Critical Context Stage 1

Light is made up of wavelengths, when waves of light enter the lens of eye, our brain interprets them as colour (Hornung, 2012). Colours that appear to be similar, such as yellow-orange and orange, have wavelengths that are nearly the same. Thousands of colours are processed by our eyes every day. People frequently underestimate the power of colours, with many assuming they are nothing more than a breathtaking result of light refraction. However, colours are inextricably linked to everyone's life and have a significant impact on our perception of the world. (Gupta, 2020) Colour is an essential component of graphic design and an irreplaceable tool for graphic designers. As a designer, we are able to use colours to communicate messages that words, languages and images can't; it is one of the most powerful and effective communication tools we have. Colour speaks volume, each colour has its own significance, and each colour delivers a distinct message. It has the power to influence people's perceptions, behaviour, moods, emotions, and even decisions (Gupta, 2020). "Mere color, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways," said Oscar Wilde.

The many examples Natalia Filvarova, a neuroscientist who studies the brain responses to colours, offered in her TED talk illustrate that colour has been used by humans to tell stories and convey different emotions for hundreds of thousands of years. Take yellow as an example, papyri and pyramids in ancient Egypt were embellished in yellow and gold to bring us closer to the sun, to the divinity, and the joy of the afterlife. Despite the fact that yellow has long been associated with joy, it can also be used to express sadness. For example, ships on the sea would fly a yellow flag to indicate that people there are dying and quarantined. As a designer, it's important to make effective use of colour to convey our messages that cannot be expressed in words to the audience, it is a tool that helps ourselves and others to understand us. Colours may also influence our decisions. According to studies, there's an area in our brain called the Orbitofrontal Cortex. (Figure 1.1) When we see a colour that matches with something else that corresponds to it, such as yellow with the smell of a lemon, this brain area becomes more active, and our brain will be more efficient at making decisions (Filvarova, 2020).
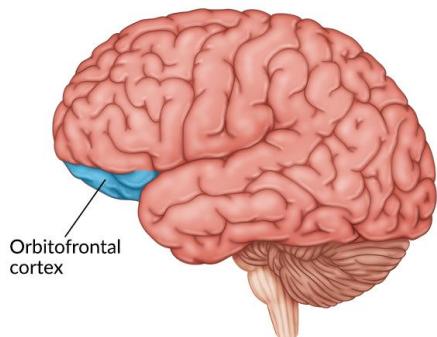

Figure 1.1 (Orbitofrontal Cortex)

A more in-depth explanation of the relationship between colours, emotions, and impressions can be found in the research article written by Jiya Gupta. In this research paper, Gupta has shown the impact of colour in every field of the world using statistical data, such as in our daily lives, interior design, culture, branding and therapy, which helps us realise that colour is influencing almost every aspect of our life. For instance, in advertising, every company has a specific reason for their chosen colour. McDonald's and KFC uses colour red in their logo and advertisements to evoke hunger.

Twitter and Facebook, both uses blue in their logos to convey a sense of trust, comfort, and likeness, as well as an atmosphere where people can express themselves freely. Besides that, the way various cultures see and define colour differs considerably throughout the world. For example, in North America and Europe, blue is a calming and peaceful colour, representing trust, security, and authority, while in some countries, it symbolises evil repellence. In Eastern cultures, blue symbolises immortality, while in Ukraine it denotes good health (Gupta, 2020). As a consequence, we can see how colour is linked to different cultures, and how much colour influences our daily life. When it comes to selecting colours, research is extremely important so that we can employ the appropriate colours to deliver our intended message to the audience more effectively.

