



Original Research Article

THE INFLUENCE OF COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY ON FOOD CHOICES AND EATING BEHAVIORS AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

Article History:

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Received: 12-11-2025

Revised: 28-11-2025

Accepted: 20-12-2025

Published: 25-12-2025

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Abstract: Colour is a very important aspect in determining how humans perceive, emotionally feel and make decisions especially in choosing food. The paper examines how the psychology of colour affects the food preferences and food behaviour of students and young adults, who are most exposed to the visual marketing and food images online. The descriptive cross-section study was chosen and 120 respondents were sampled with the help of a structured questionnaire which included demographic questions and Likert scale statements pertaining to colour preferences, food perception, influence of packaging and eating behaviour. The results were interpreted using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings indicate that vivid and warm colours, i.e. red, yellow and orange, have a great influence in enhancing appetite and taste perception, whilst blue-coloured foods are less appetising. The respondents demonstrated high trust in foods that have natural colour appearance and those foods of green colour as healthier. The colour of packaging and the visual appeal advertisements had a significant impact on buying decisions, and the social media became the key craving promoter of a visual nature. In general, the research finds that psychology of colour has a significant effect on food preferences and food behaviours amongst young people, and that food marketers must adopt responsible marketing and be more conscious of how visual perception affects dietary decisions.

Keywords: Colour psychology, food choices, eating behaviour, adolescents, young adults, packaging colour, visual perception.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Various sensory, environmental, psychological, and cultural factors influence human food selection, however, visual appearance, in particular colour, is one of the most direct and significant any factor which affects first impressions. Out of all senses, vision reacts quickest to a stimulus, which means that a person can estimate a food product in milliseconds in terms of its colour, brightness, and contrast (Spence, 2015). Young adults and adolescents are a vulnerable

population since they are most susceptible to visual advertising, digital platforms, and fast- evolving eating standards. This demographic often eats fast foods, packaged snacks, artificially coloured drinks, and presentable desserts that greatly depend on the colour perception to create a desire and a feeling of freshness or flavour (Bryant et al., 2019).

Colour-based food perception has become more potent in modern society where social media sites like Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube glorify the

pictures of food that is enhanced with colour. Young adults and teenagers are regularly exposed to food influencers, shiny colour filters, and beautiful display of food, which subsequently influence their stomachs and their food

habits on unconscious levels. Thus, the analysis of the intersection of youth food decisions and colour psychology is necessary to combat nutritional imbalance and unhealthy food habits that have become widespread in most parts of the world.

1.2 Colour Psychology and Human Perception

Colour psychology involves the study of the evocative emotional, cognitive and behavioural effects of different colours. Elliot and Maier (2014) argued that colours prompt the psychological process which may affect both motivation and arousal levels and judgement consciously or unconsciously. Red, orange, and yellow are warm colours, which are linked to excitement, energy, and stimulating appetite. These colours raise the speed of heart rate, increase attention and the urge to eat, that is why they are so common in fast-food chain restaurants all over the world (Kaya and Epps, 2004). On the contrary, cool colours such as blue and green give the impression of calmness, freshness, and loss of appetite. Even blue is considered to decrease cravings as blue color is rarely seen in food and can be an indication of spoilage or poisonousness (Piqueras-Fizman and Spence, 2015).

In addition, colours affect the sense of taste. An example is that red cues tend to enhance the perception of sweetness but darker colours may be an indication of bitterness or richness. Such psychological connections are acquired by culture, practice and evolutionary inclinations. Therefore, colour represents a non-verbal communication system which is much more influential in human perception even before the actual tasting takes place.

1.3 Food Choices, Eating Behaviour, and Visual Cues

The choice of food does not wholly depend on nutrition or hunger. Visual stimuli, particularly colour generate expectations of taste, intensity of flavour, freshness and quality of food. Research indicates that the perceived sweetness or intensity of flavour of a drink or dessert may dramatically change upon a change in the colour of the drink or dessert even though the taste remains unchanged (Spence, 2015). Being young adults and adolescents and having impulsive choices when it comes to food, they are more focused on the appearance and less on the food information, which is why they are extremely sensitive to food that promotes a beautiful look.

