

# HUE AND HYPE: A GENRE-WISE COLOR PSYCHOLOGY META-ANALYSIS OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIE POSTERS

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## Abstract

Colour psychology is the study of how different colours affect human mood and behaviour. A movie poster is the visual representation and symbol of what is to be expected from the movie. colours are a significant medium used by the movie creators to convey emotions, meaning and themes. This study aims to investigate the influence of the colours used in Hollywood movie posters to understand the psychology behind the use of predominant colours in the movie posters by referring to colour's psychology. A total of 106 Hollywood movie posters were used from 10 genres namely romance, psychological thrillers, action, horror, comedy, science fiction, adventure, animated, coming-of-age and historical dramas. The movies were selected on the basis of the highest critical ratings and box office collections. The predominant colours were identified and analysed using colour psychology interpretations. The colours blue, yellow and black were predominantly used in these movie posters, however the shades and the placements of each colour divulged a deeper meaning for the movie.

**Key words:** colour psychology, movie posters, Hollywood movies, blue, yellow, black

## Introduction

Colour Psychology is a branch of psychology that studies how different colours affect human mood and behaviour. It explores how colours can influence emotional responses, and how we respond to colours is affected by factors such as age and cultural background.

Colour is also a very effective communication tool that can be used to influence others' moods and even physiological reactions such as blood pressure, fatigue and eye strain. Colours can impact our mood, food choices, aesthetic sense, decor and the relevance of one's culture, experiences and choices we make. Though colour psychology is a relatively new branch of psychology, over recent years, it has gained popularity, especially in the fields of marketing, logo, consumer behaviourism and media & movies.

According to Galen, he associated colours with personality temperaments and mainly categorised into four types *sanguine* (being optimistic and social), *choleric* (being short-tempered and irritable), *melancholic* (being analytical and quiet), and *phlegmatic* (being relaxed and peaceful). According to Jicheng Yang and Xiaoying Shen (2022), they identified prominent colours and their symbolic meaning. The following table is the interpretation from their research paper:

colour	Symbolic meaning
Red	Festive, excited, passionate, dangerous, loving, auspicious, gaudy, enthusiastic, awe-inspiring
Dark red	Noble, solemn, selfless
Pink	Gentle, soft, earthy, reserved
Lavender	Elegant, romantic, dreamy, sexy
Purple	Solemn, deep, mysterious, noble, arrogant, glamorous
Blue	Serenity, lost, peaceful, wisdom, hope, reason, transcendence, refreshing, eternal
Green	Hope, nature, balance, environmental protection, youth, growth, freshness
Light yellow	Quiet, serene, light-hearted
Yellow	Hope, joy, light, confidence, dignity, danger
Orange	Vitality, warmth, joy, kindness, joy, liveliness, leisure
White	Sublime, clean, parting, truth, indifference
Black	Simple, mysterious, composed, insidious, cold, evil, dead, noble

## Posters and colours

Posters are primary advertisement tools used to connect with audiences. A good movie poster should be able to convey the general theme of the movie as well as the emotions of the movie. A movie poster should be able to grab attention and generate curiosity amongst the audience. Often a movie poster is a deciding factor for the audience to motivate to watch that particular movie.

Each movie poster is made to convey a particular mood associated with the movie genre to the audience, giving them a glimpse of what to be expected in the movie. Though we can observe dominant and popular colours in a movie poster, the shades and placements of these colours have specific significance. For instance, red though we associate it with love, passion and desire, the same colour in a deeper shade like blood red, observed frequently in the horror movie posters, is used to evoke emotions like anger, revenge, dreadfulness.

## Review of Literature

Beren's (2014) research findings implied that colour is not universal but attributes a strong cultural, socio-environmental and gender influence. According to this research, colour influences our behaviour, cognitive and affective states, sleep patterns and fatigue. And the research concluded that cinematographers have subliminal neurocognitive mechanisms.

Khattak et. al., (2020), study evaluated the literature linking to colour psychology. The study found that colours play an important role in marketing. They also found managers should pay immense attention to their brands and products colours in order to attract a large number of customers.

Singh, N., & Srivastava, S. K. (2011), postulated that signs merge in a person's experience rather than colour only and it can influence consumer behaviour purchase, perception and emotions. This study emphasised that colour perception is influenced by one's gender, age, personality, personal experience, and ethno-demographic factors.

