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INFORMATIONAL MEANING AND SYMBOLISM OF THE COLOR BLACK IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Color is a very important factor of communication because it is all around us. However, the symbolism of the color black is very specific and it ranges from elegance, fashion or status, to mourning, protest or anarchism. The aim of this paper is to find out to which extent business people are aware of their perceptions of colors and how they are used to communicate, especially the color black as a preferred color and its relationship with styles of communication, and selection of strategies for conflict resolution. The results indicate that a high percentage of the respondents to the questionnaire associated the color black with a rational communication style that is based on facts, rational phrases, arguments or evidence. It also shows that business people really believe that the color black in business communication is a symbol of good business communication and the choice of wearing black colored clothing for important business occasions is not random. It also shows the importance and to a certain extent the power of black in resolving conflicts.

Key words: color; color black; business communication; symbolism; perception; communication styles; conflict strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, color shave had very different meanings, often depending on the culture and traditions of the region. For thousands of years people have been connected to colors, but in the early stages colors were not bound to their names, but only their identification as defined by Igor Zjakić and Marin Milković (2010).

The power of color is just in the emotional reactions and associations that they provoke within us. From prehistoric times when caves were painted to today's modern society of knowledge and technologies, their emotional impact remains strongly rooted in our psyche, regardless of the social, material or educational status that we enjoy.

The definition of black is that it is a lack of color and as such emphasizes other colors so that they, along with black, act brighter than they normally are. It is dominating in literature, fashion and painting and used to achieve a dramatic effect.The color black has opposing connotations. It represents power, elegance, prestige, formality and on the other side death, evil, mystery and fear. It is considered to be the color of rebellion and strength, goodness and thoughtfulness and is associated with a variety of positive and negative ideologies. As Eva Heller wrote (2000) at the same time it is both threatening and attractive.In the English language, the "language of business", we find countless examples where the word "black" is a component that forms completely new words or phrase, either used in a positive context: black tie - uniformed / formal dress, black belt - a black belt in martial arts, or in a negative connotations: blackwash – to disclose or denigrate someone, blackout - power failure / memory loss / consciousness, black eye - bruising from a blow / or to damage someone's reputation, blackmail – crime of threatening, blacklist - a list of people or organizations that are boycotted, avoided or punished.

Therefore, the goal of this paper is to find out how aware business people are about their perceptions of color and how to communicate them, especially in relation to the color black.

THEORETICAL-CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. The symbolism of colors in history and culture with special emphasis on the color black

The symbolism of colors throughout the history of mankind has evolved and strengthened in parallel with social, cultural and political processes and now, in modern society, color psychology is an integral part of not only non-verbal and interactive, but also business and marketing communications. The reason for this is precisely in the emotional power of certain colors which we choose rationally depending on the situation in which we find ourselves, depending on the impression we want to leave or the impression or message that we want to convey.The symbolism

of colors was built up throughout history, religion, culture, beliefs and traditions precisely because of the constant and unavoidable exposure to colors in the world around us and in which the visual impression is the first one that we perceive.

The color black has long been a sign of male power and has been connected to influential people and equally to women's fashion. In the 19th century, women of modest means, who had to earn a living as saleswomen or governesses, wore practical and respected black clothes. However, at that time it was thought that the elegant black dress did not suit a young, not yet married woman, because it appeared too sexy. At the same period it became a symbol of anarchism, revolutionaries (fighters, hooligans). In Japan, black symbolizes seriousness, experience, adulthood and in China it is the color for boys (Watts and Sriramesh 2004). It it a well-known fact that in many countries, black represented and represents a conservative political party, the monarchy or the church. It was the color of fascism and nationalism. The black of death symbolically emphasized the seriousness of the intent and willingness to sacrifice lives of others for their own beliefs. Black is also the color of anarchism and secret organizations. We use it when we want to emphasize our own individuality, because it draws the attention away from clothes and focuses on the face, the center of the personality, thus becoming the trademark of 1950s existentialist. Marlon Brando and James Dean, symbols of the subculture of rebellion in the 1950s, converted the black biker jacket in an iconic symbol, which is today, a trademark of the heavy-metal movement. Its impact was declining during the colorful 1960s, but avant-garde Japanese designers of the 1980s returned it to its dominant role even today. In contemporary fashion the color black symbolizes elegance and grandeur. Subcultural styles, such as punk, gothic and emo are form of rebellious glamour (Polhemus 2006).