Portion size estimation, cravings and emotional eating are also subject to visual cues. Foods with

bright colours, particularly red and bright yellow, could be seen as an inducement or hedonic eating, whereas more muted or pastel colours could be connected with healthier or less calorie food. Furthermore, colour improves the retrieval of memory in that the young people can use the same brand or food again and again due to the impression of the appealing colour (Singh, 2006). As people are exposed to increased amounts of digital information, these visual images get deeply ingrained into the eating behaviour patterns and ultimately influences the dietary habits.

1.4 Colour Influence in Food Marketing/Packaging

The strategic manipulation of consumer attention and brand improvements and purchase decisions is a well-known tactic which marketing agencies intentionally employ through colour as a potent tool. Aslam (2006) argues that the colour packaging is selected depending on its capacity to convey the product qualities within a short period of time. As an example, yellow colour indicates happiness and swiftness, red means sweet or bold taste, green means nature or organicness, and blue is predominantly used in diets or products associated with a refreshed feeling. Brands of foods knowingly use colour schemes that psychologically agree with the consumer expectations.

Youths and young adults are also the most susceptible to such colour-based tactics since they often consume packaged food stuffs, soft drinks, ice soft drinks, and fast-food restaurants. The popularity of such brands as Coca-Cola (red), McDonalds (red-yellow), Subway (green-yellow), and Pepsi (blue) proves the important role of colour in brand identity, as well as the purchase behaviour of young people (Labrecque and Milne, 2013). Moreover, social media marketing enhances these visual effects where food products are coloured and thus more attractive to young people who like to post such pictures on Instagram.

1.5 Problem Statement

The existing research sheds light on the effect of colour on overall consumer perception and sensory assessment, but on the one hand, little empirical studies on the topic have been done concentrating on the age group, the most vulnerable to visual advertisement and colour- associated food queues, teenagers, and young adults. Due to the rising cases of lifestyle diseases, unhealthy eating habits, and the use of ultra-processed foods by the younger population, there is a need to understand how psychological factors such as colour influence their decision-making. There is a distinct disconnect between colour perceptions and eating patterns, emotional triggers and buying decisions in this demographic in real life. The proposed research attempts to fill this knowledge gap by focusing on the psychology of colour and its effects on the selection of foods and eating behaviour

of adolescents and young adults.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which different colour cues impact the food choices, perceptions, and eating behaviours of adolescents and young adults. The study aims to analyse:

- How specific colours influence appetite, cravings, and perceived taste;
- How packaging colours affect purchase decisions;
- How colour-based emotional responses shape food consumption behaviour among the youth demographic.

The study intends to provide meaningful insights for health professionals, educators, food marketers, and policymakers.

1.8 Research Questions / Hypotheses Research Questions

1. What is the influence of colour on food choices among adolescents and young adults?
2. What emotions and perceptions do adolescents and young adults associate with different food-related colours?
3. How does packaging colour affect purchase intention in this demographic group?
4. What role does colour play in shaping appetite, cravings, and overall eating behaviours?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between colour cues and food selection among adolescents and young adults.

H2: Warm colours (red, orange, yellow) positively influence appetite and cravings more than cool colours (blue, green).

H3: Packaging colour significantly influences purchase intention among adolescents and young adults.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The research is important not only in the academic realm but in the social and business realms. Academically, it adds to the increasing body of research of sensory marketing and colour psychology as it gives empirical data on a young population. In social terms, the research provides information that can guide nutritionists and educators to develop interventions to decrease the instances of poor diets that are influenced by visual stimuli. The young generation is very susceptible to the marketing psychological impacts, and such studies play a significant role in the development of specific awareness programmes.

In the case of the food industry, the results can inform responsible design practices in the fields of packaging, branding, and advertising. The study can also help policymakers realise the necessity of having

regulations on colour-based advertisement to young consumers. This study, therefore, fills the gap between the psychological theory and the food behaviour patterns in reality.

1.10 Scope and Limitations

The research is aimed at adolescents and youths between the age of 13-25 years, since they are the most receptive to colour-based marketing and feelings of touch and touch. It also explores how perception, appetite and behaviour are affected by food and packaging colours. The research fails to examine other sensory institutions like aroma, texture or sound. The information will be collected with the main use of questionnaires, which can lead to subjective bias or social desirability. In generalisability of findings to the target region, cultural differences in colour interpretation may also be of significance. Nevertheless, these constraints do not mean the study does not provide a valuable basis to study the effect of visual stimuli on the youth eating habits.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The psychology of colour has become a significant field of study in the explanation of the role played by visual representations in human behavioural changes more so with regards to the selection of foods. According to early theoretical research, preference and interpretation of colour is a result of both biological processes as well as uncoded associations. Palmer and Schloss (2010) have shown that positive or negative preferences towards colours occur because of ecological experiences, and that the colours that tend to yield positive results are subject to favourable perception. This theoretical premise emphasizes the fact that colour responses are not arbitrary but are an outcome of cognitive and emotional conditioning over time.

