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The Context of Use and Meaning of Colors in Handbags

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Abstract

Over the years, fashion products have appeared as a reflection of sociocultural thoughts. The visual configuration of products reflects what consumers feel and think, making them part of a collective while simultaneously individualizing them. Handbags, in this context, as a consumer product, are no different. These products are shaped so that, when used, they reflect a series of consumer desires, which send a message to their peers. Color, in the symbolic configuration of the bags, is part of a communication process that helps deliver different messages, making a product more accepted on certain occasions than others. With that in mind, this article aims to identify the meanings and contexts of use related to handbags in five different colors. To this end, a virtual survey was conducted with 94 Brazilian women aged over 18 years. The results demonstrate that colors and visual elements greatly influence when choosing bags. These colors can have different meanings according to each woman's perception.

Keywords: Fashion Image, Colors, Colorimetry, Bags, Fashion.

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Introduction

After the Industrial Revolution, the handbag came to stand out as an accessory that women desired and admired (Costa, 2010). In the 1800s, a bag attached to a woman's wrist or waist became a product of female desire. Then came the chatelaines, a model that gave women greater independence since the bag may allow the woman to carry her personal objects with her (Garbelotto, 2008).

From the beginning, communication was essential for the evolution of humanity, thanks to which society emerged. Because when man was in a state of development, there was a need for communication so that he had contact with others and formed hunting and support groups. Over time the behavior of society is constantly changing, and consequently, the culture in which it is inserted. However, one of the forms of communication that changed the world was through clothing, as before, it was a form of survival, a necessity. Still, when fashion appeared, people began to use them with a different purpose. The clothing that stays on the human skin becomes one of the essences of humanity because, through these, they can express identity, the group that identifies itself, and several other aspects.

Fashion appears directly linked to identity (Miranda, 2008); the search for women to follow this fashion is also born. It is taken as part of a social game where it assumes the role of identity representation (Lipoyetsky, 2009). Thus, clothes and accessories, like all forms of use, have great value, of which the individual represents himself and feels described in the community (Erner, 2015). All these apparatuses reveal questions about the subject, such as age, gender, social condition and aspirations, and the cultural and regional context that locates him. "The way fashion governs the press aimed at women goes far beyond the representation of clothes but goes through the outline of the guidelines, the suggested lifestyle, beauty, home and a whole idea of femininity" (Mendonça, 2010, p. 53).

Accessories significantly contribute to creating an individual's own style, such as handbags, which is strongly present in the daily female life of the western world (Garbelotto, 2010). It is noticed that on the streets or in public spaces, most women are always accompanied by at least one bag – when not carrying two or three simultaneously. These accessory

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complements woman's clothing: it has become both a necessity and a consequence of the lifestyle of women working in public spaces or professionals from the most diverse areas (Garbelotto, 2010).

Bags are currently considered one of the leading fashion accessories to compose the look of women. However, handbags have not always had the fundamental importance they have today. Through the history of the exchange, one can observe its relationship with the present day, demonstrating its importance, functions, and relations with genders and social classes (Costa, 2010). In fashion products, artifacts must have aesthetic and symbolic information that will make them desirable to their target audience (Lobach, 2001; Silveira, 2022). For that, products must establish pleasant emotional connections with users (Norman, 2008). This connection can be made through the pleasure of manipulation and/or the beauty of its shape (Fiell; Fiell, 2005).

Objects have the power of communication (Sudjic, 2010). Through the visual configuration of these artifacts, color is one of the main highlights that evoke visual messages to the public (Pedrosa, 2008; Heller, 2013). Colors have psychological stimuli for human sensitivity, thus influencing the individual to like or dislike an object (Holtzschue, 2011).

Kareklas *et al.* (2014) say that color is one of the first elements to encounter with the consumer perception, influencing behavior and preference, ensuring instant connection and quick response. In this way, it is assigned to ensure good receptivity in the product-user relationship in a visceral sense, leveraging the aesthetic qualities of products (Jones, 2005; Farina; Perez; Bastos, 2006). Colors have always been present in everyday life; they invariably provoke sensations, and these sensations can be positive or negative. Martin (2005) argues that color is a relationship between the object and the psychological state of the observer since both are reciprocally suggested.

Color is of great importance in creating a fashion product; color has a well-defined and specific function to help convey the visual message of the products (Dantas, 2022). With this, it can be said that colors are fundamental in the daily interactions of consumers since they have the power to awaken sensations in individuals and define actions and behaviors.

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Just as clothes are part of each person's personality, the bag is not left out. Before, it appeared to meet needs, such as carrying valuables. However, in modernity, in addition to meeting the main objective, another significance was added, aesthetics, each bag matches a look, and each one conveys messages visually.