Rider, R. M. (2010), this study findings showed that colour preference is found as young as infants as three months old and changes with age. The responses to colour may be influenced by nature or culture. The primary research objective was to determine the point where the joint effects of brightness and saturation cause a viewer to prefer a yellow colour to a blue colour.

Singh, S. (2006), the research findings revealed that people make up their minds within 90 seconds to react either for a product or people and 62-90 percent of the assessment is dependent on colour alone. Thereby, he insisted that prudent use of colours was a significant factor for either to influence moods and feelings and to react positively or negatively towards a product.

Yang, J., & Shen, X. (2022), investigated the application value of colour psychology in the designing of community health environments with reference to colour psychology themes and he postulated that colours can be a supporting factor to improve the community environment and health of the people.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach using a content analysis method.

## Research Objectives

- To identify the predominant colours genre-wise in the Hollywood movie posters.
- To analyse the meaning of the predominant colours identified in the Hollywood movie posters.

## Research Questions

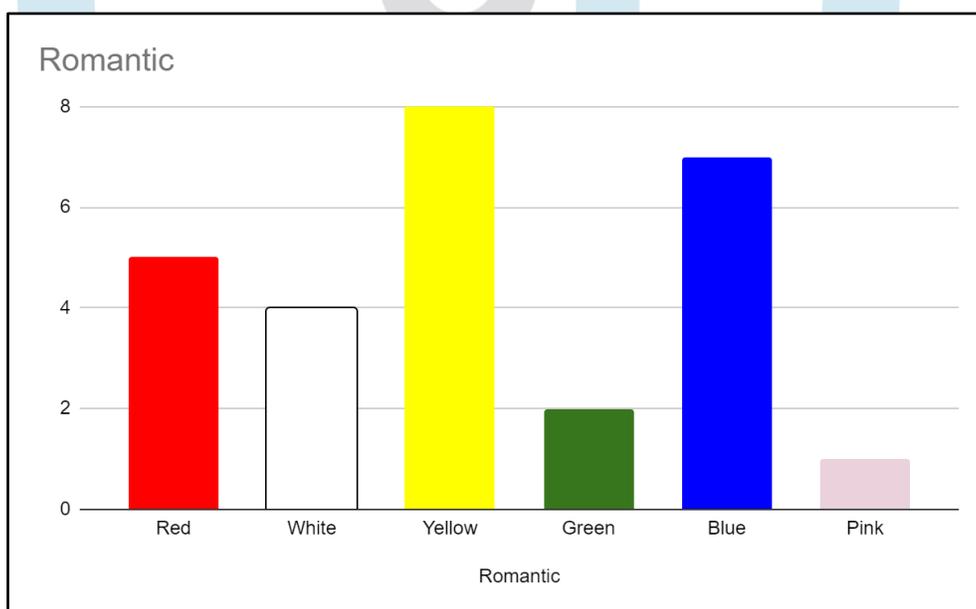
1. Do the same colours used in different genre posters convey distinct meanings?
2. Does the placement and different shades of the colours convey a meaning in the movie's posters?

## Procedure

A total of 106 Hollywood movie posters were selected using the internet, genre-wise. The movie posters were collected based on high critic ratings and movie box office collection. The predominant colours in each movie poster were identified and cumulated genre-wise and analysed using colour psychology interpretations for each colour. Graphs have been used to illustrate the findings.

## Results and Discussions

### Romantic



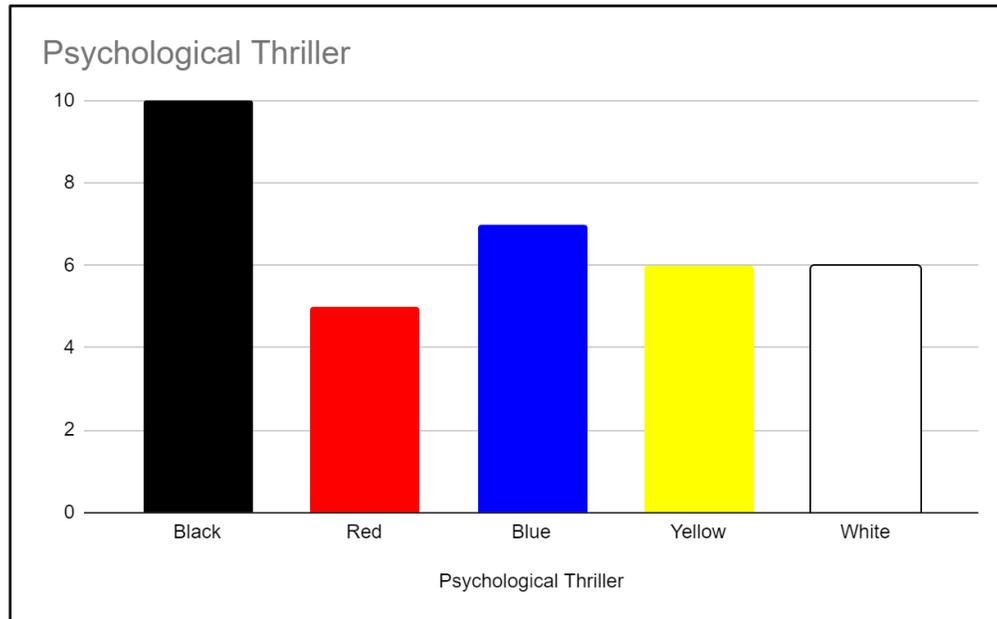
**Table 1 showing the predominant colours in the romantic genre**