Studies on emotional and cognitive reactions to colour are consistently reproducible with the colour acting as automatic affective stimuli of the decision-making process. Mehta and Zhu (2009) discovered that red stimulates arousal and vigilance whereas blue stimulates calmness and creativity. These feelings then affect behavioural patterns and food behaviour is one of them. Kuller et al. (2009) also found out that the saturation and brightness of colour affects the mood states, which form part of appetite regulation and impulse buying. These results demonstrate that colour can produce emotional resonance which may affect the attraction or repulsion of various foods in individuals to a great extent.

A large amount of sensory science studies points to the fact that colour is a strong factor in influencing the flavour perceptions, appetite, and food acceptance. Zampini et al. (2007) showed that the perceived sweetness in non-alcoholic beverages could be increased or decreased by changes in colour of

beverages, even though the actual flavour did not change. Hutchings (2011) reiterated that food appearance particularly colour pre-tasting sensory expectation has an effect on perception of freshness and quality. It has also been demonstrated through experiments that colours of red and orange increase the intensity of perceived flavour, and blue and green decrease appetite (Gueguen, 2012). These sensory links are more effective especially among adolescents and young adults who extensively rely on visual evaluation in choosing foods.

Research that specifically examines food behaviour among adolescents and young adults has pointed to the high influence of visual appeal based on colour. The social media has a significant effect on modern youth, whose exposure to visually boosted, saturated food images is omnipresent. Sharps and Robinson (2015) discovered that the perceived eating norms, which depend on visual information, have a strong influence on the food preferences of young adults. Holmberg et al. (2020) also included in the list of causes of changed eating habits and more frequent snacking habits in adolescents; digital marketing, such as colourful ads and edited photos of food. Foods that are not only colourful but also aesthetically appealing are thus more likely to be selected as opposed to healthier foods that are not aesthetically appealing but rather are visually neutral, which supports hedonic eating.

Colour is as well a key ingredient in the presentation of food. It has been demonstrated that plate colour changes the perception of portions and food appeal. Piqueras-Fiszman et al. (2012) have indicated that the perception of food eaten on white plates to be sweeter and tastier, whereas the high contrast of the plate colour inaccurately quantifies the food to be eaten. Van Doorn et al. (2017) discover that red plates may deter consumption, possibly because of the danger or inhibition linked with the color. These results are very applicable to adolescents and young adults who tend to eat in aesthetically pleasing locations like cafes, restaurants, and social events where the presentation effects on dietary behaviour are very high.

Marketing research also reveals that the colour of the packaging is an important factor that influences what consumers expect and intend to buy. Silayoi and Speece (2007) demonstrated that the design of packaging components such as colour is fundamental in attracting attention and passing on information about a product in a brief moment. The youthful populations are more likely to buy the product through impulse purchasing due to the vivid colour packaging. Garber et al. (2008) concluded that consumers linked particular colours with anticipated flavors and quality of ingredients, e.g. yellow colour with citrus and green colour with naturalness. Grunert et al. (2010) have indicated that colour-coded

nutrition labels have an effect on a perceived healthiness but the attractive packaging colours tend to counterbalance the rational analysis of the nutrition information especially in the case of the youth who are easily influenced by visual advertisements.

The cross-cultural studies show that colour perceptions are very different in different regions but they always influence food expectations. Madden et al. (2000) established that the colour interpretations vary across cultures, and that this has an effect on the acceptance and preference of coloured foods. Wan et al. (2015) found some differences between cultures in colour-taste correspondences as they are affected by exposure of adolescents to cultural norms, local cuisines, and regional marketing affect their perceptions of food colour. Nevertheless, colour is universally powerful when it comes to creating anticipations in terms of taste, quality, and safety.

