



Lipstick as Female Students Visual Communication Strategy

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Abstract

Symbolism through colouring is commonly used in various social communications because colour is significant for representing ideas, feelings, emotions, beliefs, as well as spirituality. Colour gives character to objects as well as aboutness, including the colour of lipstick on someone's lips. This descriptive-qualitative study using in-depth interviews explored how female students at the Al-Azhar University of Indonesia (UAI) represented particular meanings through their choice of lipstick colours. This research was conducted objectively and avoided gender bias. The research found that even though semiotically not know the associative or connotative meaning of certain colours, the informants admitted to using lipstick for various reasons, namely for the face to look bright and fresh, being more confident and prettier, showing their natural beauty, and displaying the cheerful impression. However, the analysis proved that after taking a closer look at the ten lipstick colour choices that have been reviewed, the subconscious message they want to convey is quite complex, ranging from optimism, cheerfulness, joy, modesty, warm, wanting to be the centre of attention, femininity, passion and love, to sensuality.

Keywords *Lipstick, Colour, Symbol, Semiotics*

INTRODUCTION

As the study about the meaning of signs, semiotics certainly offers studies on various perspectives on colour, both physiologically and psychologically (Caivano, 1998). Colour, with its various gradations, is not a spectrum without meaning and association. The colour conveys and implies various points of view and meaning. Knowledge of colour has entered the human cognitive domain since childhood. Thus, it is clear that colour is a sign that is something meaningful and becomes the object of semiotics.

Colour gives character to objects as well as the aboutness of something, including the colour of lipstick on someone's lips. In the drama "The Mystery of Mount Merapi" from Indonesia, for example, the antagonist character Mak Lampir is visualized in dark colours, especially her clothes and lips, which are maximum black. Meanwhile, on the contrary, many protagonists in children's dramas, who take on the character of a princess, are depicted as having white skin and red lips. This confirms that colour represents a particular message, which can be captured easily by or even cannot be captured by everyone (Jelinek et al., 1983).

Symbolism through colouring is commonly used in various social communications due to its significance in representing ideas, feelings, emotions, beliefs, as well as spirituality (Kudrya-Marais, & Olalere, 2022), (Coucaud, 2016). Humans process much information through what they see, which is then transmitted to the brain to interpret its meaning. The number—and variety—of symbolism in colour is as endless as strings of words (Lee & Kim, 2007).

Because colour is part of communication, it is no wonder that people's responses to colours can be associated with one's responses to words or sentences. Soares et al. (2020) found that

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students tend to associate a country with the colours on the flag, their knowledge and experiences when visiting that country, and their emotions (the country they like is described according to their favourite colour). Chen et al. (2020) confirmed a close relationship between words and colours by speakers of two different languages, namely English and Mandarin. Even though the two groups express a concept/object with different words, they associate it with the same/similar colour. Meanwhile, research by Nicolas Guéguen and Céline Jacob (2012) confirmed that the red lipstick worn by female waitresses attracts male customers to give tips in a restaurant. The red colour by the two researchers is concluded as enhancing the impression of femininity and beauty in women. In everyday campus life, some female students appear with various shades of colour on their lips, cheeks, eyebrows and around the eyes. This research focuses on lipstick as the most commonly used cosmetic, besides powder and other makeup. Lipstick constructs a distinct look, volume, colour and texture on the lips. As a speech tool or vocal tract, the mouth, represented metonymically by two lips, is an organ that will be a concern to look at when communicating. Therefore, focusing on lipstick is significant for observing what female students actually want to communicate visually.

This study found its significance because so far, cosmetics, especially lipstick, in educational settings are more often interpreted as a form of sensual communication, so many schools in Indonesia prohibit students from using them when they are in the school environment (Raka, 2022). We need to see the associations and meanings (obvious or subtle) of colours in these cosmetics in a fair, open and honest way from the user's point of view. We need to avoid prejudice that is not neutral and misogynistic in viewing this phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When discussing colour systems, one cannot miss Albert Henry Munsell (1858-1918), a US painter and art professor, as the first person to develop colour into a globally accepted study. The colour system he developed has also become the standard of the American National Standards Institute and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for soil colour standards since 1930 (Munsell et al., 1915).