Knowing about what colors people like and what they connect them with is necessary to be able to achieve the desired effect on the human psyche and is often a subject of modern science. The prominent British practitioner, Reginald Watts (2004) argues that visual language is replacing written communication, therefore public relations should actively deal with the study of semiotics, since images and symbols are the basis of the majority of modern communications (Tench and Yeomans 2009).

According to a report on the attractiveness of colors Casparie (2007), the preference for certain colors depends not only on gender, but also on the age and the social and educational group to which the individual belongs. For example, the results of their research shows that young people prefer basic light and bright colors, such as red, green, yellow, etc., while adults prefer darker and achromatic tones like black

and neutral shades. Taking into account the social status, lower class people are attracted to primary colors, while middle and high class people tend to select muted shade such as salmon, sand and similar.

Information about the color preferences of people is very consistent. The research done by Eysenck (1941) and Guilford and Smith (1959) has shown that people prefer colors in the following order: blue, red, green, purple, orange and yellow. Gender differences are minor; men prefer blue a little more than red, the women yellow from orange. Nevertheless, this data is not sufficient to apply the above preferred sequence as a rule for the entire population (Vodvarka 1999).

Image and attractiveness are the most important when physically delivering a message. The image of the communicator must be identified with the image of the product or the company he represents. Lawyers and bankers, for example, tend to dress formally in dark and calm tones so that their customers feel safe to entrust their intimate personal and financial information. In addition to oral communication, image and attractiveness are also important in written or visual communication and presentation. The way that a message is presented, its tone, structure and style can affect the image, and the image and attractiveness are influenced by the appearance of the written form of the logo, the materials, color, the type and thickness of the paper, the sophistication of the graphics and printing. When the image matches the message it can greatly improve the reception of the message (Rouse and Rouse 2005).This strategy is extremely important to achieve proper transmission of our messages. Andy Green (2007) adds that the most common reason for the collapse of big ideas is probably the failure of the communicator in transferring exciting, brilliant and effective ideas to those who have the power to support them - the audience.

1.2. Nonverbal communication by colors in human interaction, with a particular emphasis on the color black

The non-verbal communication with colors is dating back to the Paleolithic era and to cave paintings with earth pigments. Today it is the subject of numerous studies in psychology, sociology, anthropology and communicology.

Judith Hall and Mark Knapp (2010) bring the widest definition of non-verbal communication, claiming that it is a communication that can be accomplished by means other by words. The classification of non-verbal communication is divided into three primary areas: environmental structures and conditions in which the communication takes place, the physical characteristics of these communicators and

different behaviors that are manifested by communicators. According to this distribution, nonverbal communication of colors belongs in the physical characteristics of communicators and authors include them in the group of artifacts, which indicates objects that are associated with the communicator and affects his physical appearance. But also, our choice of colors often depends on the environmental structure in which we find ourselves, the conditions under which the communication takes place and different behaviors that we manifest. Various cultural and social patterns have taught us from an early age the symbolism of colors by which we choose them according to certain circumstances in which we use them as a nonverbal contribution in a situation in which we find ourselves or for an interaction in which we participate. By choosing certain colors we complete, emphasize or alleviate the transmitted verbal message.

Hall and Knapp (2010) point out that the verbal and nonverbal communication processes work together and complement each other, and it is therefore quite wrong to observe them separately or try to separate them. It is important to note that none of the above functions of nonverbal behavior is limited to nonverbal behavior, but the nonverbal behavior is used to supplement the verbal. If we apply all this to nonverbal colors communication, it will mean that by choosing certain colors of clothing we want send a message to the other party about our attitude (for example, for business meetings we often choose black colored clothing to act professionally and elegant). In this case, the selection of black has the function of nonverbal gesture as a contribution to the communication process.