David Hornung's book - Color, 2nd edition: A workshop for artists and designers (A practical guide on colour application for artists and designers) allows us to understand more about colour theory. This book is a general guide to colour, including detailed explanations of colour principles, material and techniques, colour interaction, colour harmony, colour research, as well as other colour-related topics. As previously mentioned, knowing how to select appropriate colours and apply them in design work is important for designers, just like what Edouard Manet said, "Color is a matter of taste and of sensitivity." Hence, this book is useful for designers since it helped us in deepening our understanding and enhancing our grasp of fundamental colour principles, allowing us to apply colour more effectively in our work. According to Hornung (2012) in this book, an excellent colorist cultivates a taste for discovery in his everyday experiences with the richness of the visual environment. Anything around us, might provide a myriad examples of wonderful colour and colour combinations. Colour inspiration may come from everyday objects such as stones, foliage, green leaves against a roiling grey sky, seashells, and colour ideas may also be found in paintings, prints, and posters. Anything that draws our attention might provide a stimulus for new ideas (p. 111). As designers, we will sometimes run out of colour ideas. Therefore, we need to be observant as the objects around us, as well as nature, are frequently our most fertile sources of inspiration.

It's also critical to know how to apply colour theory in our works once we've gained a deeper understanding of it. The book - Best practices for graphic designers, colour works written by Eddie Opara and John Cantwell shares everything a designer needs to know about colour. Through this book, we may learn more about how colours are applied in different fields, including branding, wayfinding, packaging, infographics, printing as graphic designers need a deeper understanding of how to observe, use, and communicate about colour for ourselves and with our clients. This book features a number of real-world projects and case studies. We can learn about their entire design process, from concept to final outcome, as well as the challenges they faced along the way. In each chapter of the book, Opara and John (2013) invited different designers to share about their experiences working with colours. For instance, Paula Scher talked about her experience working on the packaging bag for Tiffany & Co. (p. 132), and Stefan Sagmeister shared about how he used colours in his projects (p. 152). As designers, it's important to know the reasons why we are using the colours that we chose, as well as the relationships between colours. Besides, colour plays a significant role in design works, therefore we need to always consider the context in which we will use colour and make sure the colours are effective to the context.

Mauro Gatti, an illustrator, is working on an online art project called The Happy Broadcast. Gatti mentioned that he wanted to make the world a better place by spreading positivity in his own way using his art, as positivity is the fuel we need to have a better attitude toward the world, so he began posting positive news, which he called anxiety free news, from across the world in the form of colourful illustrations on his website and social media platforms. (Figure 1.2) The goal of this project is to raise awareness about the significance of mental health and sustainable behaviour, as well as to remind us that, despite the continual barrage of bad news, we can still be positive and optimistic

(Gatti, 2018). " I love imagining things and making people happy with my art, because a smile is the cheapest route to happiness, " said Mauro Gatti. We, designers, are given the ability to use colour to convey a specific emotion and atmosphere. In this project, we can tell that colour plays a vital role, as colourful illustrations may pique the interest of an audience, not just for adults but also for children. Colourful palette has an uplifting effect on our mood, which creates sentiments of optimism and enthusiasm.
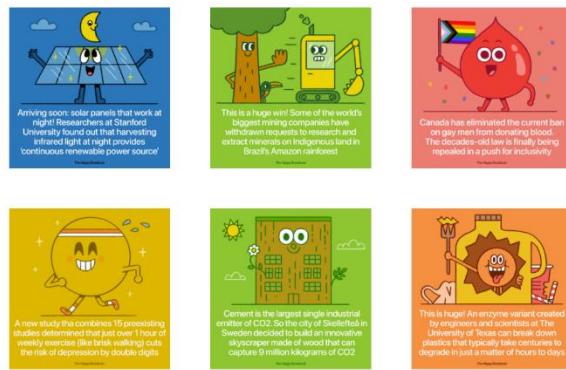
Figure 1.2 (The Happy Broadcast)

To conclude, colour is a crucial element in any design, and choosing the right colour is a priority. "Colour isn't necessarily the thing that you look at; it's the thing that makes you sense something that is hopefully emotional. You can make people feel enclosed or open,happy or sad. It's such a powerful thing," said Morag Myerscough, an artist and designer. Colour is all around us, and designers may use it to draw attention to something, reflect frustrations and injustices, raise awareness, elicit emotions, and so on. Colour is a language that every designer needs to master, we should be able to communicate in colour. It is a visual language that enables us to convey our messages when we are unable to communicate them verbally, and it helps us to visualize our emotions and feelings. Each colour has its own significance and symbolism, some varies depending on cultures. As a result, designers need to understand each colour and their relationship in order to produce work that people will resonate with. All of these research and case studies have revealed how important colour is in every design. We can see how colour is used in different fields , and there's still a lot to explore about colours from a variety of perspectives in both independent and external projects.

