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Compatible colour palettes for natural food packaging

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ABSTRACT

The idea of packaging is as old as human civilization, since the transportation and storing of products has always demanded putting them in containers and boxes, as well as the protection of food from dust, rain, humidity and other deteriorating agents. Similarly, the influence of colour as an identifying and communicating element of the *attributes* of those signs, acquire today a central role, key in the visual communication of the product image.

In the case of consumer goods, particularly food, the packaging is not only a simple wrapping for protection, but it becomes a mean of communication, used to reflect the product *image* that is intended to transmit to the consumer. Consequently, the packing size, shape, colour, the typography for the texts and materials used in its elaboration, become of key importance making the packaging its own seller and becoming sometimes the connection with the consumer, since it anticipates what the consumer thinks or awaits from the packaging, generating a sort of *meta-communication* since it expresses what the packaging contains or supposedly contains.

There are many factors in our reality, either psychological or visual, that determine the appropriate choice of the packaging colour, shape and material, according to the adopted commercialisation strategies. These factors become more important day after day, and they vary according to the cultural traditions and tastes of the different societies.

Food packaging design has been one of the disciplines that has been more related to the graphic industry in the last decades. We intend to investigate this issue and show some incompatibilities that certain design decisions have, regarding the colours used to represent the natural shapes and the resulting colours of the production of the printing standards. We will also offer some possible solutions to these conflicts which occur between one system and the other in the colour treatment. It is also the objective of this work to offer some ideas to the designers providing some conceptual and visual tools, establishing a series of compatible chromatic palettes between the suggested colour and the depicted colour.

In this opportunity, we do not intend to deal with the packaging colour as an industrialized product material, but we want to deal with some particular colour features in the graphic messages and its relations with the possibilities of reproduction, taking into account general types of materials for packaging or, even more important, the covering materials which are the visual media for the messages.

It is in this particular issue this paper deals with, where product identity, laws of marketing, technology constrains, rhetoric, persuasion among others, coexist –or not.

1. ESTHETICS OF PACKAGING

Certain categories of intervention are established, matching the types of packaging materials in products of daily, periodical and occasional use. This classification corresponds with the variables of *cesias*, since they determine sensory differences in the perception of colour in accordance with the concerning topic. In this opportunity, the following classification is used:

1. **Transparent:** We can observe that in transparent packaging for fruits, vegetables or pasta, the representation of colour comes from a natural fact, since the same product is the one being exhibited in its most pure expression; consequently, the perceived colours will be a combination of the colours of the product interacting with the proposed colours for the visual message of the container. The harmony or incompatibility should be seen in the combination of these two semantic fields.
2. **Translucent:** In this case, its own composition produces a combination of overlapping colours due to the semitransparent veil covering the product.
3. **Opaque:** This kind of packaging requires a colour treatment to access the identity of the content, in addition to photos or 2D or 3D illustrations to exhibit it. In this case, the participation of the designer and the areas of knowledge presented in this work are of essential importance.
4. **Reflective:** Similar to the previous material as regards the treatment of colour, but it has interesting possibilities in its colour display due to the reflexion of light over the covering material.
5. **Blended:** Combinations in pairs of the materials mentioned above. The characteristics aforesaid for each type also apply here.

2. FOOD COLOUR AND IDENTITY

One of the basics conditions of colour in packaging is that it has to be *useful* and support its shape in the identification of the product. In now a days society the visual identity already established its value as a basic need of every entity or item. There are some categories that have a direct influence in the colour choice of the graphic proposals for packaging, where there has to have:

- **The brand's identity:** the shapes that represent the production company and/or the logo of the product.
- **The product image:** the leading companies establish a colour associated to its identity assigning to it meanings that may refer or not to the food they represent.
- **Selling requirements:** Visibility, readability and unity in its writing, with the objective of facilitating its localization and recognition.
- **Semantic association:** Basic relation between the content and what it is displayed. Colours help attract the buyer's attention and provide information related to its content.

3. FOOD AND NATURAL COLOURS

When we talk about the *natural* characteristic of colour, we make reference to a semantic distinction in the faithfulness of the colours of the product, which can be verified mainly in photographs, where it is presumed that colours do not suffer alterations. We can also include any type of image manipulation that does not modify the original colours. Consequently, it is necessary to talk about colour "naturalness" in the packaging graphics, since it is in this