The format and mainly the color of the bag influence the choice because the color is related to human psychology. Color passes a meaning to everyone, as it involves brain processing and actions. For each look thought out and chosen, a specific bag will be selected, considering the different messages these images convey. Therefore, we must know which bag colors call consumers' attention, aiming to develop the product to meet their desires. Well, in this Fashion segment, a well-planned color chart is used to draw the public's attention.

Fashion is used in everyday life to express identity; consumers use it to belong to the community and simultaneously differentiate themselves from it, becoming individuals. Therefore, the bags are placed as an element of a composition, considering their possible meanings and how other individuals will interpret them. This research is justified by the need to know the possible interpretations of people about types of bags in different colors. With that, designers and image consultants can create more assertive visual compositions consistent with the image consumers want to convey.

It is also based on Moreira (2016), when the author states that the application of color in the creative process in fashion is little investigated. Even though they are widely used in practical activities, in-depth academic studies of the design processes of color charts in Fashion Design are scarce. Therefore, this research is based on the possibility of developing a better compelling correlation between product and consumer regarding the creative options in elaborating a color chart.

From these discussions, this paper aims to identify the meanings of the colors and the contexts of use associated with a handbag's five colors (black, white, blue, yellow, and red).

Methodology

The main types of handbags consumed by women over 18 years old were mapped to define the products to be researched. Three categories were found: shoulder, handbag, and touring bag. Based on this information, an analysis was carried out of the type of bag most representative of that category, according to the researchers' view, using the "shopping" tab on Google. Based on that, this paper emphasizes the handbag. Therefore, the following grants were selected to be researched in this work (Figure 1):



Figure 1 – Handbag object of study in this investigation

The bags are placed as an element of a composition, considering their possible meanings and how other individuals will interpret them. This research is justified by the need to know the possible interpretations of people about types of bags in different colors. With that, designers and image consultants can create more assertive visual compositions consistent with the image consumers want to convey. Bearing this in mind, for the questionnaire development, bags in primary light colors were considered (Barros, 2011), in addition to white and black, which are considered fundamental in Fashion Design (Treptow, 2013).

The planned questionnaire develops a sequential logical sequence in which, in the first stage, sociodemographic information was collected, such as a) age; b) marital status; c) gender;

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d) region; e) monthly income; f) device on which you were accessing the questionnaire. In the second stage, the different types of bags and their colors were shown so that people could inform which semantic symbologies were being passed. The data obtained will be considered through fundamental descriptive analysis.

According to Reis and Reis (2002, p. 5), “We use descriptive statistics to organize, summarize and describe the important aspects of a set of observed characteristics or to compare such characteristics between two or more sets.” With this, it is possible to identify the frequency distribution for each clothing collection analyzed, concerning the pairs of semantic descriptors and classified words, transforming these results into graphs and tables. Thus, it is observed that the descriptive statistics analysis appears to be satisfactory enough to arrive at the inferences of this research.

Results and Discussion

For the semantic analysis of the handbags, three tables were developed in which all the answers were considered, the ones highlighted in green being the ones with the highest percentages. For example, “very happy” is regarded as a positive point, and “very ugly” is a negative (Table 1).

Table 1 – Percentage results referring to the relation between colors and adjectives

Adjective/Color	Yellow	White	Blue	Black	Red
Happy	75%	50%	93,1%	73%	100%
Melancholic	25%	50%	6,9%	26,7%	0%
Stimulant	70,8%	52,2%	100%	65,5%	96,7%
Monotonous	29,2%	47,8%	0%	34,5%	3,3%
Sophisticated	64%	75%	81,8%	75,9%	76,2%
Simple	36%	25%	18,2%	24,1%	23,8%
Empowered	66,7%	69,6%	82,6%	94,7%	78,6%
Null	33,3%	30,4%	17,4%	5,3%	21,4%
Creative	54,2%	61,9%	86,2%	70,6%	78,6%
Ordinary	45,8%	38,1%	13,8%	29,4%	21,4%
Pleasant	65,2%	88%	92,9%	96,3%	96,2%
Unpleasant	34,8%	12%	7,1%	3,7%	3,8%
Modern	69,6%	76,2%	85,7%	91,7%	95,8%

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Outdated	30,4%	23,8%	14,3%	8,3%	4,2%
Sexy	58,8%	59,1%	93,8%	81,5%	92,9%
Serious	41,2%	40,9%	6,3%	18,5%	7,1%
Chic	62,5%	80%	75%	77,8%	39,1%
Casual	37,5%	20%	25%	22,2%	60,9%
Fashion	70,8%	72,7%	79,3%	92,3%	84,6%
Campy	28,2%	27,3%	20,7%	7,7%	15,4%
Ugly	46,2%	17,4%	7,4%	7,7%	12%
Beautiful	53,8%	82,6%	92,6%	92,3%	88%

We can highlight that red was chosen as joyful, modern, and casual, corroborating what Pedrosa (2004) and Pastoureaux (1997; 2011) state, but no previous association was observed between modern and casual. White, in turn, was seen as melancholy, monotonous, and chic, which was also not presented with the same meaning by the referring authors. The blue handbag was classified as stimulating, sophisticated, creative, sensual, and beautiful. In contrast, according to Pedrosa (2004), this color evokes a sense of beauty. Still, finding an association for the other adjectives was not possible.