Munsel develops colour communication systems used in architecture, the fashion industry, identification of skin, hair and eye colour in forensics, and the colour of food products. Munsell created an accurate system for numerically describing colour. He wrote three monumental books on colour: *A Color Notation* (1905), *Atlas of the Munsell Color System* (1915) and one posthumously published work, *A Grammar of Color: Arrangements of Strathmore Papers in a Variety of Printed Color Combinations According to The Munsell Color System* (1921). Since then, the Munsell colour system has gained international acceptance and has served as the basis for colour grading systems, including Cielab, a uniform colour space (UCS) recommended by CIE in 1976.

Albert Munsell, professor of art at the Massachusetts Normal Art School (now Massachusetts College of Art and Design, or Massart), devised a "rational way of describing colour" using decimal notation instead of colour names (which he found often confusing). At first, he used this method to teach his students about colour gradations. He began work on the project in 1898 and published it in book form *A Color Notation* in 1905. He refined his work in later works (Munsell, 1919).

In Munsell's system, people's perceptions of colour can be grouped into three variables: hue (base colour), chroma (colour intensity, the difference in colour from grey), and value (the level of brightness and darkness). In this way, Munsell accurately maps a person's perception of colour (Cochrane, 2014). Jacob Rus (2007) created a Munsell colour system scheme, as shown below.

Hue

Munsel divides the horizontal circle in his colour system into five primary colours: red,

yellow, green, blue and purple. This gradation ranges from "hot" (represented by red) to "cool" (purple). Hue is measured in degrees around the horizontal circumference, which is measured from 0-360 degrees, where 0° is red, 120° is green, and 240° is blue. Red is also 360°, which is also 0°.

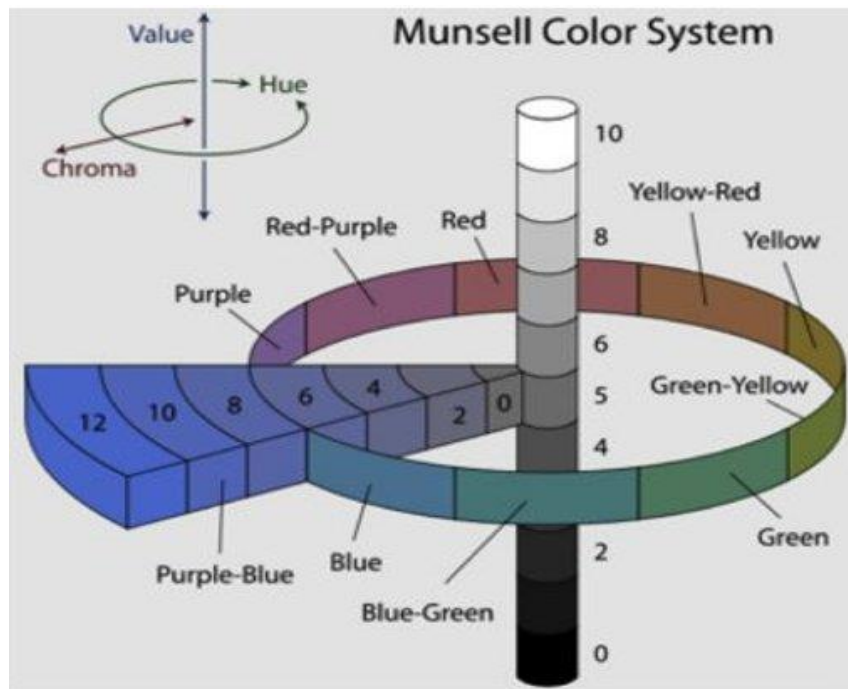


Figure 1. The Munsell colour system created by Jacob Rus (2007).

Value

The value, or brightness level, is described vertically along the colour, from black (0) at the bottom to white (10) at the top. The grey (5) value lies along the vertical axis between black and white. The brightness level is measured by percentage. A colour with a brightness value of 0% is black, regardless of its hue or saturation. A brightness value of 100 means pure white, which is 0% saturation.

Chroma

Chroma, more commonly known as saturation, measured from the centre of each slice, represents the "purity" of a colour (related to the saturation or the density of the hue of the grey). The higher the saturation of a colour, the more grey elements in the colour will disappear, and the hue will be closer to the base colour. Otherwise, the lower the saturation, the hue will fade and become grey. Saturation is measured in percentage, which means 0% is grey and 100% is full colour.

Color Symbolization

In semiotics, a symbol means a sign whose meaning has been agreed upon by a group of people or society. Colour is very attached to the meaning, interpretation and association based on culture. One colour in one culture may be perceived differently in another culture. Thus, colour is the same as a symbol, having a unique meaning in every culture, even though the hue is the same. Colour semiotics has a complex system because it is based on history, religion, climate, and environment. Therefore, the naming of colour is closely related to logical and linguistic phenomena.

