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In a study including nine Luther Cross Country women, the color of running shoes was examined as a potential motivator for buying new shoes. Photo elicitation was the method for gathering data and the theory of 'marketing of coolness' used to examine it. Collegiate women purchase new shoes on a yearly basis in order to maintain the health of their feet as well as to prevent injuries induced from running copious amounts of miles daily. Findings indicate that runners purchased shoes more on the basis of their functionality rather than their color, however, the color could not be denied as a significant factor in their satisfaction of the shoe. The addition of bright colors appears as a marketing tactic to reinvent the already invented, adding a 'cool' factor that may not be the ultimate deciding purchasing factor but evidently creates 'feelings' for the product, particularly ones of content.

Color Run

Running anywhere from 40 to 60 miles in the average week of a collegiate women's Luther College Cross Country runner requires shoes that will not only hold up under the hard work and pressure, but will last, and help in preventing injury. Running, although not a contact sport, can easily lead to numerous injuries as a result of the foot constantly striking the ground as it bears the full body weight of the runner. Tendons and bones wear and tear under this pressure and proper running shoes can help curb this. The foot itself also requires protect, making running shoes the only, but extremely essential equipment of a Cross Country runner. Once a runner finds their ideal shoe, it is likely that they will continue to purchase that shoe. On average, proper running shoes cost nearly \$100 dollars, indicating that there is more of a decision process in purchasing the shoes then compared to inexpensive product such as a soda. However as a runner myself who has participated in this decision process for six years, I have noticed an increase in the intensity of the color of running shoes. My first pair of running shoes was white with purple

accents freshman year of high school. Come junior year I was able to purchase that same model in a bright baby blue that covered the whole shoe with neon pink accents. Noticeably, my teammates also acquired shoes in flashy neon greens and pinks, and by college, the shoes in the locker room embrace more colors than the rainbow. What I am most interested in is how this new 'trend' has affected purchasing decisions. The brighter the shoes the better, and the more compliments you are likely to receive from fellow runners. It appears this trend is most prevalent in women's Cross Country shoes but has leaked into men's shoes as well, as the shoes embrace bold, flashy colors too. So does the color sell the product? I wanted to see if color had an impact in buying running shoes among college women Cross Country runners. Running shoes have gotten brighter, and more vividly colorful. With manufacturers working to sell more and more, I wanted to see if this was in fact a successful tactic.

First off, as a means to gather data, a variation of the photo elicitation method was used. Nine Luther Cross Country women took a photo of their current running shoes and answered two questions. The first was what and why they chose that model of running shoe and the second why they also picked that color of shoe. A direct face to face interview did not take place; rather information was gathered via email. I did not specify how to take a picture of their shoes, however interestingly enough, most put effort in to take a picture that reflected the shoes in the best light possible, getting on the same ground level as the shoes or propping one shoe up by the other as to reveal how the shoes and color look from different angles. Instead of using the photos to create conversation, as Gillian Rose's (2012) description of photo elicitation would, the subjects answered the questions and the photo was used to speak for the color of the shoes so the interviewee would not have to describe how the shoes look. Showing the color in a photo was much more efficient and reliable than text, as photos have the ability to hold detailed information

and record it (Rose 2012:307). In relation to the questions answered, most although not asked directly, responded by saying or implying that when it came down to their purchase what mattered most was the style and type of shoe rather than the color itself. This was a logical response and one that was fairly predictable, however the effect of the color still produced results that could not be ignored. For example, Anna Arbisi, a senior, stated that she chose her shoes based on the fact that they did not give her blisters like other shoes. She asserts, "I did not buy them because of the color but I'm really glad they fit me so well because I like the looks of them", reflecting that even though color was not the primary reason for buying the shoes, the color was still something she liked and could be happy about since she did not have any other color options in that particular model. Another senior runner, Kayla Uphoff, bought her shoes because they are one of the only shoes that do not make her feet hurt, as she has struggled with injuries mainly in her foot. She also mentioned that the color of her shoes was simply what color the running store sent her when she ordered them, indicating that she did not have an option. However like the other interviewee, she mentions that she does like that colors, stating the blue and green of her shoes as a "pretty sweet color combo", reflecting again that she is satisfied with the colors. Other statements by subjects showed that the color, although not the most important aspect is still impactful. Devon Hovey, a junior, tells about her shoes saying, "They are also very pretty! I love buying bright/loud shoes. It helps me to get excited to go out for a run". Again, it is seen that color does add to the shoe, particularly adding to Devon's excitement to run and actually use the shoe. Kaitlin Lower, a sophomore runner, expresses that she chose the color of the shoe because they were some of her favorite colors and she like the practicality of it too, since a shoe that is grey instead of white is less like to show the accumulation of mud and dirt. She also shows her excitement by mentioning, "...and they were Luther blue!" Her concern with