When it comes to romantic comedies white is often used as the base colour, upon which other colours and images are built, giving them a brighter feel than the other genres. While these posters do include black and other dark colours, they are mainly used to create a contrast and are not used as the main focal point. This is a very common solution in Romantic posters and is undoubtedly due to the fact that many actors and actresses in this genre can become quite well-known and loved as a part of the genre itself.

Yellow is one of the predominant colours used in the posters and here evokes emotions of softness, cheerfulness, bright and optimism.

Blue is the third predominant colour used and evokes feelings of calmness, peacefulness, tranquillity and security. The subtle shades of blue implies the meaning of peacefulness and trustworthiness. The blue is gentle in appearance and is often used to make the same impression in these posters.

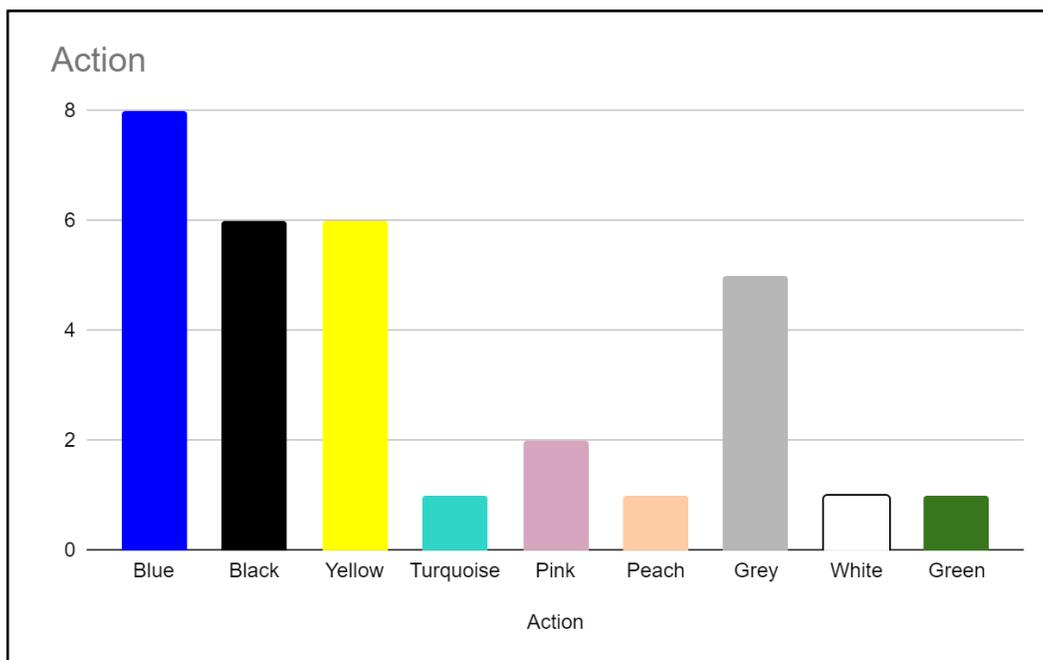
Red being the fourth predominant colour used can signify passion, excitement, causes physiological changes like heart rate, desire and a feeling of warmth. The movie posters in the romantic genre often use shades of red and orange which are associated with romance and evoke these feelings.