In every culture, there are always idioms or proverbs for certain colours. In Indonesia, for example, white is always associated with kindness, purity, purity and innocence; conversely, black has bad associations, depth, darkness, and mystery (Shafi, 2017). This can be seen in proverbs such as "*Hitam-Hitam gula Jawa* (black as Javanese sugar)", meaning 'when you have black skin, you are beautiful to look at'. Or, "*Hitam- Hitam kereta api; putih-putih kapur sirih* (Black like trains; white like lime powder)," which means 'do not think that the ugly always has little value; sometimes what looks beautiful is cheap'.

In Russian culture and language, the word white has derived meanings such as "light" (white wine), "clear" (white in daylight), "clean" (white room), "unusual" (white crow), "degree of extreme anger" (white tear), or "clear" (transparent white) (Kaskatayeva et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the white colour in the English linguistic worldview is often associated with honesty, virtue, goodness, joy, divinity, chastity, supreme wisdom, dreams, and a life spent. Expressions like "whiter than white" are used when talking about someone honest and strictly following rules. Brides at weddings most often dress in white (white wedding) because white traditionally signifies purity and virginity. In addition to positive associations, sometimes the colour white is associated with negative connotations: "white elephant" (In a fairy tale, the King of Siam wanted to destroy one of his subordinates by giving him a sacred white elephant that cost much money), "coward, weak heart" (in the phrase white feather, white feather).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach, with research procedures that produce descriptive data in written and spoken language from the observed people and behaviours (Allan, 2020). The qualitative advantage is that the study is holistic, dialectical, and essential for developing theory and searching for meaning through narration and interpretation (Bryman, 2017). This research is library research which uses the primary references in the form of books and journal articles related to colour semiotics, which is reinforced by in-depth interviews with as many as ten (10) informants, namely female students at Al-Azhar Indonesia University (UAI) until the information obtained is saturated and considered adequate. Ten informants were considered sufficient in a homogeneous group because researchers wanted to get in-depth and intense data rather than spread it out. Corbin and Strauss (2015) said that to provide sufficient data to obtain sample saturation, there should be more than six informants. The interview itself was conducted face-to-face. Library research is relevant because it can solve problems based on critical and in-depth analysis (Ruppel, 2009). The main reference used to map colour perception is the site <https://www.color-name.com>.

Furthermore, the data collection was carried out by searching for and gathering information related to research problems; then, researchers analyzed the data using the content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2018). The research method is carried out by identifying information objectively and systematically. Once collected, the data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytic approach. The approach is carried out in three stages: first, a critical analysis of the relevance of the information or data collected to the research topic; second, a critical interpretation of the data collected and described in order to lead to conclusions on the formulation of the problem; third, drawing conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting in-depth interviews with as many as ten informants from the UAI English Language and Culture Department, researchers found that, on average, they started using lipstick after entering high school. One informant had used lipstick at the junior high school level, and the other since entering university. For more details, see the Table 1.

Table 1. Age range of informants who started using lipstick outside

Age to start wearing lipstick outside	14	15	16	17	18
Number	1	5	2	1	1

They know and learn the use of lipstick from their mothers, school friends, and social media. One of the informants, Zara (20), said that she began to learn to use her mother's lipstick secretly and only dared to use it outside since high school. Meanwhile, Alicia (19) admitted that she learned to use lipstick from her schoolmates and then continued learning from YouTube.

Some informants admitted that they did not feel a special meaning to the colours they used. Fika (18), for example, who likes nude colours. According to her, this colour was chosen because she felt it matched her skin. By using lipstick, she feels more beautiful. In the same tone, Asih (22) also wears lipstick so that she looks fresher, brighter and not pale. "There is no special reason. I like the orange colour because I feel it looks brighter," said Hanny (23). Devita (19) added, "There is no specific message to convey."

Gita (18) conveyed a different matter and could more specifically explain the function of the colour in her lipstick. She will wear nude lipstick if she wants to show her natural beauty and brick red if she wants to look confident. She uses the colour of lipstick depending on the mood and situation. Likewise, Keysa (22) likes peach to give a cheerful impression to those who look at her.

Although they did not specifically know the meaning behind the colours, all informants believed that there were certain images in colour. After conducting interviews with informants who spend Rp100,000 (USD6.5) to Rp700,000 (USD47) a year for lipstick. One person has 3-5 different lipstick colours. If combined, they usually use as many as ten lipstick colours. The ten colours are red, brick red, peach, red-purple, cherry red, pink, glossy pink, dusty pink, nude and orange. Let us discuss these various colours one by one.