Critical Context Stage 2

Independent Project

Colour plays a significant role and is a crucial element in every design. As designers, we are given the chance to explore, experiment and play around with colours when working on different design projects, which is exciting but sometimes can also be overwhelming since we may lack inspirations for colour schemes. However, if we give ourselves some time to slow down and truly observe our surroundings, we will realise that nature, and those everyday objects are the best inspiration for colour. According to the book - Color, 2nd edition: A workshop for artists and designers, the sky, tree, grass, stone, leaves, and everything else around us could provide us wonderful colour and colour combinations (Hornung, 2012). We don't even have to go far to find colour since it is all around us. "The color combinations are endless," said Gary from the CO-OP. People nowadays are attached to their phones and devices, and this is reducing our attention spans and impairing our capacity to think creatively and develop original thoughts. But when we pay closer attention to our surroundings more, our creativity might be sparked (Today Well Spent, n.d.). We see many things everyday, but we won't pay much attention to it, because we frequently consider them as mundane parts of our ordinary lives and think they aren't noteworthy. Therefore, it's critical to practice mindfulness, which is paying attention in the present moment. By doing so, we will realise there is so much to notice every moment of every day, as well as how much we tend to overlook (Youren, 2018).

Hence, this project is a self-observation project that allows the designer to explore what we would consider repetitive and mundane in our daily lives, while also allowing the designer to explore different colours that exist in the surroundings. Through this project, the designer have to slow down, spend some time observing and documenting the surroundings, notice and capture every moment from day to night, and collect different colour schemes. Also, working on this project may lead to the discovery and exploration of places or objects that have never been noticed before. "I constantly scan my immediate surroundings whether I'm sitting, walking, jogging, or riding. I'm specifically searching for light striking or falling on an item or person. It may be as undetectable as a slender beam of light, or it might be in the peculiar shadow it casts," Joe Baraban, a photographer, offered some advice on being observant (Baraban, 2019). Nature is a master colourist, mixing colours, textures, and light to create stunningly beautiful palettes (Coburn, 2002). The colour schemes in our surroundings are not always the same, but they are keep changing due to the changes in light, weather, time, and other reasons; and each colour schemes can evokes different emotions, nevertheless, we frequently overlook and ignore these changes. Being a non observant and mindful people, the main objective of this project is to enable the designer to get inspired by surroundings, observe colours as well as observe things in different perspectives. The project's outcomes are exhibition and publication that conveys the visual stories of the designer, showing what has been explored and documented. This project is placed under the category of experimental design, which is a type of design work that focuses more on the process rather than its outcome, and the main intention is to explore, experiment, and discover.

"How does the colour vary every day in the surroundings?" was the main research question heading into the research process. Both primary and secondary research were conducted in this project to have a better understanding of this chosen topic. Primary research was done through observation, from May 30 to June 2, a period of three weeks. The designer spent these three weeks paying close attention to the surroundings, taking pictures and documenting the day and time. During this

observation, it was intended for the designer to keep an eye on how the colours in the surroundings changed, as well as how nature and everyday objects which are easily overlooked produced a wide range of breathtaking colour palettes. After three weeks of observation, around 100 images are collected. These photos were shot at various times and dates, and they clearly show how the colour scheme in the surroundings varies from day to night and in various weather conditions, things that appear to us to be the same in fact also have a variety of shades. Besides, many things were previously unnoticed including the dreamy sky, trees beneath the streetlight, and the beautiful reflection of the clouds in the puddle were discovered through this observation (Figure 1). While secondary research was conducted through the internet, such as looking into some online articles about paying attention and getting colour inspirations from nature and our surroundings. In addition, as this project involves photography, books or articles with photography principles and tips, as well as photographers such as Joe Baraban (Figure 2) and Jordi Huisman (Figure 3) with their photography works, were also used as part of the research sources. The tips shared in the book- How to rule at photography such as be conscious of shadows, take multiples of everything, experiment with cropping were learned and applied in my project (Books, 2020).