Michael Argyle (1998) defines the main functions of nonverbal behavior in human communication as: research of emotions, exploring relationships with others (liking/ disliking, dominance/submissiveness), presenting yourself to others, and accompanying the speech to regulate the sequence of speaking, attention, feedback reactions and so on.

On the example of choosing the color black, we see that we can use its symbolism in all the four functions of nonverbal behavior. Black expresses emotions toward others, we present ourselves to others (as a serious, sophisticated person) and emphasize the message pronounced in the oral communication (we lead an important business meeting in black clothes that emphasizes our professional authority). Dubravka Miljković and Majda Rijavec (2005) point out that the clothes we wear have a strong influence on the four dimensions of the impression that we leave to others: credibility, sympathy, attractiveness and superiority. Because of its strong and rooted symbolism the color of clothing is almost as important as the clothes themselves. Because of the strong nonverbal messages that we send out by colors,

color psychology has become a new branch of professional studies in the field of psychology, business communication and marketing. Allan Whitefield and Travis Wiltshire (1990) point to several studies by proving that cultural background has a strong influence on color preference (for example, in Western cultures the color white is a color of purity and innocence, while in Japan it symbolizes sorrow and death). We choose the color of clothing we wear for specific occasions in our everyday life based on these learned symbolisms and are often the basis for our preference of certain colors.

The Lüscher color test is a psychological test invented by Dr Max Lüscher in Basel, Switzerland in 1969. Max Lüscher (in Lie and Murarasu, 1996) believed that sensory perception of color is objective and universally shared by all, but that color preferences are subjective, and that this distinction allows subjective states to be objectively measured by using test colors. Lüscher believed that because color selections are guided in an unconscious manner, they reveal the person as they really are, not as they perceive themselves or would like to be perceived. The simplest version of the test consists of the respondent's subjective order of colors from favorite to least favorite. Lüscher believed that the personality characteristics can be identified on the basis of the individual's choice of color. Thus, the respondents selecting identical color combinations have similar personalities. After the respondents would line colors, Lüscher would notice personality traits that were tied to a specific color.

The Lüscher sensory color scale and human preferences consists of eight colors and a range of qualities that they symbolize:

1. Blue - inner contentment (concentration, tranquility, serenity, tenderness)
2. Green - self-awareness (perseverance, self-confidence, self-control)
3. Red - competitiveness, eccentricity, reinforced sexuality, adventure
4. Yellow - creativity, motivation, expediency
5. Purple - emotional fulfillment
6. Brown - shows the bodily condition
7. Black - depression, tendency of giving up and handover
8. Grey - social exclusion, shyness, reticence.

The Lüscher's color test is used still today in some psychological testings, personality analysis and researches in the field of color psychology, despite the criticism invoked by the human learned knowledge of the symbolism of colors for which we cannot reliably assert that the selection of your favorite color is unconscious and that comes from deeper structures of the personality. However, modern psychology continues to explore the psychological aspects of colors because they are

an inseparable part of nonverbal communication, and with the flourishing of alternative methods of healing the holistic methods such as chromotherapy or "healing with colors" are popular again.

1.3. Communication styles and conflict strategies

Reinout E. de Vries defines communication style as „the characteristic way a persons ends verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal signals in social interactions" (2009: 179). Among the many theories and authors dealing with communication styles (Burgoon & Hale 1987; Gudykunst et al. 1996; Norton 1983) or contextual communication styles in, for instance, conflict management (Goldstein 1999), leadership (Johnson & Bechler 1998; Luthans & Larsen 1986), job interviews (Bolino & Turnley 1999), intercultural settings (Holtgraves 1997; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003) etc., we opted for Virginia Satir, because her division of styles of communication related to individual elements of communication processes, such as message, sender and recipient. The author varied styles of communication according to whom or what the person communicating cares about most in a given moment. Satir (1972, in Brajša 1994), distinguishes five styles of communication: blame, palacate, super-reasonable, irrelevant and congruent.