Red

As the strongest colour, red has more than a hundred variants. Because the informant only mentioned red, the researchers put it in the maximum red variant because this colour has a hue of 0 degrees, with a saturation and brightness value of 85%, respectively. As the strongest colour, it is associated with sensuality and passion that burns like fire. As the strongest colour, red is used as a colour for both demons and love (Pravossoudovitch et al., 2014). Therefore, some religious figures do not like this colour like Prophet Muhammad (Schimmel, 2014).

Brick Red

The brick red colour consists of 58% red, 18% green and 24% blue with a hue of 352o, a brightness value of 80% and a saturation of 68%. The more elements of red, the stronger the colour and the colour red is associated with enthusiasm, passion and energy (Eiseman, 1998).

Cherry Red

This colour is produced from a combination of 44% red, 20% green and 37% blue with a hue of 318o, 54% saturation and 53% brightness value. The high blue composition lowers the brightness of this colour. According to the informant, Devi (19), her favourite colour was chosen because it gives a bright impression but is not too strong, like maximum red. Cherry red itself is a symbol of the spirit of youth (Månsson, 2018).

Red-Purple

The red-purple colour consists of 66% red and 34% blue. This colour has a hue value of

328o and a brightness value of 89%. This warm colour conveys the meaning of love, passion and romance and is often used on cards or gift wrapping to couples (Del Bimbo, 2000).

Pink

The informant only mentioned pink without any specifications. Because there are a lot of pink variants in the colour system, the researchers put this colour category into simple pink, a combination of 39% red, 30% green and 32% blue with a hue of 345o. Pink is the clearest symbol of femininity and cheerfulness (Fauziyah, 2020).

Glossy Pink

Glossy pink is a mixture of 52% red, 37% blue and 11% green. Glossy pink has a hue of 321o and goes under the colour with a high or bright hue. This colour is associated with passion, love and romance (Buffalo & Williams, 2004). However, Ifna (21) admits that she only likes this colour because she feels it suits her lip shape.

Dusty Pink

Dusty pink is a blend of 39% red, 29% green, and 33% blue with a hue of 337o. Blue and green colours make the red elements of these colours cooler, thus giving an elegant impression of the passion and love associations brought by the red elements (Elliott, 2003). However, the informant Cita (22) admits that she likes this colour without any particular meaning; she just feels it matches her skin colour.

Peach

Peach is composed of 38% red, 34% green and 27% blue. It has a hue of 39o, 29% saturation and a brightness value of 100%, which is included in the bright colour category. This colour gives the image of enthusiasm, care and energy (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). In addition, the brightness level also easily allows the user to become the centre of attention.

Nude

Nude is a blend of 36% red, 33% green and 31% blue with a hue of 25o. This colour is named after the skin type of Caucasian people. In French, this word means 'naked', which means the colour of the skin of the Caucasian race. This colour is considered a neutral colour because it pairs well with many colours. The nude colour belongs to the beige family. This colour is sometimes called light brown. There is a white element, so this colour has a high value. However, the medium hue of brown makes it more neutral. There is a warm and humble image to the use of this colour (Manyu, 2020).

Orange

In the colour study, there are actually a lot of orange colour variants. The informant did not specifically mention what kind of orange it is. However, in the view of ordinary people in Indonesia, the orange refers to the evening orange or international orange. So, this colour is the topic of discussion in this paper. This colour is a composition of 76% red and 24% green with a hue of 19o. This colour goes into a bright colour, which conveys optimism and joy (Kolyada-Berezovskaya & Berezovskiy, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

Although semiotically, the informants did not know the associative or connotative meaning of certain colours, they admitted using lipstick for various reasons: for the face to look bright and

fresh, more confident and prettier, showing their natural beauty, and displaying a cheerful impression.

However, if we take a closer analysis of the ten lipstick colour choices that have been reviewed, the subconscious message they want to convey is quite complex, ranging from optimism, cheerfulness, joy, modesty, warm, wanting to be the centre of attention, femininity, passion and love, to sensuality.

Further Research

This research can be continued by searching for information on whether they have problems or get a certain stigma because they try to communicate associative or connotative meanings by using lipstick. This is because a number of schools in Indonesia prohibit the use of lipstick in schools. Or other studies that explore information related to their perceptions of the ban.

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