Figure 1   Few photos taken during observation

Figure 2   Joe Baraban's Photograph

Figure 3   Jordi Huisman's Photograph

As mentioned above, the final outcomes are exhibition and publication. All of the photos captured throughout the observation period will be shown in the exhibition. The photographs are displayed in two different ways: one is organised by date ; the other is organised by time and is broken down into morning, afternoon, and night. All the photos that are printed in tiny sizes are pasted on the exhibition wall, so when the audiences walk from a distance, they can plainly see how the colours

vary during the day and night and the entire colour palette, and they can get closer to look into every photo. How to interpret the photo is entirely up to the audience themselves, each person may have a different interpretation. While the publication is a part of the exhibition. From all the photos collected, part of them are chosen to include in the publication. The book is designed in a more free, casual, and playful way, experimenting with interesting layouts. According to research, each colour has its own significance, and each colour delivers a distinct message. It has the power to influence people's perceptions, moods and emotions (Gupta, 2020). Hence, the photos in the book are categorised according to emotions, as different colour tones give different feelings, can be calmness, happiness, energised, nostalgia, romantic, gloomy. Different chapters will be represented by different songs that convey and match the emotions of the chapter's images. It's also open to interpretation since people will feel differently about the same image. In addition to the photographs, there are also the colour palettes shown in the pictures as well as some designer's personal thoughts and feelings at the time the pictures were taken. Through the exhibition and publication, it is hoped that people will be inspired by these photos, and also to remind and encourage people to be mindful, observant, and pay attention to their surroundings, as we will realise that inspiration is all around us and can be found anywhere.

External Project

Colour is an inextricable part of our daily lives, and its presence is evident in everything we see. Colour is one of the most powerful and effective communication tools, we can use colours to communicate messages that words, languages and images can't. Colour affects how we see our world, it has an impact on how we communicate crucial information before we are aware of it. Colours may have a lot of symbolic significance, but individuals from different cultures value and think about things differently, which has an impact on how they understand and perceive colours (Gajanayake, 2019). Sometimes these associations have gained significance over several generations or even centuries. The original reason may no longer be known, slipping into folklore (Karen Haller Behavioural Design, 2011). The cultures around the world, including Asian culture, Middle East culture, European culture, American culture, African culture, all of which see and interpret colours differently. For instance, in China, red symbolises happiness, wealth, and good luck; people wear red during Chinese New Year, and brides wear red on their wedding day; but in South Africa, red symbolises death and is strongly associated with mourning. In European countries and the United States, purple represents magical, royalty; but in some countries like Thailand, purple is associated with mourning(Shutterstock, 2021). Therefore, it's important to have a basic understanding on how colours are interpreted across different cultures because their meanings might vary greatly.

TISDC (Taiwan International Student Design Competition) was chosen as the competition in which to participate. Culture has the power to unite and bring people together, which is relevant to the competition's theme of One World, therefore this project will be focusing on colours and cultures. Learning about other cultures helps us understand and embrace different perspectives within the world in which we live. It helps us to acknowledge and respect "ways of being" that are not necessarily similar to our own, and knowing the different meanings of colours is one of the ways may assist us in learning other cultures, as well as embrace cultural differences, which is the main

purpose of doing this project (Partnership Blog, 2021). The final outcome of this project is educational card decks that are culturally and colour-related. The card deck includes the meaning of colours in different countries, as well as showing the connection between them. The project's main target audience will be children aged 9 to 12, which is the age group that can read more and absorb information better. According to Mclean (2020), children at this age are still mostly concrete thinkers, but they are starting to think in more abstract ways. Most children can perceive things from the perspective of others, as a result, they are able to express true empathy for others' experiences and feelings, as well as a greater tolerance for diversity. Furthermore, children in this age range already have a basic understanding of colours, hence, this project allows them to explore and comprehend the meaning of colours in different cultures.