**Table 2 showing the predominant colours used in the psychological thrillers genre**

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the psychological thriller movie posters. Black here is one of the most predominant colours used in these posters signifying mystery, power, fear, death, evil and is often called as a very intimidating colour. It carries negative traits of being pessimistic, withholding and aloof. Black though it is predominantly used, it is very interesting to see where it has been placed and the meaning it implies. For example, in the movie poster **Black Swan**, black colour is around her eyes, which shows her negative “other”, the darker nature, hallucinations and struggles. In the movie poster of **Get Out**, the racial conflict and its mystery is shown through the posters. The movie poster of **Orphan** is designed in such a way where everything except the protagonist’s face is in the darker shade of green mixed with black. The protagonist is wearing pigtails trying to show her innocence while she has a choker in black trying to show her desires and mysterious character. In the movie poster of **Old Boy** everything is black with neon colours of blue and red, except for the characters which gives deeper meaning to them. It sheds light on the dark past of the character and he wants to change.

The posters also have the colour grey used which can be associated with negative connotations, not seen in positive feelings. It is considered as a still emotionless, moody colour. In the movie **Gone Girl**, the poster design goes from shades of blue-black to grey and the main character is placed very insignificant compared to the other elements on the poster, giving the audience deeper insight into his character. Yellow is another predominant colour that has been used in the posters and can imply as a warning sign, to show aggressiveness. Studies show that babies are found to cry more in yellow colour. It has also been shown that people get more aggressive when yellow is shown. The movie posters of **Psycho**, **Seven** and **Memento** have used shades of yellow that are sandy and mixed with brown to show and highlight the aggressiveness of the main characters. **Seven** and **Psycho** are movies that have themes of murder and mystery, and their posters highlight the names of the movie and the whole poster in yellow to grab the attention of the audience.

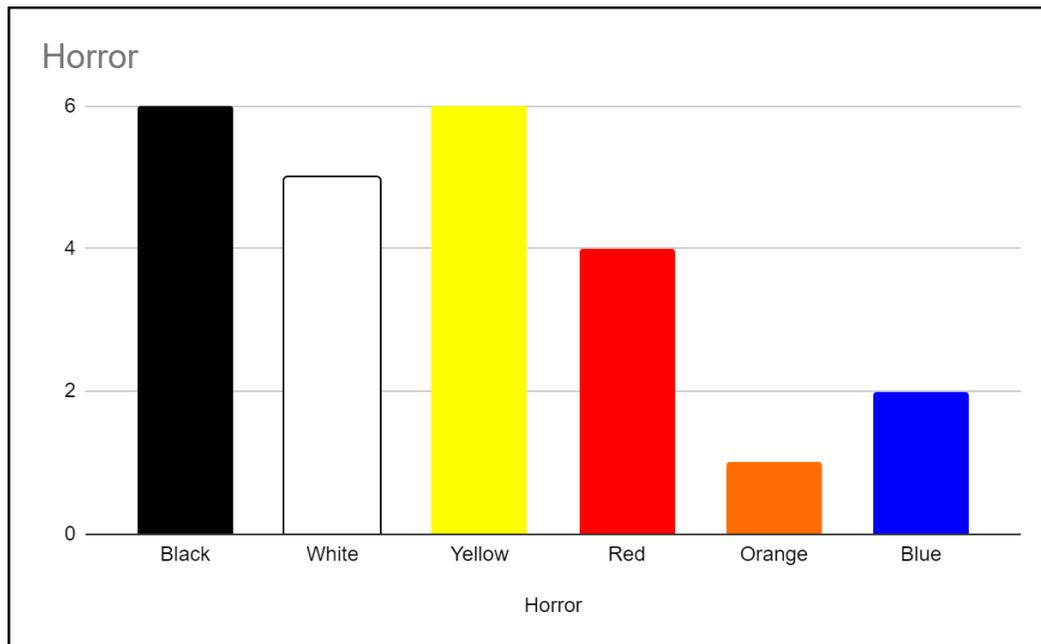
**Action**

**Table 3 showing the predominant colours used in the action genre**

The Action genre also works on a base of very dark colours, though not of as large an amount as Science Fiction. All of the analysed posters use black or a dark colour very close to black as the base colour. The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the action movie posters.

Aqua Blue is one of the predominant colours used in these posters to show purity, peacefulness, trust, calmness. In the movie posters of Avatar, John Wick and Dune, they try to talk about the protagonist's need for balance, peacefulness, though their action is aggressive, they are forced to react so, their calling is for peace and balance. Black is the second predominant colour to be used in these posters that is used to represent a strong willed and determined character, someone who is not afraid to go after what they want and usually seeking for power and prestige.

