

Colours in Signage Typography – Commercial Street, Bangalore

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the colours in signage typography of the shops located in Commercial Street, Bangalore, which is in the central business district of the city. The signage in the shopping hub was studied for the background colour of the sign, the colour and kind of typefaces. The study found out that white is the most used colour for background and red is the most used colour for type. The type used for the signs is mostly red. Other colour and typeface combinations were found available. It is found that the most important motive for using these colours is to stick to the formula of highly visible colour 'red' and highly legible and visible typestyle 'sanserif'. It was also found out that there is a dearth of experimentation in these aspects of signage however, the use of unusual shapes and projections for signage are prevalent.

KEYWORDS: shop signage, display colour, display typography

INTRODUCTION

Commercial Street is a shopping area in Bangalore, capital of the State of Karnataka in India. It is one of the oldest and busiest shopping areas in the city. It lies in the central business district of Bangalore, the information technology hub of India. It is one of the fastest growing modern cities of India. It caters to window shoppers, shop hoppers and high-end national and international shoppers. This area has shops selling silks, ready to wear, textiles, dresses, clothes, footwear, jewellery, toys, handicrafts, artefacts, knickknacks, furnishings, food, electronics including, mobiles, cameras, etc., catering to women, men and children. The product range available is mind-boggling and are both branded and non-branded; traditional and modern; and indigenous and imported. This shopping hub has evolved from a nondescript bazar to thriving modern shopping street competing with new age malls for footfalls, business volume and value. This extraordinary clutter of shops vying with one another for the eye of the eager or nonchalant shopper's attention to offer her a good or service is an interesting proposition to study. Here the basic business instinct of doing business to make profit comes to play for 15 hours a day from 9am to 11pm each day.

The challenge of drawing the attention of prospective customer from a distance and inducing them to enter the shop is the most important first step. It is this step, which also decides the next step of the customer for looking around the shop with an intention to buy. This shopping area is also known for bargaining of prices. Therefore, the first and foremost consideration of any shop owner or manager is to get the prospective buyer to its doorstep and retain her attention until the actual selling starts taking place. In this scenario the display signage play a vital role in, onsite promotion in the clutter of shops. This ensures that the prelude and initiation to sales transaction to take place smoothly even before the shopper seeing the shop, the seller, the product, the bargains and other engagements of sales activity.

Signage normally consists of types (fonts), icons and pictures in colours. The typography on signage and the colours used in them make the first step of sales transaction. This study covers the aspects, nature, and colour in signage typography on the shop fronts. In order to stand out and differentiate through the clutter the signage takes different shapes too.

THEORY

The study of signs and signage dates back to centuries. However, signage have come off age in the recent few decades metamorphosing from a simple guide to the user, to other actions, like attracting their attention, convey the intent and purpose of the product, differentiate the place, shop or product, create an identity, etc. In display typography, colour and type are the most distinct features. This when combined with concepts like framing, textural simulation, contrast and harmony; either differentiates the user, creates a mood or creates an identity. Unlike street signage, which is mood neutral, the commercial display signage is intended to evoke or simulate certain emotional responses from the onlooker. Display signage has to compete for attention and draws the common onlooker or shopper into a shopper for a particular product from a particular shop. It is achieved using typefaces, colours, their placement, effects, texture and material treatments.

Type for display has four major functions namely, 1. Attract attention; 2. Create Distinction; 3. Evoke a Mood and 4. Build Hierarchy. Designers when using type use it as a design element to attract attention vis-a-vis 'catch the eye'. In order to make the type function effectively and to retain and hold the attention, distinct treatment of type is carried out using colour and other aspects. Display typefaces emote, entice and talk to viewers through styles and expression of forms. Hierarchy is built using different sizes, colour and structure to motivate, guide and entice the viewer.

Colours in signage play the role of mood creator, differentiator, vision enhancer, guide, persuader, influencer, director, interest generator, compeller and proliferator. It also increases legibility, readability and intrigues the onlooker in a psychedelic manner. These are achieved using contrast, harmony, clarity, space and concepts of aesthetics.

METHODOLOGY

The study covered the shops located at the Commercial Street of Bangalore and their signage. These signage were studied with a view to understand what colours have been used for the typefaces and their background. This involved walking through the street during the daytime and evening time to see, observe and record the typefaces and colours found in the signage. These signage were photographed and classified based on their colour scheme. This sorting resulted in groups of signage based on their colours used for the typefaces. The field study ensured selecting samples covering the full stretch of Commercial Street and compiling details of signage, which are representative and present the variety and nuances available and found adding value to the study. The selections of shop signage are random and author has exercised his discretion. The sorted collage of signage is presented here. It is learnt that there are no specific signage guidelines other than the one which mandates the use of local language, in this instance Kannada.