An online survey was conducted as the primary research approach as it allows us to collect data by asking individuals directly. This project is to look into the symbolism of each colour in different cultures throughout the world. Therefore, the survey form was shared to people from different countries through social media in order to acquire a variety of different data. The questions were focused in four categories, which are national flag, religion, festival, and tradition. The form was opened for 2 weeks, and 11 people responded to this. The respondents came from a variety of countries, such as the United Kingdom, United States, Jordan, Philippines, Kenya, South Korea, Maldives, and Malaysia (Figure 4). In this survey, respondents are required to share and explain the meaning of each colour in their countries. In addition to collecting data, this survey also showed that some respondents have a good understanding of the meaning of colours in their own countries while some don't. Therefore, carrying out this project will be useful for learning about colours and cultures. However, the data collected from participants are fairly limited. Hence, secondary research was conducted as it could provide more extensive and diverse samples than we could gather ourselves, as well as a broader perspective on the topic. One of the secondary research methods was collecting data through the internet, such as looking into online articles about different countries and their culture.
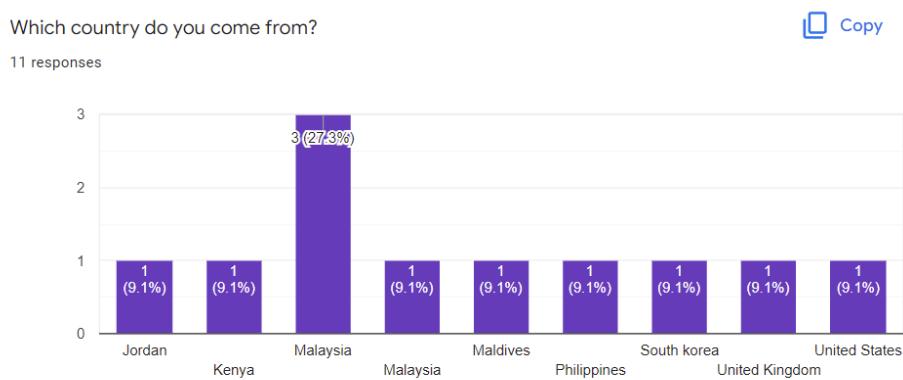

Figure 4 – Survey Form

As mentioned, the final outcome of this project is a deck of educational cards that are designed for childrens. Culture has many components, and this project is only focusing on the national flag, religion, and festival. There are total of 7 colours of cards, which are red, orange, yellow, green, blue,

white, and black. The significance of the colours in different countries are listed on the cards. Since there are too many nations in the world to include them all, so only 16 have been selected as the project's primary focus countries, including the United States, Mexico, Kenya, Jordan, South Korea, Japan, China, the United Kingdom, and more; 8 of these are countries where respondents of the survey come from. To attract and interest children, the cards are designed with the combination of text and illustrations, which is appropriate for this age group. According to scientific research, illustrations may help children learn quicker and comprehend more (maaillustrations, 2014). Besides, these cards provide concise information, which makes learning simple and eliminates the need to read large sections of text. Front of the cards are the text, while back of the cards are the different pieces of the illustrated map. Each card is labelled with numbers, so when children arrange all the cards together according to numbers, they may see a big map that includes all the information as well as the connections between countries that have the same meaning of colour. This will make the learning process more interesting and fun.

Critical Context Stage 3

Reflection is always necessary for the designer to think and conclude what has been done well and what needs to be further improved so that we can learn from our mistakes and do better in the future projects. From feeling overwhelmed at first to gradually figuring out what to do, there has been a lot of effort put into these projects and has experienced lots of struggles, as usual. Both of the designer's projects are directly related to the SOI, which is colour.