Yellow, the third predominant colour used in these posters which is used to evoke negative feelings such as gear, betrayal, egotism, anxiety. The Bourne Identity, Top Gun: Maverick and Mad Max movie posters have used yellow prominently to highlight the heroes, to show the male leads to be more powerful. While Sicario, Bullet Train and Baby Drive movie posters have used yellow to show the vulnerability of the characters. Especially in the movie poster of **Sicario**, the female lead wants to be a very optimistic person and do something good, but she is surrounded by amoral people and the poster tries to depict the same. In comparison, in the movie poster of **Baby Driver**, the yellow is used subtly with shades of brown and pink, showing the young innocent protagonist trying to fight all odds and also trying to find love.

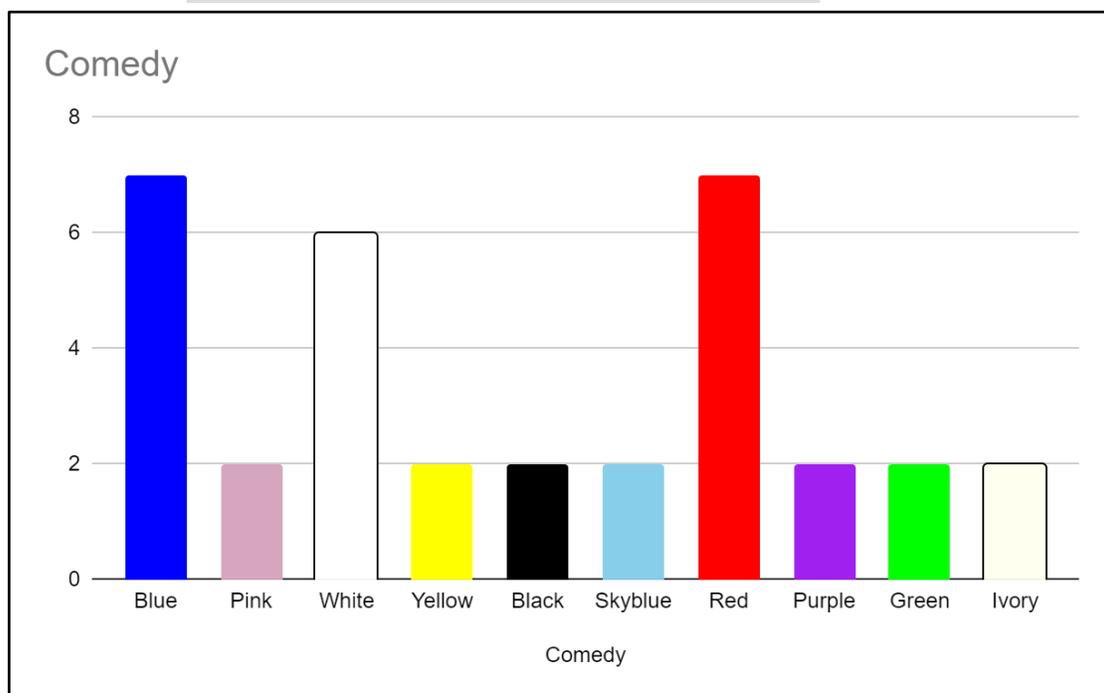
**Horror**

**Table 4 showing the predominant colours used in the horror genre**

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the horror movie posters. The colour black is used more in these posters and can imply death, mourning, misfortune, evil, sufferings, bad luck, illness, depression, grief, lurking in the shadows, anxiety, wickedness, forbidden pleasure.

Blood red here signifies danger, imminent death, incurable hunger, strongly negative emotions such as aggression and lust. Use of honeydew yellow is also seen.

Grey is the other colour that is used more in these posters that signifies death, destruction, decay, immortality, the other side and brutality. Orange implied fire, hopelessness, madness and dark ritual.

