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Colour in Student Magazine Design

Abstract

Creating a school magazine offers students opportunities to develop their skills, professional potential, teamwork, creativity, media literacy, and involvement in the school community. In magazine design, colours create a positive first impression, strengthen a magazine's attractiveness and popularity among readers. Combinations of colours form a consistent visual identity and hierarchy, and set the spatial balance. Since colours have an emotional impact, they can affect the mood of the readers or evoke an emotion that corresponds to the article's content. Using a colour palette that matches the identity of the university or the faculty can reinforce brand awareness and help build trust with students and the wider public. Critical to creating a professional university magazine are not only the right background and typeface colours, but also matching colours of imagery that appropriately complement the typography and page layout, including white spaces that reinforce the professional to upscale feel of

the magazine design. Effectively selected colours will not only make the magazine a communication vehicle for information, but will also enhance marketing potential and especially aesthetic values.

Key words

Colour. Design. Magazine. Readability. Visual Identity. Visual Style.

Introduction

The creation of a student magazine is a part of many university curricula focused on mass media. It represents the most frequent method of the practical concept of teaching in schools (Bôtošová, 2019). School magazines often reflect the opinions of students, their lifestyle, activities at the school, faculty or university, and point out problems that affect them. An important component of the creation of a magazine is not only its topic, content, texts of different genres, photos, but also its graphics and page layout.

Colour plays a significant role in the design and visual side of the magazine. It adds aesthetic value and works as an important marketing or communication tool. Appropriately chosen colours contribute to the magazine's attractiveness, create a positive first impression and draw readers' attention. They also form a consistent visual style for the magazine, set its tone and contribute to its identity as a brand (Clementson, n.d.). Since colours have an emotional impact, they can affect the mood of the readers or evoke an emotion that corresponds to the article's content. While light colours have positive emotional responses, dark colours evoke negative emotions (Hemphill, 1996). Vivid colours can evoke a feeling of joy, optimism or energy, pastel and muted colours can induce a sense of calm and relaxation.

The visual harmony of the entire magazine is achieved by the proportionality of colours and their balance. Dominant colours (one, maximum two) form the overall identity of the magazine, complementary colours are suitable for different sections and columns. Accent colours are used to highlight, neutral colours (white, black and grey) to balance the colour scheme. All colours must be harmonized with white space, i.e. sufficient empty space around text, photos and images (Clementson, n.d.). Appropriately selected proportionality of colours, including white space, improves the readability of the text, increases its perception, facilitates orientation in the magazine and helps readers quickly identify important information without being overloaded.

Although the readability of text can be increased by using contrasting colours, too much contrast strains the eyes. Barták (1977) determined the order of expressiveness of the combination of font and background colours as follows: 1. black on yellow, 2. green on white, 3. red on white, 4. blue on white, 5. white on blue, 6. black on white, 7. yellow on black, 8. yellow on purple, 9. white on red, 10. white on green, 11. white on black, 12. red on yellow. Contrast reduction can be achieved by using a slightly tinted background. For the readability of the text, colour combinations that do not have sharp contrast are perceived as pleasant.

The visual appeal of a magazine can be increased by universal colour

coding. In Western culture, the symbolic meanings of colours are understood as follows: white – purity, yellow – optimism, red – activity, purple – elegance, green – renewal, blue – trustworthiness (Škvareninová, 2014).

1 Methodology

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which students use colour as an aesthetic and communicative tool in magazine design, through qualitative analyses of undergraduate magazines. The primary focus is on the application of colours in magazine design, their correspondence with the magazine's theme or universal symbolic coding. We also look at how the colour palette affects the readability and clarity of the text or the orientation of the magazine. The research sample consists of ten magazines produced by university students from Slovakia, Spain and Turkey. All of them studied at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava (FMK UCM) in the field of Media Relations (VZME), either as an undergraduate course of study or as part of the Erasmus+ programme. The analysed magazines were created in 2017 – 2022 on the course "System of work in print media". The assignment included the information that the magazine should correspond in colour with at least one of the criteria: the theme, the cultural symbolism of the colours, the identity of FMK UCM (which at that time was represented by the colours magenta and grey).