First of all, the research part, particularly the online survey, could have been done better. The survey should be sent to more people, get more respondents, to gather more data as the amount of data right now is insufficient. Besides, there is still room for improvement in terms of information organisation and analysis. The ability of doing concept maps and mind maps has to be strengthened, as they can help the designer to comprehend the relationship between concepts and to get a big-picture view. It took a fair amount of time to compile and arrange the information gathered for the external project and to consider how to communicate my exploration to the audiences in a more suitable and effective manner while still making my SOI the major focus.

Another key moment of the designer's practice throughout was the photographing process. Photography is something that has never been done on any projects before since I'm not very skilled at it. The whole photographing process was done using mobile phone. Finding the nice angle and composition has been difficult and challenging, which has left me constantly worried that the photos won't turn out well. During this process, improvements were made as a result of getting one of the lecturers who was also a photographer for his input. Though there is undoubtedly plenty to learn and improve upon, I am nevertheless pleased with the outcomes given that I made an attempt to push myself to step out of my comfort zone and try something new. Also, as a non-observant person, this observation helped the designer to become more mindful while also providing a lot of inspiration.

Besides, much knowledge and tips about printing has gained through these two projects. I was used to creating mockups for my previous projects primarily digitally because I wasn't able print them out due to the pandemic. Hence, this was the first time doing printing other than normal poster printing, and both of my projects required a lot of printing. The fact that it was the first time also contributed

to the numerous issues that resulted in a few times of reprint. The first problem that I faced was the size kept being off while printing the packaging since the thickness of the paper varied from the test print I did, making it difficult to measure the size, which leads to the size not fitting. And cutting the papers requires caution and slowness.

Book printing also took a lot of time and effort. I have learned how to prepare and set up the document for print. Everything from cutting to binding are all done by myself. Adjusting the margins was the hardest part as we need to avoid cutting into the text or photos while binding. Also, because crop marks were not included in the first few printings, even if each sheet of paper was measured with ruler, there would still be some variation in size between sheets when the book was bound. Therefore, crop marks were included when doing reprint, making it easy to cut and ensuring that each paper was the same size. Different binding methods were explored in order to find which one would be best for the book. I watched different tutorial videos as this is completely new to me, and I thought it was enjoyable when doing it. Coptic stitch binding and staple saddle stitch binding were initially tried, but they weren't the greatest option as they don't have a very appealing appearance. Hence, I attempted thread saddle stitch binding, which was the one that worked the best. However, the print quality for both projects can be improved, particularly for the educational cards, as some of the printed cards have faintly visible lines.

In addition, children aged 9-12 are the target audience for educational cards. It was intended to let the target audience try out the product to know what works and what doesn't so that it could be further enhanced. However, due to time and pandemic limits, this wasn't able to be done. It would be better if they could test it out to see whether this card deck is truly suitable for them even though it was designed with concise information and illustrations that were as age-appropriate as possible.

Initially, I was self-doubting and overwhelmed by my Statement of Intent, but through these two projects, my thoughts and ideas about what I want to do and what I'm going to do have become clearer. For the Independent Project, I used colour to explore and understand my surroundings. This makes me more conscious of colour shifts in my surroundings and how colourful it is. While for the External Project, colour was associated with culture and used to meaningfully and educationally teach the children about embracing other cultures.

As mentioned in S.O I, each colour has its own meaning and symbolism, and each colour conveys a distinct message. We are able to use colour to communicate what words, languages, and images can't, it is a powerful tool for designers as colour speaks volume, and these two projects support this statement even more. Colour is considerably more powerful than we previously realised, and is essential for designers. Further research and study about colours are still necessary, especially on how to use colour effectively to communicate ideas and messages. All in all, there is still plenty to explore and learn about colours from a variety of angles and viewpoints. In future projects, it is hoped to use colour to create designs that are more effective and impactful.

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