**Comedy**

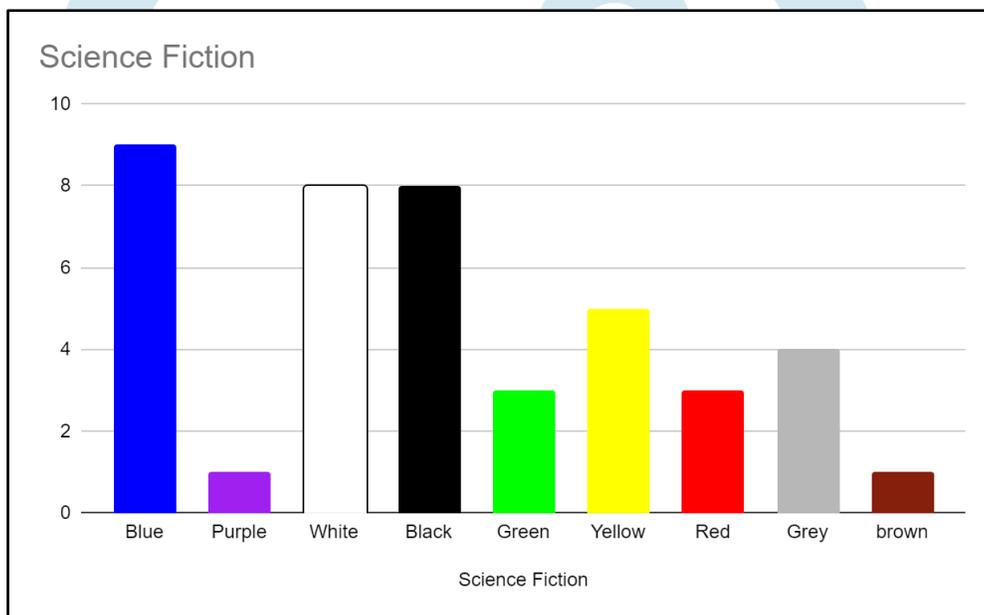
**Table 5 showing the predominant colours used in the comedy genre**

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the comedy movie posters. The use of high contrast and bright colours have been noticed in the posters. Interestingly the colour red is often used on the fonts to highlight the names of the film in the poster.

The predominant use of white in the posters is associated as a positive colour. This talks about balance, innocence and light heartedness.

Blue-white is used for minimalistic soft shades, tranquillity, peace, harmony and balance. Soft shades of blue are associated with soothing shades for the mind.

### *Science Fiction*



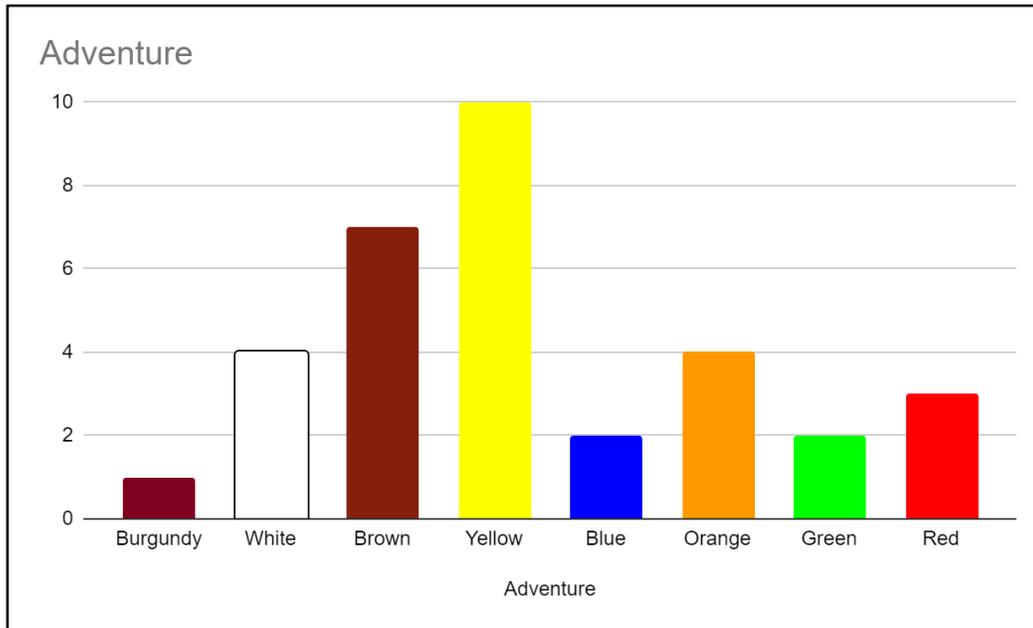
**Table 6 showing the predominant colours used in the science fiction genre**

The science fiction genre posters seem to favour dark colours. The darkest colour used in these posters is always very close to black. Dark colours symbolise the unknown and unexplored, something that has always fascinated the human being.