dirt and mud showing on her shoes indicates that she does care about their appearance and likewise, the fact that she could get shoes that showed team spirit added to her liking of the shoes even more so than being content with their functionality. So although not the most essential aspect to the shoe, it cannot be denied as playing a part in how the runner feels about their shoes.

With this in mind, I examined the way the runners felt about their shoes and the color in relation to the theory of 'the marketing of coolness'. In the 1960s, advertising underwent a drastic change, as advertisers saw themselves as "creative professionals rather than craftsman who worked according to scientific rule about how persuasion operates" (Sturken and Cartwright 2009:293). Rather they started focusing on "youth culture" or what was "cool" and used it to promote consumerism. Creativity and innovation was the new means to sell commodities and as a result objects were attached with notions of "hip and cool" (Sturken and Cartwright 2009:293). Unconventional ideas were embraced as a means to break out of conformity and new trends, just as I saw in the emergence of unconventional colors in conventional running shoes, are evidence of this. Sturken and Cartwright (2009:294) directly say that "'Cool' brands, such as iPod and Nike, succeed in retaining coolness through complex strategies of marketing and reinvention. In other words, the appearance of colors in shoes that use to primarily be shades of black and white is a means to "reinvent" something old into something new and hip. Again Sturken and Cartwright (2009:294) mention that "mainstream producers, such as fashion designers and athletic shoe manufacturers, pay marketing consultants (known as "cool hunters") to go out into streets and find out what trendsetting cool kids are wearing and doing". Trends rise and fall at a very rapid speed, and running shoes seem particularly susceptible to this. Each year a new and seemingly improved model comes out, promising something better. The addition of colors, then reflect a means to 'revamp' running shoes, as what is "cool" needs to be constantly re-evaluated

in an ever fluctuating consumer culture. Participants reveal that this has been influential, perhaps more so in their content of their shoes than actually picking the shoe to begin with. Personally, when I am purchasing a new pair of running shoes and color options are available, I seek one that is bright and bold, and is appealing to me, which does make me excited about and increase my satisfaction with the shoe. This is not only a result of personally being content with the color, but seeing that fellow teammates admire its appearance as well, therefore achieving the status of 'cool' amongst the team. Creating this notion of 'cool' is exactly what marketing seeks, as they can attach a more complex meaning to a simple product, and sell this notion with the product. As a result a runner is theoretically buying not only a shoe but such implications of 'cool' that are attached to it, which in turn allows an addition of content with the product. However, it's important to note that an increase in color of shoes does not always make a runner more satisfied with the shoe. Sarah Owens, a freshman noted that she actually would have preferred blue shoes, but pink was the only color in her size and style of shoe she wanted. Rhianna MacDonald, a freshman, also noted that she chose a less bright color of shoes in order to switch it up from her typical bright shoes, indicating that to some, the bright shoe could already be in motion as a fading fade.

Overall, the emergence of the bright and bold colors of running shoes over the past few years is a reflection of manufacturers to reinvent the already invented. Running is a sport where if the shoe fits, you stick with it and are not likely to switch styles easily. Participants reflected this concept, purchasing the type of running shoes for their functionality rather than their appearance. However the power of the visual cannot be denied as runners reflected that having colors they want increases their satisfaction of the shoes. Bailey Mulholland, a junior, notes, "I like bright shoes, not usually white and only black if there are accent colors", indicating that she

would prefer shoes with color. This new trend is likely to not have happened by mistake as manufacturers intentionally add innovative concepts to increase consumerism of their product. Bright, bold, sometimes blinding neon colors currently dictate what is 'cool' for running shoes, indicating that the visual does have power. It may not necessarily be over the purpose of buying the product for its functionality, but rather how the strongly the consumer feels about the product. Ultimately, it does make runners feel good about their shoes or even "empowered", exactly what any manufacture would want a customer to feel like.

Works Cited

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