LIMITATIONS

This study has not considered the nature of goods on sale, their value and volume and profile of consumers and their traffic and the size of signage nor its size of type. This study does not cover the seasonal aspects like festivals and off-seasons and discount sale seasons. This study also has not considered the aspects specific to individual shops. This study has not factored other forms of promotions and publicity by the individual shops. The study did not involve contacting the shops or shopkeepers for their motive behind having a particular signage.

Figure 1: A view of Commercial Street during day, Bangalore.



Figure 2: A views of Commercial Street during evening, Bangalore



Figure 3: A collage of signage found in Commercial Street, Bangalore



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that red, black and white are the most used colours, while orange and yellow stands next, followed by brown, blue and green. Pink, purple and violet are resorted to in exceptional cases. Most used colour combinations are as give below.

Table 1. Signages and their colours

Background	Colour of Typeface	Number of signages
White	Red	17
	Blue	6
	Black	5
Orange	Black	6
Red	White	16
Brown	White	6
	Red	1
	Yellow	4
Green	White	3

Blue	White	7
Grey	White	3
Black	White	7
	Yellow	1
	Red	3
	Gold	1
Pink, Purple, Violet, gold	White	1
Total		87

Table 1 reveals that 33% of the signage have white background; 19% red background; 15% black and 13% brown background. The colour of typeface occurs 25% for red with white, brown or black backgrounds; 50% for white with red, brown, green, blue, grey, black, pink, purple or violet backgrounds. There appears to be an overwhelming preference towards white typefaces in different backgrounds, followed by red typefaces.

The signage have used typefaces, which are sanserif, serif, ornamental or script. The kind of typefaces used in the signages are listed below

Table 2. Typefaces in signage and their colours

Colour of Typeface	Number of signage with		
	Sanserif	Serif	Others
White	12	6	2
Black	8	1	0
Red	17	3	2
Yellow	5	0	1
Brown	3	0	0
Green	0	0	0
Blue	4	0	1
Grey	0	2	0
Pink, Purple, Violet, gold	7	16	1
Total	56	24	7

There is an enormous preference for sanserif typefaces amounting to 65% of signage considered in this study. It is 28% for serif typefaces and 7.5% in case of fancy, decorative and script faces. This shows the intent for using more sanserif faces is increased legibility as provided by them, than the aesthetics of the display. Sanserif and serif typefaces cover shops across product range including clothes, dresses, shoes, jewellery, men's and women's accessories, hardware, artefacts, carpets and eateries, while the fancy, script and modern faces are used by shops selling trendy dresses, jewelers and artefacts.

The colours used for the typefaces are classified based on the signage's background in the table below. This classification is done empirically based on the field study and further sorting with a view to find a trend.

Table 3. Combinations of background colours and colours of Typefaces in signages

Colour of Typeface	Number of signage
Red on white	26
Red blue on white	5
Yellow on Red	0
Red on black	3
Yellow on black	4

Orange on black	0
White on blue	7
White on green	3
White on brown	5
Pink, Purple and violet	3
White on black	8
Black on white	3
Others	12
Total	87

Table 3 reveals that the most preferred type vs background is red on white, which accounts for 30% of the signage studied. White on black and white on blue account for 10% and 8% of the signage. Other major typeface and background colour combinations are red and blue on white, red on black, yellow on black, white on green and white on brown. However, combinations of yellow on red, orange on black or orange on blue are quite conspicuous by their absence.

CONCLUSION

The colours used in the signs for typography and their background are vastly restricted to red, orange, blue, yellow, green, black and white. The preference for white typefaces followed by red clearly follows the basic principle of visibility and legibility from a distance for the signage. The trend is also for having white backgrounds followed by red and black for the same reasons. The majority of the typefaces used are different variations of sanserif with a heightened intent of legibility and visibility.

There were exceptions with pink, violet and purple in a few cases where some fancy was intended. The emphasis in creating signage is focused on legibility and standing out in the crowds than nuanced communication, compatible with the product on sale. In this process of attracting attention, aesthetics and finesse are not given the required consideration, which can add value in differentiation.

In using colour combinations for typeface and background, the shops restrict themselves to established and safe colour schemes than trying out new colour combinations. Overall, the shops follow conventional wisdom on colours and typefaces than experimenting with new typefaces or colours, even though being trendy and global shall reward them and establishing their brand.

SUGGESTIONS

It is suggested that the shops need to explore the full range of colours available in the display gamut in order to ensure appropriate matching of their wares and needs of the consumers. This needs to be done by combining good and suitable typefaces which are now available aplenty to ensure good communication, instead of sticking to old and Devanagari style faces which desires some imagination. The shops need to realize the importance of differentiation and branding to clear out from the clutter and stand out with original and niche ideas. It is essential that the shops use compelling colours and matching typefaces to achieve this.

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