The main colour in the poster is blue in all of its hues. Blue is a colour closely associated with technology, which is one of the key elements in Science Fiction. Blue being the predominant colour in the movie posters can symbolise tension, anxiety, cold fear, unearthly monsters and demons, danger and tragedy.

Mint green colour has been seen to be used in the movie posters and used to symbolise suffocation, unnatural disease, immortality, projection and danger.

## Adventure

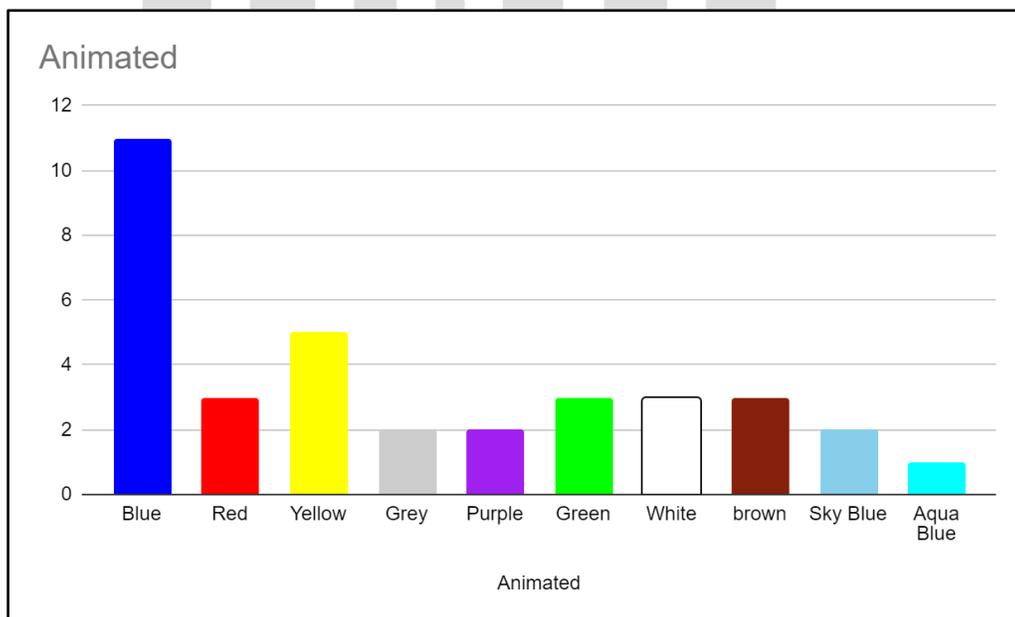


**Table 7 showing the predominant colours used in the adventure genre**

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the adventure movie posters. Yellow is the predominant colour to be used in the posters, used to symbolise hope, rights, escape and experience. Bright yellow is used to show optimism and happy endings.

Red is being found in the posters and can symbolise passion, adrenalin rush and into the moment feeling.