We used qualitative methods to analyse the magazines. The qualitative approach focuses on the inductive character, the aim is exploration, i.e. the pursuit of insight, understanding, orientation, but at the same time a holistic approach. The data is subjective, going into depth (Bačíková & Janovská, 2018). We focused on the following categories:

- Overall colour concept of the magazine with respect to its content, topic or colour symbolism;
- Colour design of the cover of the magazine, including an illustrative photograph or image, also the incorporation of the colour scheme of the headlines and sub-headlines;
- Combinations of font and background page colours (including legibility of text);
- Colour of headings;
- Combination of text colours;
- Correspondence of the colours of images and photographs with the overall colour concept of the magazine (photo-background-text relationship);
- Colour balance in space (text-photo-space relationship).

The magazines are in pdf format and have the appearance of printed journal pages in the form of two facing pages, a singular title page and a final page. We present the results of the analysis of seven magazines in a sample (in alphabetical order), and conclude with the results of this analysis.

2 Results

2.1 Erasmus Travellers

It is written by Spanish students, thematically focused on travel, and the colour palette also corresponds to this. They mostly use blue, as well as thematic illustrations – photos of a ship, maps, also an illustration on the front page – a plane’s wing in the clouds, which has poor quality and may cause an undesirable effect when printed. This can lower the standard of the magazine. All the text on the front page is in blue and refers to the topic of travel. However, the blue colour dominates the magazine, whether within the headlines, sub-headlines or the text background. The exception is only the pink-tinted rectangle, which is prominent compared to the rest of the magazine. The authors have inappropriately chosen a mustard colour font in this section as it is difficult to read (Figure 1). On the



Figure 1: Erasmus Travellers
Source: Erasmus Travellers (2019)

next page we see hard-to-read black text with a dark blue background where the clouds are, and the picture is not well chosen either, as it looks dark and gloomy. The headings in the other texts are in blue and the text itself is in black, all on a white background, which makes the text easier to read. The photographs are appropriately complemented, they don't interfere with the text. Text columns are sometimes scattered throughout the magazines, with written text wrapped around visual elements to make the text and images work together. Since attractive photographs contribute significantly to the attractiveness of a magazine, it is essential to consider visual imagery (McLoughlin, 2017). However, some photographs should be of better quality and also need improvement of their artistic mood. An exception occurs in the content of the magazine, where there is black text on a blue background, which is difficult to read and, moreover,

this is the only space where the text and background are designed in this way. Advertisements in this magazine are well done. The photographs accompanying the articles are also appropriately complementary and upbeat, as if they were really enticing readers to take a trip to the destination in question. We rate the magazine positively, apart from the inappropriate content, the pink frame with yellow text and the gloomy-looking picture with black text. These things are difficult to read.

2.2 Goddess

Goddess magazine has a highly fashionable character, strikingly resembling women's fashion magazines such as Elle, Emma, Eva. The cover page is dominated by white complemented by black together with a golden-brown headline. The illustrative photograph depicts the singer Adele, it is a semi-detail that has a slightly provocative character. We rate this as an appropriate illustrative shot. The front cover contains information about the price of the magazine, as well as dating, when it was published, the title's website and other subtitles. Topics on fashion and beauty trends, Christmas gift ideas and horoscopes predominate. The main motto of this issue is that "Confidence is power". The colouring of the headline and sub-headline is appropriate and thematically complements the illustration. We find that the colours of the headline are in most cases black and capitals. The only use of golden-brown (similar to the title page) is for the magazine's theme,

namely under the title "Confidence is power". The whole magazine is tuned to a minimalist style. A white background and black font dominate, and the font choice is appropriate, as it is easy to read and clearly separated from the headlines (capitals and bold), the perex

on a page, but are well proportioned to the text that surrounds the visual material. The Goddess magazine is an example of students' knowing how to work with visual material and having knowledge of how to work with photographs, illustrative images, colour and text.



