

Fashion Color in Yoga Community in Indonesia: Yoga Commodification



Bima Bayusena¹, Erlina Zulkifli Mahmud², Randy R.³

¹Department of Linguistics, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung Indonesia

²Department of Linguistics, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia

³Department of Literature and Cultural Studies, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung Indonesia

ABSTRACT: As fashion is embodied, all aspects of fashion become a matter of embodied experience, including its color. This qualitative research focused to discuss the interpretation of color choice as a complex matter relating personal, cultural and global myths and beliefs using discourse analysis. The myth of fashion color of yoga maintained in nowadays India Traditional Yoga Schools is compared to the interpretation of daily fashion color for yoga practitioners in Bandung and the fashion color of yoga practitioners participating in FORNAS 2023 when they participated as asana group performers. The result showed that the different myths took place in selecting fashion colors and global commodification occurred as the color choice of modern yoga practitioners tend to follow global trends and even chose colors avoided in the strict tradition of Yoga. The result also suggested that personal color choice on the daily basis was only partly applicable as yoga practitioners also considered conformity with their community through dress code and color choice for special events. The stage performance suggested how yoga in Indonesian leaned largely on global fashion trends and put aside the myth of Hindu traits, replacing it with moslem and national/local cultural identities inserted as attributes in their stage performance fashion. Global color trend of 2023, uniformity of fashion, yoga mat colors, and the use of international brand indicated how yoga in Indonesia has become a part of commodification, with apparent consequences.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, color physical properties, cultural consequences of yoga commodification, discourse analysis, Patanjali

I. INTRODUCTION

Abundant researches have provided us with findings of the impacts of yoga on community and mental health. (Crews et al., 2016), for example, concluded that survivor of sexual violence collectively admitted that through embodied activity at a mind-body-spirit level, yoga group could provide a place for “building community, gaining safety, and knowing the support and acceptance of a healthy community”. (English et al., 2022) had used many databases to come up with 148 records and 11 peer-reviewed articles identifying main impacts of yoga on participants, namely “feeling an increased sense of self-compassion; feeling more centred; developing their coping skills; having a better mind-body relationship; and improving their relationships with others”. In Indonesia, Perkumpulan Praktisi Yoga Nasional Indonesia agreed to be included under Komite Olah Raga Rekreasi Masyarakat Indonesia (Kormi) since 2021, realizing that the word Yoga means “oneness”, “union”, involving physical, spiritual, and mental practices.

The journey of a person to become a yogi, or a healer, follows a strict regulation involving long tradition of beliefs and myths. Rooted in Hindu tradition, Yoga is central to Ayurvedic daily routine as it balances all three doshas, the three important factors supporting life, namely Pitha (the elements of fire and water), Vata (the elements of ether and air) and Kapha (the elements of earth and water). The myth of saligrams have been widely known and maintained, and the tradition strictly follows the daily supply of nutrients, fashion, and even traditional clothing color.

However, as yoga spread around the world, the practice of yoga becomes increasingly reduced. More and more people begin to treat yoga only as a form of physical exercise of two of the eight limbs of yoga, namely asana and pranayama, leaving behind or seldom giving attention to all other limbs of yoga as mentioned by Patanjali. The strict tradition also has to see the impact of globalization as yoga and fashion industry collide. Yoga mats, yoga pants, and yoga leggings gains more attention as the yoga community grows around the globe.

This particular research focused to determine the belief of color maintained by traditional/ classical Yogi schools today and compared the traditional belief with the interpretation of fashion colors by the member of Yoga practitioners in Kota Bandung and

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the interpretation of yoga color used by yoga practitioners from all provinces in Indonesia that participated in the group asana performance during the FORNAS 2023 (a national festival held to celebrate all recreational sport activities actively performed by various communities in Indonesia). Further discussion elaborated the complex personal, cultural and universal interpretation of a physical, physiological and psychological phenomenon known as color.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research involves three essential things: fashion, color, and yoga. All three of them are studied using discourse analysis dealing with a variety of qualitative methods that explore the structure and expression of language in its social and cultural context (Alek, 2023). Dijk (1997) refers a discourse as the following things: language use, communication of beliefs, and interaction in social situation.