## Animation

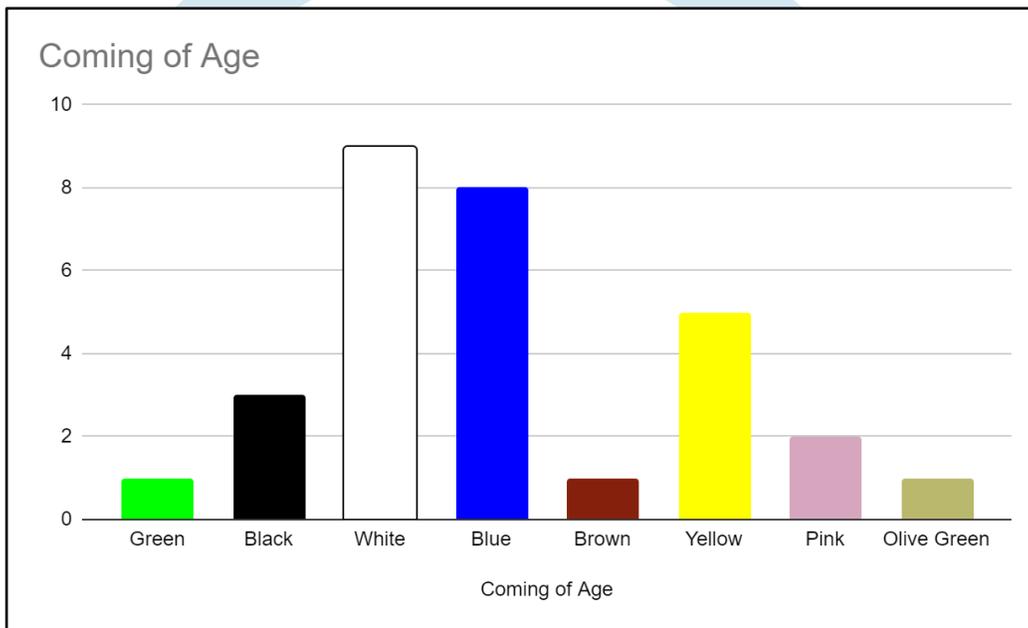


**Table 8 showing the predominant colours used in the animated genre**

Animated movies tend to have very straightforward designs when it comes to the posters. All of the posters analysed have portrayed at least one lead character in the poster and seven out of twelve posters have portrayed all of the lead characters. Our reaction to different colours is also partly influenced by our age. High-chroma primary and secondary colours are preferred by all schoolchildren over muddy and neutral grey colours. Saturated reds and blues are preferred over shades and tints of reds and blues.

The designers have used very bright and intense colours. All of the posters do have at least one warmer colour in the design, generally used as a highlight and often used in the text. The colours used in Animation posters are generally very clearly related to the environment. All of the posters are set outside and the colours in the posters reflect this. Though there are many prominent colours, the posters are found to be more colourful. colours like blue, aqua blue, sky blue, gold, purple and neon colours are found. Purple shades in these posters can signify dreams, aliens, youth and innocence.

**Coming of Age**



**Table 9 showing the predominant colours used in the coming-of-age genre**

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the coming-of-age movie posters. Multi-colour dimensions have been used and seen prominently in these posters. The colours yellow and plant green have been used that can imply growth. Yellow, which is very bright and attractive, grabs your attention. Red blended with brown shows wild, free and coming across insecurities.

**Historical Drama**

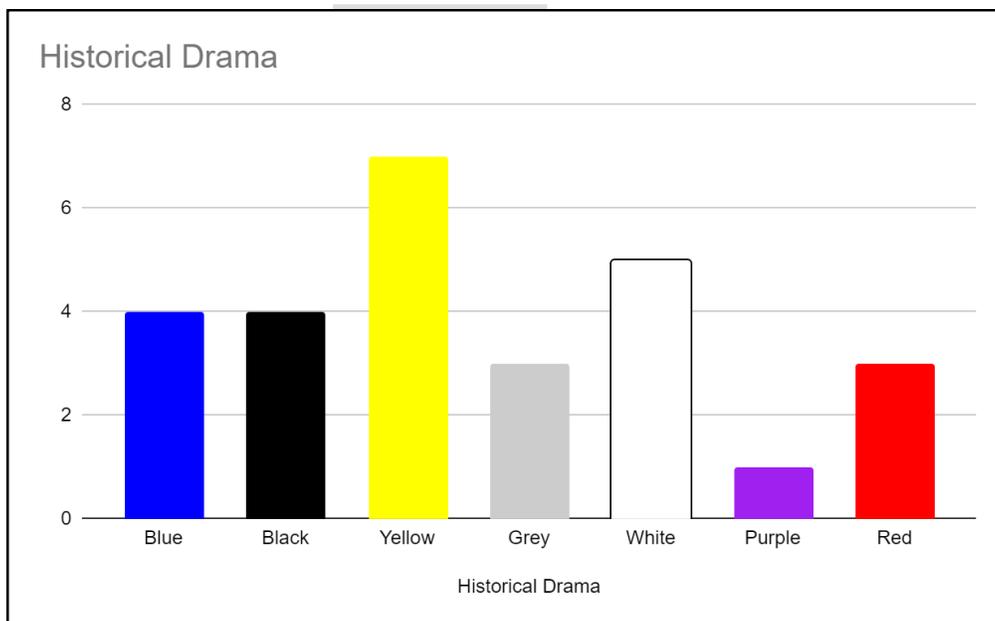


Table 10 showing the predominant colours used in the historical drama genre

The above graph shows the predominant colours used in the historical drama movie posters. Grey is prominently used in the posters that implies nostalgia, historical prominence, combinations of gothic and industrial, cold, wisdom, dampness, boredom, emotionless, self-restraint, refined and gloomy.

### Conclusion

On the basis of the following data collected, the following colours blue, yellow, black and red were found to be the predominant colours used in all the movie posters, however, the tones, shades, and placements of these colours implied different meanings depending on the different genres of the movie posters.

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