Figure 2: Goddess
Source: Goddess (2021)

2.3 Media Magazín

(italics appear here), the body of the text and the intertitles. Several pages are devoted to advertising, which does not clash with the rest of the context. On the contrary, it appropriately complements the whole concept of the magazine. The pages are easy to read, the images mostly do not interfere with the text, and when they do, they are easy to read (Figure 2). They are not distracting, and the authors have avoided blending text, illustrations and backgrounds in any colour other than white. The illustrative images are appropriately placed, with either one photograph/image or several

The leitmotif of the Media Magazín is the presentation of FMK UCM and the VZME study program. Therefore, the basic colours of the entire periodical are magenta and grey, while white and black are also used as the background colours for pages and fonts. All four mentioned colours are on the title page as well. It seems unprofessional that the shade of magenta on the title and the last page is different

from that on the other pages of the magazine. The cover page contains basic information about the journal, including the titles of the main articles and a suitable illustration image. As a visual whole, the cover page is relatively simple. The simplicity is also aided by the sans-serif font used throughout the magazine, which improves readability. Within the magazine, the authors have appropriately chosen colour combinations to differentiate articles, so that the same page colour and font combinations are not repeated in two consecutive texts. On the positive side, most of the articles (except one) related to FMK UCM use more magenta than the other texts. In the magazine, the combination of white and magenta looks fresh, lively and dynamic, the combination of white and grey calm, the white page and the black font standard. The combination of magenta background and black font looks slightly aggressive, the readability of the text is worse than with a white page background and magenta font colour. The combination of the black background and the white font is very hard-to-read. The white bold font is even used with thick line spacing, therefore the text looks hard and heavy (Figure 3). Such a colour combination is difficult for the human eye and brain to process (Švec, 2016); it is also not recommended in terms of text readability (Mistrík, 1977). The bold font is not suitable as a text font; it is often used as a strong visual accent to emphasize important parts of the text, e.g. headlines or advertising

slogans. In the magazine, photos and pictures are appropriately chosen and are not distracting. As a whole, Media Magazín is a very respectable achievement by the students. It can be faulted for the insufficient readability of white bold font with thick line spacing on a black background, and the inconsistency of the magenta shade.



Figure 3: Media Magazín
Source: Media Magazín (2017)

2.4 Media of Tomorrow

The bilingual magazine reflects the present, past and future of the media. Its design is very simple, austere, without author's intention and conceptual work with colours. The front page is dominated by a large magazine headline in bold white and four short sentence fragments in bold white and yellow announcing the content. The font overlays a photo

of a YouTuber, which has a symbolic meaning pointing to the influence of YouTubers on communication and the lives of young people. However, the entire front page seems crowded and the photo disappears on it. Simple use of colours is applied in the design of the whole magazine: grey or black text is predominantly on a white or

pale grey background, while bold black is used to highlight headlines, perex and questions in interviews. The authors abandoned this colour scheme in two articles, where they added strips of yellow, red, magenta and dark blue as background colours, but without any identifiable intention. Geometric shapes in a combination of white, grey and black are also a characteristic element of the page design. On two pages they are complemented by red and blue - however, the shapes resemble a diagram of electrical connections (Figure 4). Such graphics do not

correspond with the focus of the magazine or with the study program VZME, which is presented in the magazine. There are no photos supplementing the texts. We can find only five small portrait photos, two of which capture the authors of the articles, the remaining three photos are not marked in any way and the reader does not know at all who is depicted in them. The positive is the white space around the photos, which makes the text look airy. The magazine is an example of simple design, unprofessional work with colours, photography and the overall design of the pages.

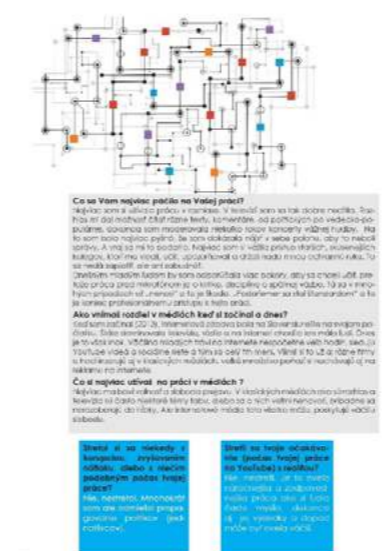


Figure 4: Media of Tomorrow
Source: Media of Tomorrow (2018)