Fashion is embodied. When (Mikerina, 2016) stated that “scholarly work on fashion has shifted from the regime of representation to embodiment, we directly find the different focus of Barthes and Umberto Eco in discussing fashion. This is the reason why (Busch & Hwang, 2020) highlighted the notion of “the embodied experience of fashion” following Umberto Eco’s notion. The concept of fashion and dress becomes complex because, as stated by (Skov & Melchior, 2008) dress is treated as “the key concept, defined to include both body supplements and body modifications”.

Such an embodiment covers all parts of fashion, including its color choice. (Almalech, 2014) quoted Umberto Eco when discussing color as “a cultural unit”, which means that as a sign it combines both the individual and the social. It also has some universal meaning attached to it due to its universal physical characteristics.

As we see the world around us, our visual perception plays an important role. (Delazio et al., 2017) stated that color is an important factor “to enhance experience, not only consciously but also without invoking awareness.” In order to interpret color in this universal usage, we can find many theories in semiotics. (Al-Shraideh & El-Sharif, 2019) stated that colors “indicate abstract impressionistic attributes and symbolic representations of messages and cultural ideas which can be universal or culture-specific”. The possible conflicting interpretation of color due to its universal/culture pattern becomes even more complex because as claimed by (Caivano, 1998), color can become a sign not only for “for a physical phenomenon,” but also “for a physiological mechanism, or for a psychological association..”

There is indeed a universal color convention that may be the result of the physical properties of that particular color. Red, for example, is widely used in many countries to attract attention to an important object to signal danger because of the physical properties of the color. Having the longest wavelength of light (620-750 nanometers in visible spectrum), red light is able to travel the longest distance, allowing us to see the light through mist or fog. The universal physical properties of colors also tend to shape our perception of the world as we experience the relation between color and energy absorption and heat. (Paminto et al., 2021), for example, stated that “There is an effect of the color of the surface of the object on the absorption of solar radiation indicated by the increase on the temperature.”

Despite of its objective physical properties, the interpretation of color sensation and its psychological association seems to be more personal. When (Kurt & Osueke, 2014), for example, claimed that color “affect our feelings”, this may be a unique individual interpretation, that may partly be supported by community or cultural agreement. (Adams & Hansen, 2020) claimed that “the idea of a univocal, ahistorical, “common sense” conception of color, as it has been discussed by philosophers, is a myth,” because “there is intrapersonal variation in how colors are conceived, depending on what type of object is being considered, and on what intentional “frame of reference” one adopts.” Such variation can explain why (I. P. Canlas, 2016) mentioned that the research concerning teacher and students’ mental thought indicated that “there exist a serious gap in the understanding of both teachers and students on the relationship of color, temperature and heat”. In this case, even when we discuss the objective physical properties of color, the interpretation is still subjective and varies.

When yoga and fashion industry collide, the association of color for yoga clothes seems to also consider both the personal variation and cultural aspect of the color meaning and interpretation. (Kauppinen-Räsänen & Jauffret, 2018) mentioned that “colour meaning is the outcome of the interlink between the object and sign, including human aspects.” As a part of long tradition, yoga has its powerful myth, deeply rooted in the belief system of the community. As mentioned by (Bhavanani, 2017), “magic of Indian Mythology and spirituality,” has been expanded globally through Yoga. Therefore, brands also need to consider the effect of those myths when they introduce their products. (Kommonen, 2008) stated that “Colours tend to carry with them an archive of cultural myths, and understanding these is a crucial ability for powerful visual myth creation for a brand”. The fact that yoga goes international also means that it experiences and reflects also the ideology and myths shared globally. In response to the global idea of sustainability, for example, (Willett et al., 2022) mentioned the importance to consider “the cultural meanings embedded within a sensibility for sustainable clothing”.