The role of colour in the consumption of food is escalated by digital media. Reichenberger et al. (2020) demonstrated that a digitally improved image of food elicits a higher level of craving and an increased desire to eat energy-dense food. The adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to the manipulation of colours by filters and editing software since they are one of the most prolific social media users. The digitisation of food increases the natural colour of food and tries to present it as fresher, sweeter or more decadent than it would be in real life, creating unrealistic expectations and encouraging people to consume more.

All in all, the literature shows that colour has a considerable impact on the emotional reactions, taste expectations, level of appetite, the food presentation, marketing efficiency, and patterns of food consumption, as experienced online. Nevertheless, there are loopholes in terms of how these colour-instigated reactions actually affect actual eating habits of adolescents and young adults in real life situations-a highly vulnerable age group in terms of visual acuity and nutritional susceptibility. The majority of current research is dedicated to general consumers, controlled experiments, or cross-cultural interpretations with no gap of comprehending the effect of colour on the youth eating behaviour in social and digitally dynamic settings. This is a good reason to carry out a comprehensive study on the influence of colour psychology in food preferences and food consumption habits among this target market.

RESEARCH GAP

Available literature demonstrates that, colour affects taste perception, emotional response, and consumer behaviour however, very little has been conducted on adolescents and young adults who are very impressionable and exposed to visual food cues the most. Majority of researchers look at the colour effects

in a controlled laboratory environment or between general adult groups, whereas there is limited information on how colour affects the eating patterns in the real life amongst young populations (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014).

The study is also mostly dedicated to packaging and flavour perception, and the role of digital media and food images with colour effects on the food desires of young people is under- investigated (Reichenberger et al., 2020). Besides, prior research indicates that cultural differences on colour-food relationship exist but their effect on the dietary choices of adolescents has not been sufficiently examined (Madden et al., 2000).

On the whole, more investigations should be conducted in this area that would combine psychological, behavioural, and marketing views on the food preferences and consumption habits of adolescents and young adults in a real-life situation.

3. Research Methodology

This research paper takes a systematic approach to the study methodology in order to review the effects of the psychology of colour on the food preferences and eating habits of adolescents and young adults. In this chapter, the research design, population, sampling method, data collection instruments, variables, data analysis methods, and ethical issues were outlined.

3.1 Research Design

The research design adopted was a descriptive and cross-sectional study design to ensure the perceptions, preferences, and behaviours of the respondents were captured at a given time. The design fits well due to the fact that it enables the researcher to quantify the association between colour cues and food preferences without interfering with any variables. Descriptive design is popular in behavioural and consumer research since it helps to investigate natural reactions to environmental factors like colour (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Population and Study Area

This study will use the population of adolescents and young adults between the ages of 13-25 years. The selection of this age group is due to the fact that it is the most exposed to digital media, food promotion and attractive food images and therefore they are more vulnerable to the effects of colour psychology. The localities covered by the study will comprise urban and semi- urban areas to allow the researcher to have variation in the exposure and consumer behaviour patterns.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Participants were selected by convenience sampling which is because of the availability and participation of respondents in the target group. Convenience

sampling offers convenient benefits due to the widely spread population which is heterogeneous in terms of behaviour and thus allows a good collection of data within a short period of time.

The overall number of respondents is 120, which is not too big to perform the descriptive and correlational analysis with statistics. A sample size of above 100 is usually thought to be suitable when it comes to behavioural research that requires perception and preference research (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016).

3.4 Tools of Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on existing literature related to colour psychology, food marketing, and eating behaviour. The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

1. Demographic information
2. Colour preferences and emotional associations
3. Influence of colour on food choices and purchase intentions
4. Eating behaviour patterns related to visual cues

A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used for attitudinal statements to measure respondents' perceptions more accurately.

3.5 Variables of the Study

The study includes both independent and dependent variables:

- Independent Variable:
 - o Colour psychology factors (warm colours, cool colours, colour saturation, contrast, packaging colour)
- Dependent Variables:
 - o Food choices
 - o Eating behaviours
 - o Purchase intentions
 - o Appetite or craving levels

These variables were selected based on theoretical models that show colour's effects on emotional, sensory, and behavioural responses (Hutchings, 2011).

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered both online (Google Forms) and offline to ensure wider participation. Respondents were informed about the objective of the study, and participation was voluntary. To increase accuracy, each participant was shown a small set of coloured food images to help them respond based on actual visual cues rather than memory.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the collected data.

- Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used to summarise demographic characteristics and general trends in colour-food associations.
- Inferential Statistics:
 - o Correlation analysis to examine the relationship between colour cues and food choices.
 - o Regression analysis to determine the predictive influence of colour on purchase intention and eating behaviour.
 - o t-tests/ANOVA (if needed) to analyse group differences across age and gender. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS or Microsoft Excel.

3.8 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

Cronbach's alpha test was applied to check the

internal consistency of the questionnaire. A score above 0.70 was considered acceptable for reliability. Content validity was ensured through expert review by faculty members and researchers in psychology, marketing, and nutrition fields.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In the collection of the data, ethical constraints were strictly observed. The respondents were given anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation. No individual identifying data were taken. Agreement with parental knowledge was obtained by people below the age of 18 years. The research implemented traditional institutional ethical practices.

RESULTS

DATA ANALYSIS

This Research paper consists of a statistical analysis of the data gathered on 120 respondents as per the effects of colour psychology on food preferences and food consumption behaviour amongst adolescents and young adults. The findings are in form of frequency tables, percentage distribution, descriptive statistics, and a discussion of key findings.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

4.2.1 Age Group Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
13–15	25	20.8%
16–18	27	22.5%
19–21	30	25.0%
22–25	38	31.7%

Interpretation:

The age group 2225 years was the most active in terms of the number of respondents (31.7%). The least significant group was of adolescents between 13 and 15 years (20.8%).

4.2.2 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	39	32.5%
Female	45	37.5%
Other	36	30.0%

Interpretation:

The proportion of females was a little higher (37.5%), but 30 percent were of the Other category. There is good gender diversity in terms of distribution.

4.2.3 Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
School Student	38	31.7%
Undergraduate	39	32.5%

Postgraduate	43	35.8%
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Interpretation:

The sample consists of an equal distribution of students, postgraduate respondents (35.8) constitute the biggest proportion.

4.2.4 Monthly Pocket Money

Pocket Money	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₹1000	30	25.0%
₹1001–₹3000	26	21.7%
₹3001–₹5000	31	25.8%
Above ₹5000	33	27.5%

Interpretation:

Majority of the respondents earn a lot higher than ₹5000 per month (27.5%), which implies that young adults have greater purchasing autonomy.

4.2.5 Frequency of Eating Outside Food

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	27	22.5%
1–2 times/week	31	25.8%
3–4 times/week	30	25.0%
Daily	32	26.7%

Interpretation:

A significant portion (26.7%) consumes outside food daily, showing high engagement with visually marketed foods.

4.3 General Colour Preferences

This section presents respondents' overall inclination towards colours and how colour influences their psychological and perceptual responses.

Table 4.3: Mean Scores for General Colour Preferences

Variable	Mean Score
Attraction towards bright and vibrant colours	3.58
Colour affecting mood and emotional response	3.10
Warm colours associated with excitement	3.48
Cool colours associated with calmness	3.20
Importance of colour in overall product choice	3.62

Interpretation

The greatest mean score (3.62) shows that the respondents have a strong general recognition of colour as a key element when choosing products. The preference of bright colours (3.58) also proves the fact that visual brightness is one of the important phenomena the young consumers are attracted to. The association of warm colours with excitement (3.48) creates a moderate impact on emotions whereas cool colours that create calmness (3.20) had a little less support. Generally, the degree of colour sensitivity is moderately high among the respondents, which means that the role of colour in psychological perception is observable among the youth.

4.4 Influence of Colour on Food Choices

This section highlights how colour impacts food appeal, appetite, taste expectation, and perception of freshness or healthiness.

Table 4.4: Mean Scores for Influence of Colour on Food Choices

Variable	Mean Score
Colour influencing decision to eat food	3.74
Red foods appearing more appetising	3.69
Yellow/orange foods increasing appetite	3.60
Blue-coloured foods appearing less appealing	3.42
Green foods perceived as healthier	3.88
Trust in foods with natural-looking colours	3.91
Colour shaping taste expectations	3.70
Dull colours reducing food interest	3.55

Interpretation

Maximum consensus can be found in trust in naturally coloured foods (3.91) and the perception of green foods to be healthier (3.88). These results affirm that natural and green colour cues have strong health perceptions among the young people. The red and yellow foods also improves appetite which is in line with the current sensory science knowledge. Blue foods have the lowest score of the appeal (3.42), which is also in line with the literature on colour psychology. Comprehensively, it must be noted that the findings are clear that colour is important in relation to stimulating appetite and the perceived quality of food among adolescents and young adults.