2.5 Passenger

This was created by students from Turkey. On the front page, a round picture of a van at sunset shines on a brightly coloured background - it refers to the topic of travel. The title is depicted in garish purple. Otherwise, we find no other text or message on the cover. The sunset theme continues on the following pages, where the authors summarize the cast of the editorial team. The black font - although a different font and font weight, looks very contrasting when compared to the orange. The text is easy to read. However, the content of the magazine is almost unreadable as there are different coloured images in dark purple in this section, with rectangular shapes placed on top of them through collage with other photographs. This is difficult to read, confusing and unclear. The magazine is dominated by black headlines and text, the authors rather work with the colour of the background (Figure 5). There are many pages in the magazine with separated text in different text boxes, in places the font is less legible as they have used italics. A magazine layout template may contain several paragraphs. To increase readability, it is very important that the column and line margins are appropriately trimmed (Outsource2india, n.d.). Overall, we rate Passenger as an inconsistent work. There are inappropriately chosen fonts, illustrations that clash with the rest of the text, the background or other illustrations.



Figure 5: Passenger
Source: Passenger (2018)

2.6 Sky Lifestyle Magazine

The magazine focuses on the lifestyle of young people. It is dominated by the colour grey, which is dark grey on the front and last page in combination with elements of orange-red and black, and inside the magazine pale grey as the colour of the font or as part of some of the photographs. However, on the front page, the combination of colours under the word LIFESTYLE reduced its legibility, so we judge this colouring to be inappropriate as a background for the typeface. Grey symbolises harmony, compromise, elegance, but is also associated with unhealthy lifestyles, civilisation diseases and old age. In the magazine, it mutes the saturation of other colours, but this was the intention of the authors, who, apart from the four photographs,



“overlaid” all the other images in the magazine with grey, thus muting the intensity of the colours, or used black and white photographs. This visual concept benefited from black captions. We assess the colouring of the whole magazine as subtle, without being intense. On the negative side, the numerals used to mark the pages are too large and sometimes interfere with the text, thus reducing its readability. On most pages, the page number is so dominant that the reader may notice it first (Figure 6). The placement of numbers at different places on the page – sometimes at the top, at the bottom, in the middle of the page,

on the left, sometimes on the right – is also confusing and without any concept. The minimalist impression of the magazine is disturbed by the serif font. On the negative side, there is also a lot of unused blank space on some pages and the grey-green colour of the font makes it difficult to read. The magazine is an example of how disproportionate graphics, unbalanced number sizes and incorrectly used typefaces undermine the elegant concept of the whole issue.

Figure 6: Sky Lifestyle Magazine
Source: Sky Lifestyle Magazine (2020)

2.7 Uvedomelo

The magazine Uvedomelo is focused on a healthy lifestyle, which is also reflected in the appropriately chosen dominant green colour. It is also a leading colour on the front page where it clearly indicates the content and focus. The authors abandoned green for the topic of women’s ecological cosmetics, where they chose a pink-magenta page background with black font, and for an interview with the

moderator and greenfluencer Viktor Vincze, where the white page background is complemented by bands in two shades of blue. The mentioned colours support gender stereotypes that attribute pink to girls and blue to boys. We positively evaluate the use of colours in articles about retail chains, where the colours representing the companies in question prevail, which contributes to brand building. On some pages, green, pink-magenta, and occasionally yellow are also used as the background colours of the page, on which the light black font is not easily legible. The headlines of the articles are dominated by green and black fonts; we also rarely find white fonts on a dark blue background or yellow fonts on a green background. All subtitles are perfectly readable. The images are appropriately chosen, they do not interfere with the text, the authors adapted the colour combination of the background and font of the magazine pages to them. A specific element is that in several articles the students used the bold font to highlight important parts of the text, which does not have a distracting effect on the single-colour background of the page. Multi-coloured font of different thickness on a multi-coloured background is less readable and puts more strain on the eyes (Figure 7). The colours used throughout the magazine evoke ecology, solidity, trustworthiness, on some pages also conservatism and support of stereotypes.



Figure 7: Uvedomelo
Source: Uvedomelo (2020)

Conclusion

The overall colour concept of most of the magazines was dominated by content and subject matter. In the health food magazines, green and

Čo naše oceány a živočíchy, ktoré sa v nich nachádzajú? Mnohí nazývajú “sietový lov” udržateľným druhom lovenia.. Pri tomto love sa do siete zachytí len 500 gramov rýb , ktoré mali byť chytené a okolo 2,2 kilogramu rýb, ktoré sa chytili omylom. Ryby, ktoré sa ocitnú v sieti neplánovane väčšinou zahynú. Vodný ekosystém je tak rýchlo ničený, že sa nestíha obnovovať a tak znovu kvôli nám, ľuďom, je množstvo druhov na pokraji svojho vyhynutia.