Blame - is used by people who only care about themselves and devalue others, and do not consider facts to be essential. They do not approve of anything, they are exclusive, ask only negative questions and do not approve anything.

Palacate - is characterized by devaluating oneself, ignoring the facts and only taking others into account. People who use this style tend to be appealing, agree to everything, approve everything and suppress the uncomfortable.

Super-reasonable - is concerned only with facts, uses rational phrases, avoids emotions and is full of theories that emphasize their intelligence.

Irrelevant - no one and nothing is important, not even the facts. Communication consists of saying a multitude of irrelevant, meaningless words, showing complete indifference and disinterest. A lot of talk, but actually little discussion, therefore it is considered "façade communication".

Congruent – is used by peple who care about real communication situations, ourselves, the interlocutor and the message, and try to keep up together and connected.

Conflicts of interests occur when the action of one person attempting to maximize his advantages or benefits prevent, block, interfere with, injure, or in some other way make less effective the actions of another person attempting to maximize his/her advantages or benefits.

David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson in *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (1987) conducted a research that found that in the resolution of conflicts we can use one of the strategies below:

Competing strategy is dominated by a need for satisfying their own aspirations (high assertiveness), whereas cooperation (the desire to satisfy their partner's needs) almost does not exist. This approach to conflict resolution develops a victory-defeat situation, rivalry, the use of force and forced submission by the other party.

Avoiding is characterized as non-assertiveness and uncooperative, thus simultaneously giving up on satisfying their own needs and disregarding their partner's needs. Does not want to see the problem and the conflict is ignored, trying to mitigate with the expectation that the problem will resolve itself and confrontation is avoided.

The adapting strategy is dominated by nonassertive and cooperative behavior, disregarding of their own needs and desires yet considerate to their partner's needs and desires. This is actually ignoring oneself and giving in to complying with their partner.

In the compromising strategy it is important to emphasize moderate assertiveness and cooperativeness that are in the foreground. Therefore, by negotiating, weighing the profit and loss and a joint search for mutually satisfactory and acceptable solutions resulting in only partial compliance with the partner's needs and desires.

Cooperating is a strategy in which the dominant characteristics are assertiveness and cooperativeness. With equal insistence on their own and their partner's needs and desires real problem solving is achieved, because differences are confronted, and ideas and information are shared. In this case, problems and conflicts are sought as new challenges and opportunities, integrative solutions are seeked and thus developing a situation in which everyone wins (Brajša 1994).

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Questions and Goal

Color is a very important factor of communication because it is all around us. But the symbolism of the color black is very specific, ranging from elegant, fashion or status, to mourning, protests and anarchism. In this study we are interested in how business people use color in business communications. Do they notice the color black and what does it mean to them personally? Is the color black a status symbol or is it associated with certain emotions or attitudes? Are there differences in color

preferences, especially the color black, particularly among genders or different age groups? Is there a significant relationship between the preferred color black and styles of communication? Is there a significant relationship between the preferred color black and strategies for conflict resolution? These are the **research questions** that this research paper will attempt to answer.

The goal of the research is to find out how aware business people are about their perceptions of color and how to communicate them, especially in relation to the color black.

2.2. Participants and Instrument

According to the research questions, an online questionnaire was prepared with ten multiple-choice questions (circling or selecting one answer from a drop down menu), on the meaning of color in communication, and an additional table with Lickert's scale for selecting a preferred communication style and strategies of conflict resolution. The sample was appropriate and random, but because of the huge interest and response by users of the social network Facebook, the questionnaire was only available for one day (13 February 2016) and in 24 hours 301 people, mostly scholars, coleagues and students, filled out the questionnaire on Facebook. Of the total 301 surveyed, 238 of the women (79.1%) and 63 men (20.9%). In order to fill out the questionnaire the participants had to be working business persons.