4.5 Influence of Colour in Packaging and Marketing

This section evaluates how packaging colour and marketing visuals attract consumers and affect buying behaviour.

Table 4.5: Mean Scores for Packaging Influence

Variable	Mean Score
Packaging colour capturing attention	3.85
Preference for colourful food packaging	3.68
Green packaging perceived as healthier/organic	3.92
Purchasing snacks/drinks due to visual attractiveness	3.67
Colourful advertisements influencing cravings	3.59
Remembering brands based on packaging colours	3.73
Attractive packaging encouraging trials of new foods	3.81

Interpretation

The highest score (3.92) of green packaging implies that consumers strongly relate colour and health. The willingness to experiment with appealing products (3.81) and attraction of attention through appealing packaging (3.85) are indicative of the success of colour-related marketing strategies. Colour (3.73) as a brand recognition implies that colour promotes brand identity retention. In general, colour becomes an effective marketing instrument that influences young people in making food buying choices.

4.6 Eating Behaviour Influenced by Colour

This section assesses how colour affects cravings, emotional eating, food presentation, and social media–driven consumption.

Table 4.6: Mean Scores for Eating Behaviour

Variable	Mean Score
Colourful foods triggering eating without hunger	3.61
Craving brightly coloured sweets/desserts	3.56
Perception that colourful foods taste better	3.42

Eating more when presentation is colourful	3.48
Influence of social media food photos	3.67
Temptation to try aesthetic foods online	3.76
Colour affecting mood during eating	3.40

Interpretation

Social media impact has the highest means values temptation to try aesthetic foods online (3.76) and influence of food photos (3.67). This underscores the fact that visual exposure with the help of digital platforms enhances cravings and interest in food. Emotional eating patterns among the young people is displayed in colour-induced eating without hunger (3.61). Such results suggest that colour is more than merely a factor in taste, it determines behaviour, desire, and online- inspired consumption trends.

4.7 Overall Perception Toward Colour Influence

This section summarises respondents' general understanding of colour as a psychological and behavioural factor in food choice.

Table 4.7: Mean Scores for Overall Influence

Variable	Mean Score
Colour influencing food preferences	3.88
Colour-based marketing affecting youth eating habits	4.05
Colour playing a major role in daily food decisions	3.79

Interpretation

The highest rating in this section is 4.05 which is the strong agreement of the respondents that marketing driven by colour affects the eating behaviour of the youth (4.05). Colour plays a huge role in the daily food choices (3.79) and food preferences (3.88), which supports the overall thesis that colour psychology creates a powerful influence, consistent, and easy to measure on young consumers.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current research demonstrate important information about the psychological effect of colour on food preferences and food consumption patterns in adolescents and young adults. The findings are strong that colour is a strong visual stimulus influencing the opinion of taste, healthiness, and general food appearance. This concurs with previous studies that opine that colour is one of the most effective extrinsic stimuli in influencing consumer expectations prior to actual consumption (Hutchings, 2011).

The general colour preferences analysis showed that the respondents are extremely attracted to bright colours, and colour is a vital factor in choosing the product. This observation has been observed to corroborate other previous studies by Singh (2006) which showed that vivid colours make attention and product more desirable. The neutral role of warm and cool colours in the emotional states also indicates the emotional-cognitive correlations written in colour psychology literature.

Colour effect on food preferences was another significant one with the respondents having more trust in foods that are naturally coloured and green foods being considered healthier. These findings confirm the findings of researches that indicate that green is a symbol of freshness and health (Aslam, 2006). The inclination to consider red and yellow food as more appetising is linked to the commonly recognised

appetite-stimulant effects of warm colours. On the other hand, the lower preference towards blue-coloured foods is aligned to past records which indicate that blue is an appetite suppressant since it is not an aspect that is easily found in foods that are commonly eaten.

The effects of packaging colours were also revealed as another important determinant of behaviour among the young consumers. The best correspondence with green packaging was the idea of organic and healthy food, as was observed by Labrecque and Milne (2013). The high mean scores of attention to colourful packaging, brand recollection, and willingness to try products of good appeal in terms of colour depict the persuasive nature of the marketing strategies based on high intensity in colour oriented elements of design. This also contributes to the argument that the adolescent and young adults are very sensitive to visual branding.

