study.

3.2 Results Analysis

The survey results revealed that South Korean consumers preferred posters with a white

background. As the proportion of white increased, their purchase intentions also grew. In contrast, Chinese consumers showed the opposite trend, with decreasing purchase intentions as the use of white increased. In the case of red backgrounds, South Korean consumers did not exhibit an increase in purchase intention as the proportion of red increased. However, for Chinese consumers, red had a significant impact, leading to higher purchase intentions. Lastly, for blue backgrounds, South Korean consumers were negatively affected, with their purchase intentions decreasing as the proportion of blue increased. In the Chinese sample, blue did not have a significant impact on purchase intentions. The corresponding charts are shown below:

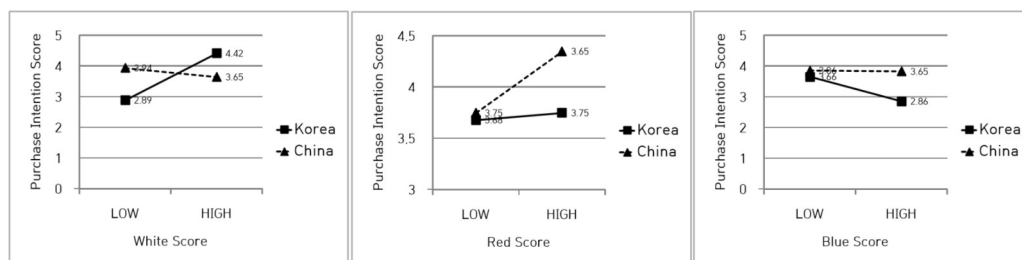


Figure 2 The Impact of Different Poster Colors on Purchase Intentions

The survey results highlight the significant and complex influence of different colors on consumers' emotional responses, brand image, and purchase intentions, with nationality serving as a moderating factor. Specifically:

White Background: White had the most pronounced positive effect on purchase intention. This may be because white is often associated with purity, simplicity, and high quality, conveying a sense of professionalism and trustworthiness. These associations enhance the brand's positive image and increase consumer purchase intentions.

Blue Background: The effect of a blue background on purchase intention was less significant. Blue often symbolizes calmness, rationality, or distance, which can reduce emotional engagement. The multi-faceted nature of blue may lead to varying emotional associations across cultures, weakening its impact on brand perception.

Red Background: Red had a notable effect on the purchase intentions of Chinese consumers but was less influential for South Korean consumers. In Chinese culture, red symbolizes warmth and celebration, heightening emotional engagement. This cultural context likely explains the increased purchase intention among Chinese consumers.

In conclusion, the role of color in brand marketing is both significant and complex. White effectively enhances emotional response and brand recognition, leading to stronger purchase intentions. While red may have a slightly weaker emotional impact, it still indirectly boosts purchase intention through its effect on brand image. Blue, however, due to its ambiguous cultural meanings, significantly diminishes brand recognition and purchase intentions. Therefore, careful consideration of color selection in brand promotion is crucial, ensuring alignment with the cultural context and emotional responses of the target market to effectively strengthen brand image and drive purchasing decisions.

4 Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of different background colors on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in China and South Korea, revealing that color plays a significant role in consumer behavior across cultural contexts.

White backgrounds had a positive influence in both markets, especially in South Korea, where it

significantly increased purchase intentions. Blue backgrounds had minimal impact, particularly in South Korea, where its calm and rational associations reduced emotional engagement. Red backgrounds, meanwhile, had a strong positive effect in China, symbolizing warmth and celebration, but showed less impact in South Korea.

In conclusion, the choice of color is crucial in brand marketing, as different colors elicit varied emotional responses and outcomes depending on cultural background. Therefore, when designing cross-cultural advertisements, brands must carefully consider the cultural context and emotional associations of colors to maximize the effectiveness of brand communication and enhance market competitiveness.

References

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