Yellow stands out as simple, null, common, unpleasant, outdated, serious, tacky, and ugly; it is mainly felt with a negative connotation. The same authors' associations in the area were not found. Finally, for black, we identified as empowered, pleasant, and fashionable; it also managed to find the same result according to the associations of the referring authors.

A questionnaire was developed with the possible locations to define where these people would use those kinds of handbags, as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 – Percentage results referring to the locations where the handbags are used

Place of Use/ Color	I Would Not Use a Bag That Color	Elegant Party	Nightclub	Happy Hour	Outdoor Walk	Work	Day To Day	Shopping	In House
Yellow	18,5%	13%	14,8%	13%	11,1%	5,6%	11,1%	13%	0%
White	10,6%	10,6%	16,7%	10,6%	15,2%	6,1%	9,1%	15,2%	1,5%
Red	12,1%	1,1%	19,8%	16,5%	14,3%	0%	15,4%	18,7%	2,2%
Blue	24,5%	9,4%	20,8%	17%	3,8%	7,5%	3,8%	11,3%	1,9%
Black	3,1%	21,6%	14,4%	15,5%	5,2%	8,2%	17,5%	11,3%	3,1%

We can see that red is preferred in shopping and outdoor walks. White, in a nightclub or elegant party. Blue for happy hour, lounge, or some choose not to wear them anywhere. Yellow, with percentages in a nightclub or would not use them; and black, selected for work, elegant parties, day-to-day, or at home.

Then, the last part of the questionnaire, with the same names of places present in the previous table (Table 3), was developed to mention where people would not use these bags. This information was then observed from a cross-reference table.

Table 3 – Percentage results referring to places they would not use the handbags

Place of Use/ Color	Elegant Party	Nightclub	Happy Hour	Outdoor Walk	Work	Day To Day	Shopping	In House
Yellow	11,6%	7%	0%	7%	20,9%	11,6%	4,7%	16,3%
White	7,7%	5,8%	3,8%	11,5%	17,3%	13,5%	1,9%	25%
Red	29%	1,4%	2,9%	4,3%	27,5%	5,8%	2,9%	10,1%
Blue	10,3%	2,9%	2,9%	14,7%	11,8%	11,8%	8,8%	17,6%
Black	9,2%	6,6%	5,3%	15,8%	15,8%	9,2%	7,9%	21,1%

In the table, we can see in percentages which place people would not use these bags, highlighting the red, which people would not operate at an elegant party or work. White, in

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your daily life and at home. Blue, only in the mall, would not be used; and the black one, the people would not use at happy hour or outdoor walks.

Final Consideration

The development of symbolic analyzes about the meanings associated with handbags in five colors suggests that this element plays a symbolic role beyond its use. This was demonstrated by the responses regarding the location. A preference for specific colors was observed for each place suggested in the study.

This research found that potential consumers read colors like red, being empowered, unpleasant, outdated, and chic. Black is melancholy, severe, and casual, while blue is related to creative, pleasant, modern, sensual, and beautiful. White refers to drab, sophisticated, null, and chic. Yellow was considered cheerful, stimulating, sophisticated, simple, tacky, and ugly, and used in parties, elegant places walks, and shopping (Table 4). The construction of this research and results can be inserted into creative processes in which they should create new fashion products, whether commercial or conceptual. The research aroused interest for further studies and covered other fundamental elements of visual communication that may be present in bag configurations, such as shape and texture.

Table 4 – General results on the association between colors and types of bags

Colors/Bags		Handbags
Red	Symbology	Happy Modern Casual
	Context of use	Nightclub Shopping Happy hour
Blue	Symbology	Stimulant Sophisticated Creative Sexy Beautiful

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	Context of use	Nightclub Happy hour Shopping
Yellow	Symbology	Simple Null Ordinary Unpleasant Outdated Serious Campy Ugly
	Context of use	Nightclub Shopping Happy hour
White	Symbology	Melancholic Monotonous Chic
	Context of use	Nightclub Shopping Outdoor walk
Black	Symbology	Empowered Pleasant Gashion
	Context of use	Elegant party Day by day Happy hour

For the elaboration of possible new works, we suggest research focused on the semantic meaning of accessory pieces, like jewelry, and how this composition can impact when it comes to assembling the look. We can also research how to create a fashion product from semantic analysis and how the touch and texture of certain products affect when choosing to buy bags, shoes, or even garments.

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