Structure of participants by age group is the following:

Table 1. The age group of the respondents

Age group	Presentage of the repondents
18-20	9%
21-25	32.2%
26-30	15.3%
31-35	14.6%
36 and older	28.9%

The sample is not representative because the sample involved far more women than men, which shows that women are more interested in issues of color in communication. The age distribution of the sample is evenly distributed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Which color are you most attracted to? - was the first question asked. 18.5% have a preference to the color black and black is certainly one of the three most preferred colors, with blue and red lead only by a thin margin. We could conclude that for this sample of respondents the world is a red-blue-black world.

Table 1. Color attraction – preferred color

Precentage of respondents	22.0%	19.90%	18.60%	11.30%	7.00%	5.30%	5.30%	3.70%	3.30%	2.70%
Preferred color choice	blue	red	**black**	Purple	Green	white	pink	orange	yellow	Brown

For greater objectivity in the respondents' answers, the following question was complementary, therefore they were also asked - Which color do you not prefer?

Table 2. The colors that respondents do not prefer

Precentage of respondents	23,30%	20,60%	16,90%	12,6%	8,6%	7,3%	3,7%	3,3%	2%	1,7%
Color not preferred	pink	brown	orange	yellow	green	purple	**black**	White	Blue	Red

It is interesting that now the color white also appears before the color black on the not preferred list.

The following question was asked: Do you perceive blacks as positive or negative color?

67.8% of respondents consider black to be a neutral color

21.9% of respondents consider black to be a positive color

10.3% of respondents consider black to be a negative color

From the answers we can see that 2/3 of respondents consider the color black as a neutral color (67.8%).

In response to the question: How often do you wear black clothing? The respondents answered as follows:

36.2% of respondents wear black clothing very often

33.5% of respondents wear black clothing often

22.9% of respondents wear black clothing sometimes

If we connect the percentages of responses for very often and often, we get 69.70%, which represents almost two-thirds of respondents who like to wear black clothing, which is a significantly high percentage. The remaining 7.4% of respondents said that they rarely wore black clothing.

When asked: Do you think black is a color for women or for men?

94.7% of the respondents consider black to be equally a male and female color.

The result reaffirms the view of the respondents that black is a neutral color.

In the second last question the respondents had to connect the color black to a certain style of communication.

Question: With which communication style do you associate the color black? The responses were as follows:

63.2% of respondents associated black with the rationalizing communication style

15.9% of respondents associated black with the indifferent communication style

13.6% of respondents associated black with the accommodating communication style

7.3% of respondents associated black with the accusing style of communication

We can conclude that the majority of the 301 people surveyed link black with a communication style that is based on facts where rational phrases are used and emotions are avoided – the rationalizing style of communication.

The last question was devoted to conflicts of interest in communication, ie. Which conflict strategy do the respondents associate with the color black?

Table 3: Conflict strategies of the respondents according to their favorite color

