The Evolution of Color Interpretation Over Time

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Color plays a significant role in how people interpret emotions and meanings, but these interpretations may change over time. The purpose of this experiment was to examine how associations with common colors have evolved across different age groups, with a focus on emotionally charged meanings. It was hypothesized that younger participants would show more polarized and emotionally strong interpretations of colors such as red, orange, and purple, while colors like green, blue, and yellow would remain more stable across generations. To test this, a survey was conducted in which 154 participants were separated into five age groups: 18 and younger, 19-35, 36-50, 51-75, and 76 and older. Participants rated how strongly they associated six colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple) with various emotions, including power, wealth, luck, confidence, beauty, danger, peace, hardship, and nostalgia, using a 1-5 scale. Participants also indicated whether each color felt overall positive or negative. The data showed significant generational differences, particularly for red (the trendline having a slope of 0.988 and a p-value of <0.0001), yellow, and purple. Red shifted from more positive associations in younger groups to more negative ones in older groups. Yellow showed decreasing negativity over time, while purple demonstrated a parabolic trend across ages. In contrast, green and blue remained consistently positive across all age groups. These results support the hypothesis that emotionally charged colors change in meaning across generations, while more stable colors retain consistent interpretations over time.

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