III. METHODOLOGY

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As international Yoga Day is annually celebrated on June 21st, coinciding with the summer solstice, the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, the practice of yoga around the globe soars. This was the best time to see the best day when practitioners of yoga put extra efforts in practicing yoga. The research used qualitative method, using text analysis, interview and observation.

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE

In order to determine the color choice of traditional and classic yoga, the research used the data of the fashion color of traditional yoga gathered from two famous traditional yoga institutions based in India, the Isha Foundation and Traditional Yoga. The myth maintained was derived from the explanation of the colors mentioned by Isha Foundation leader, Sadhguru.

The color choice is then compared with the color choice for the clothes of the yoga practitioners on the International Yoga day in those two institution, as well as the color chosen by the yoga community in Bandung on that particular day to determine whether consistent color was proposed and used during the International following the traditional teaching, and whether the color was indeed interpreted as intended by the myth.

On the next stage, we interviewed 20 yoga practitioners in Bandung to determine how they interpreted the color choice, and to determine the group's knowledge about the traditional myth. Further question focused on their own personal color choice, and their interpretation of other participants' color choice.

Finally, observation was chosen as data were collected from the fashion color of practitioners on actual stage performance. As FORNAS had been held and yoga practitioners participated and performed on the 6-7th of July, this research collected the data of fashion colors used by 8 groups of asana performance from 8 different provinces. Observation was conducted to check the fashion color choice and to compare the color choice to the traditional myth and global fashion color trends of 2023.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The data derived from transcript written by Sadhguru were analysed with the focus on finding explanation about the use of several color. This was then compared to the actual consistent color used by Dr Kumar and by their disciples in their practice. The consistent application indicated the compliance to the belief and myths.

The data were then compared to the color choice of yoga practitioners in Bandung when they practiced daily, to determine whether different kind of myths worked.

Lastly, since we assumed that personal and social color choice would be different, we compared the result of the interview with the actual stage performance. The observation could find actual color choice used when yoga practitioners performed in social settings. The interpretation of color choice was conducted by comparing the choice of the actual performance with the those suggested by the strict Traditional Yoga lineage and with the choice of the global fashion trend in 2023 to determine how yoga practitioners responded to different myths.

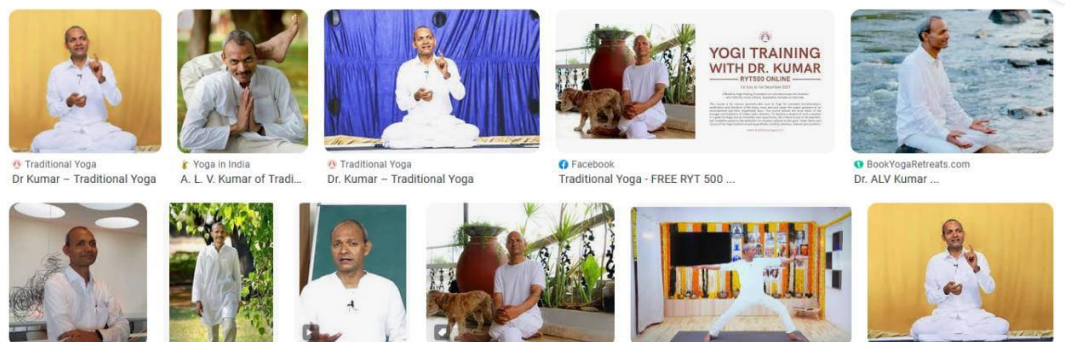
IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Traditional colors in Yoga Clothes and their myths.

Traditional yoga cloth in India, known as dhoti, traditionally use white, broken white, and brown color. Both Dr Kumar's and Sadhguru's teachings on fashion colors provided explanation concerning the myth of the colors that could be applicable for embodied fashion system. As noted on Sadhguru's explanation, for example, white is a symbol used for people who prefer "to walk spiritual path." The physical properties of white indicates that as an object, it reflects all lights so that wearing white means that a person "avoids gathering anything" and can focus on the internal vibrational frequency. Traditionally black is avoided since it absorbs all energy. Black is also avoided because in India it signifies "death". In order to avoid absorbing all energy, traditional yoga practitioners avoid wearing black unless they are certain that the energy of the location was positive.