Čo s týmto robíš? Dá sa to ešte zachrániť? Áno, dá! Človek je tvor prispôsobivý. Vieme sa prispôbiť podnebiu, v ktorom žijeme, vieme sa prispôbiť v spoločnosti, na vzduch, ktorý dýchame a rôznym iným veciam. Týmto sa snažíme naznačiť to, že keď niekto povie , že žij ako vegetarián alebo vegán sa nedá, tak klame. Vieme si na to zvyknúť. Je množstvo možností, ako živiny potrebné z mäsa nahradiť rastlinnými produktmi. Ak sa predsa len mäsa nevieme zbaviť úplne (a ani nechceme), tak aj v tomto prípade existuje riešenie. Naša Matka zem by sa určite potešila, keby sme konzumáciu mäsa aspoň znížili. **Uznajte sami, konzumovať mäso trikrát do dňa je zbytočný luxus. Našej planéte by pomohlo, a rovnako aj nám, ak by sme vynechali mäso aspoň pár krát do týždňa.**

pastel pink were dominant, which looked healthy and fresh. Grey, which was the dominant identity colour of the young people’s lifestyle magazine, indicated minimalism, elegance, the students’ drive for innovation, and their search for new solutions. In a magazine focused on travel, blue was an appropriate

choice because it symbolizes solidity, reminiscent of the colour of water or the sky, which are associated with vacations. The multiple colours used throughout the magazine's design referenced diversity. On a positive note, the students here used pastel colours, they did not use colours with sharp contrasts that would make it difficult to perceive the image and the text. In the analysed sample, only one magazine had the dominant colours of magenta and grey, which reinforced the FMK UCM brand. The analyses showed that magazines that deal with a wide range of topics and content, or are not aimed at a specific group of people and may not have a dominant colour chosen. However, without a dominant colour, the overall visual impression of the magazine can be chaotic, disjointed, difficult to recognise and even unprofessional, thus losing its aesthetic and marketing potential.

When combining font and page background colours, bold white on black, black italics on dark blue, pale grey on white, white on light blue, pale green-grey on white and mustard on red were totally inappropriate as they impaired the legibility of the text. The use of the bold font and italics throughout the text is also negative. The soft and pastel colours in the background of the page looked fresh and the legibility of the text, which was in darker colours, was very good on these pages. The font of any colour against a background made up of primary shades of yellow, red, blue and purple was difficult

to read. An important element in the combination of font and page background colours was the white space around the text and illustrations, which relates to the balance of colours in the space; it helped to create visual balance and the impression of a good design.

The colours of the headlines mostly matched the overall concept of the magazine, but there were some headlines that were not sufficiently legible, e.g. a darker pink on a bright pink or yellow page background. The analyses showed that headlines, like text and illustration material, need blank space around them, otherwise they can be less legible even with a well selected colour combination.

In the colour combination of the text, we positively evaluate the combinations related to the theme of the magazine or to branding. On the negative side, in the interviews with the students from FMK UCM, the authors of the magazine did not incorporate the colours forming the faculty's brand into the design of the page. Instead, they used yellow, red and blue, which have nothing to do with the identity of FMK UCM.

In most of the magazines, the colour of the pictures and photographs corresponded with the overall colour concept of the magazine or the theme. Illustrative pictures that did not match the text or the study program VZME, such as geometric shapes, electrical diagrams, did not fit into the magazine concept.

It therefore seems that the integration of colour into the other

design elements of the magazine is important not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also from a functional, emotional and marketing point of view. It ensures that the magazine looks coherent and professional, contributes to its overall impression, and can improve its success and popularity among readers. Using a colour palette that matches the identity of the university/faculty can reinforce brand awareness and help build trust with students and the wider public. Effectively selected colours will not only make the magazine a communication vehicle for information, but will also bring aesthetic value. Not only the right underprint and typeface colours are critical to creating a professional magazine, but also matching colours of imagery that appropriately complement the typography and layout of the text, including white spaces that reinforce the professional to upscale feel of the magazine design. In terms of an example of good practice, the use of colour and overall design in Goddess can be cited as professionally handled, making the magazine look active and fresh.

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