FAVOURITE COLOR	CONFLICT STRATEGY					TOTAL
	ADAPTING	COOPERATING	AVOIDING	COMPROMISING	COMPETING	
RED	33.33%	41.67%	8.33%	4.17%	12.50%	100.00%
PINK	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
PURPLE	37.50%	50.00%	0.00%	12.50%	0.00%	100.00%
BLUE	6.25%	56.25%	9.38%	12.50%	15.63%	100.00%
GREEN	13.33%	60.00%	6.67%	6.67%	13.33%	100.00%
YELLOW	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
ORANGE	40.00%	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
BROWN	0.00%	60.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	100.00%
WHITE	40.00%	20.00%	0.00%	40.00%	0.00%	100.00%
BLACK	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Interestingly, the respondents associate the best method of resolving conflicts with less preferred colors, such as pink and brown, orange and green, which leads us to the conclusion that color preferences among the respondents still vary according to the situation, circumstance, experience, and are not constant. In this case, according to the respondents, the color black is linked to the three better strategies for conflict resolution and the poorer strategies are absent. This means that the color black is very important for conflict resolution and has power to a certain degree in resolving conflicts. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ or rank correlation in the case of binding black with a specific strategy to deal with conflict is +0.46; such a correlation would be considered moderate, but since we cannot expect a correlation between the color black and certain strategies to resolve conflicts this is, according to the researchers, a significant relationship and indicates the psychological structure of personality that is not in the sphere of rationally visible however by indirect methods, such as this comparison of colors and strategies of conflict resolution it has clearly manifested.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that business people noticed color in communication, and their preferences according to the order of selection are as follows: in first place is blue (22.90%), then red (19.90%) and in third is black (18.60%). According to the results of Eysenck from 1941 and Guilford and Smith in 1959, who concluded that people prefer colors in the following order: blue, red, green, purple, orange and yellow, the assumption is that the differences in color preferences is due to time lapse and cultural activities, because over the decades individuals and societies have developed in a certain direction, which to some extent is confirmed by this study, although we cannot confirm with great certainty that the results are representative because the survey sample was apposite and unrepresentative. However, in any case the results are intriguing and suggest an interesting direction for further research. It is interesting that in the complementary question regarding colors that are not preferred, the order of preferred colors has changed with red first, then blue, white and in fourth place the color black. The color white appeared as an addition, a color which was irrelevant in the first question. We believe that this order is credible as it is known from psychological studies that people in the position of choice use rational decisions in the first 5-7 variables, after which the ratio does not have such an intense effect. There were ten variables in question, that is ten colors.

Since 67.8% of the respondents consider the color black to be a neutral color and 94.7% of the respondents consider black to be equally a male and female color, we can conclude that these results reaffirm the view of the respondents that black is a neutral color.

According to the facts that 70% of respondents wear black clothing very often and that 63.2% of respondents associated black with the super-reasonable communication style, we can conclude that business people really believe that the color black in business communication symbolises the quality business communication and the choice of wearing black clothing for important business occasions is not random because they truly believe in the symbolic connection of the color black and quality of business communication. Furthermore, the color black, according to the respondents, is linked to the three better strategies for conflict resolution (cooperating, compromising and adapting) and the poorer strategies are absent. This means that the color black is important for conflict resolution and has power to a certain degree in resolving conflicts. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ or rank correlation in the case of binding black with a specific strategy to deal with conflict is +0.46; such a correlation indicates a significant relationship and the psychological structure of personality that is not in the sphere of rationally visible however by indirect methods, such as this comparison of colors and strategies of conflict resolution, it has clearly manifested.

We believe that this area needs further study. Firstly, we need to improve our understanding of the numerous ways how colors, color black especially, effect nonverbal communication and help resolving the conflicts. Secondly, we need more empirical studies and diferent approaches to develop our knowledge about the subject and implement it in a modern business environment.

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INFORMACIJSKO ZNAČENJE I SIMBOLIKA CRNE BOJE U POSLOVNOJ KOMUNIKACIJI

Sažetak

Boja je vrlo važan komunikacijski čimbenik jer se nalazi svuda oko nas. Međutim, simbolika crne boje je vrlo specifična i kreće se od elegancije, mode ili statusa, do žalovanja, protesta, anarhizma. Cilj rada jest doznati kolika je osviještenost poslovnih ljudi o vlastitoj percepciji boja te načinu komuniciranja istima, a posebno u odnosu na crnu boju te postoji li značajna povezanost između preferirane crne boje i stilova komuniciranja, odnosno između preferirane crne boje i izbora strategije za rješavanje konflikta. Rezultati ukazuju da visoki postotak ispitanih vezuje crnu boju uz racionalizirajući stil komuniciranja koji se temelji na činjenicama, racionalnim frazama, argumentima i dokazima. Također, ukazuju da poslovni ljudi zaista smatraju crnu boju u poslovnoj komunikaciji simbolom kvalitetne poslovne komunikacije i izbor crne odjeće za važne poslovne trenutke nije slučajan. Isto tako, ukazuju i na značenje i određenu moć crne boje kod rješavanja konflikata.

Ključne riječi: boja; crna boja; poslovna komunikacija; simbolizam; percepcija; komunikacijski stilovi; strategije rješavanja sukoba

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