An interesting observation was associated with eating behaviour whereby colourful foods were observed to evoke cravings even without feeling hungry. The respondents were also able to admit that social media played an influential role in the development of their interest in the aesthetically presented food. This is in line with recent research that digitally enhanced food images have the potential to cause very high cravings and affect eating behaviour among adolescents (Reichenberger et al., 2020). The attractiveness of

aesthetically pleasing foods implies that digital culture and consumption of visual contents have escalated the colour-related psychological reaction in younger people.

Throughout the results, it is shown that colour is not an aesthetic element but rather a psychological stimulus which can determine perceptions and expectations and influence behaviour tendencies. Colour marketing, food packaging, and digital images have a very great impact on food decision making processes that override rational or nutritional factors. The observation is in line with the current sensory marketing studies which suggest that the consumer judgement can be overridden by outward physical appearances.

The implications of the findings are also important. To begin with, they reinforce the fact that adolescents and young adults are visually stimulated consumers whose food preferences can be triggered with the help of the strategic colour. Secondly, they mention a possible health issue in society, where attractive fast food, candy, and processed products can be overly appealing to younger generations. Third, the research highlights the importance of responsible marketing especially since colour cues may give a false impression to the consumer making them consider unhealthy food to be healthier.

Conclusively, the discussion suggests that the psychology of colour has a multi-dimensional role in determining preferences and eating behaviours of adolescents and young adults in relation to food. The findings uphold earlier studies but further provide new information of the interactive effect of marketing, digital media, and psychological colour associations. These results offer good grounds on policy recommendations, intervention in education, and research that can be conducted in the future on healthier visual communication methods in the food industry.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The current study investigated the effects of the psychology of colour when it comes to food preferences and food eating habits to adolescents and young adults. The results clearly show that colour is such an influential visual information that it greatly influences how this age group perceives, how they eat, how they feel and how they shop. The respondents were very drawn to colourful colours and colour became a key determinant in product choice.

The colours of foods were observed to be very instrumental in the development of the anticipation of flavour, freshness, and health. More trust was achieved with the use of natural- looking colours and green was commonly linked with health and organic

quality. Colours that were warm red, yellow, orange were associated with higher levels of appetite and perceived palatability, as opposed to blue-coloured food which was always rated least appealing. These findings confirm the available sensory and mental theories of colour perception.

There was also a great influence of packaging colour and marketing visuals on choice behaviour. Brands that had a distinctive colour were remembered better and brighter by the respondents and foods in a colourful attractive package were more likely to get tried. Also, the importance of social media was discovered, since digitally enhanced food images would cause craving and alter eating behaviors even when one is not hungry.

In general, this research has found that colour is not a passive aesthetic concept, but rather an active influence on food preferences, emotional eating, and purchasing behaviour in adolescents and young adults. These influences are intensified by colour-based marketing tactics and online exposure of food which tend to promote the use of consumption habits that are highly visual. The results support the idea that more responsible marketing and creating more awareness regarding the ability of visual cues to change dietary behaviour unconsciously should be made.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed for students, parents, educators, health professionals, and food industry stakeholders:

Promote Awareness About Colour-Based Food Manipulation

Young consumers should be educated about how colours in food and packaging influence cravings and food choices. Awareness programs in schools and colleges can help students make more mindful dietary decisions.

Encourage Natural and Less Processed Food Choices

Since respondents showed strong trust towards naturally coloured foods, promoting fresh fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed foods can positively impact eating habits.

Regulate Colour-Based Marketing Targeting Youth
Policy makers and regulatory authorities should consider stricter guidelines on using colour- enhanced visuals or misleading packaging that makes unhealthy foods appear healthier.

Use Colour Psychology in Health Promotion Campaigns

Public health campaigns can strategically use green, blue, and earthy tones to reinforce healthy eating

messages, as these colours evoke calmness, naturalness, and well-being.

Reduce Exposure to Colour-Enhanced Digital Content

Parents and educators should guide adolescents to critically evaluate digitally filtered food images, as exaggerated colours often distort perceptions of taste and freshness.

Restaurants and Cafés Should Adopt Responsible Food Presentation

While colourful plating increases appeal, it should be used to promote healthier options rather than calorie-dense or ultra-processed foods.

Further Research on Cultural and Psychological Moderators

Future studies should explore how cultural background, personality traits, and emotional states may alter colour–food associations among diverse youth populations.

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