Another color traditionally used is ochre/orange/saffron. Traditionally, ochre is used for the disciples because of what it represents. The agna chakra, the chakra of enlightenment is commonly discussed to have orange color. Orange also represents maturity (as in fruit that is mature), or represents the new beginning or the new chapter in life, metaphorically in line with the sunrise that emerges early on a new day. Such an explanation of the function of color showed us that the physical properties and the vibrational frequency of colors are considered to have impact for the person's body, physically and emotionally. The use of colors could affect the way we react towards the energy around us. Reflecting or absorbing certain part of light in this sense also mean avoiding or accepting certain parts of the energy, and those parts becomes the stimulus that our mind, emotion and physical body have to respond.

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A. Embodied Fashion Color of Traditional Yoga Guru

As seen from the pictures above, the belief of white is a matter of embodiment for Traditional Yoga Guruji as he consistently wears white in every occasion. Meanwhile, Sadhguru is more flexible in his choice of color, although white is the dominant color we can see for his attire. Some other color choices that Sadhguru usually used were also the color traditionally used in Yoga, such as ochre that represents chakra, or other positive vibration such as yellow interpreted as the color of muladara to bring stability, red as the most vibrant one, and blue as the representation of all-inclusiveness and the representation of Shiva, Krishna and Rama who have blue aura.

It certainly is not surprising to see Isha Foundation portrayed the event where students dominantly wore white, starting from the 21 day Hatha program that month. The consistent application of the color white and ochre could also be seen not only on that particular day, but also on daily practice.

It is also not surprising when, across the globe, on the International Yoga Day 2023, yoga practitioners in one studio in Bandung wore white as can be seen below.



B. White Dress Code for Yoga Participant in Celebrity Fitness TSM 2023

However, in Bandung, the color choice was not a matter of belief, but more of a social dress code agreed upon for the theme. As asked about the reason that dress code was white, the administrator claimed that white was used to symbolize purity. That white symbolizes purity is known as global understanding and the Indonesian culturally understood white in this particular sentiment, similar to the interpretation of the red and white national flag.

This triggers the next question concerning the color myth of Yoga Practitioners in Bandung and Indonesia.

2. What Myth? Fashion Color on Daily Practice

During interview with one yoga instructor in Bandung, it could be determined that he understood the Ayurvedic tradition and the use of colors for different yoga day practice. However, in his own practice, he considered that his attire was no longer a personal choice, and as a teacher in several studios, he followed the instruction for a certain dress code and dress color as agreed upon for themed activities. On regular basis, the most important aspect of the clothes for him was not the color but the fabric. His tendency toward green was based on personal taste and his idea of having a more nature-based color.

When asked about the myth behind colors for yoga attire, only three instructors who had become registered yoga teacher said that they understood the myth, and could discuss about the Ayurvedic tradition and the function of those colors in traditional Yoga. The other 17 participants said that they were not familiar with the symbolic meaning.

Global trend of yoga apparels seemed even more pressing in this community as 15 participants claimed that the most important factor in choosing yoga apparel is the comfort, two claimed that practicality was the most important factor. This might be the reason that fashion industry nowadays put more focus on the design of yoga apparel that should reflect the need for flexible movement. (Wang et al., 2021), for example, mentioned comfort as one of the most important part of the design for “seamless yoga pants structure.” Comfort is even more pressing for Bikram Yoga so that (Doty & Green, 2017) focused on the development of yoga apparels that “stretch in the waist-to-crotch area”, and (Lee et al., 2020) put extra emphasize on the choice of “fabric material” and “level of clothing pressure” to make sure that comfort is gained before and after bikram yoga practice.

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Contrary to the myth of Traditional Yoga to avoid black, participants tend to choose black for yoga pants. The reason seemed more practical. White was not preferred because it is an impractical color. Some yoga pants are considered too thin and white color could showcase parts of the body. White was also avoided for other participants because of the fact that it could easily get dirty, and it is notoriously known to be the most difficult to clean. Black seemed practical, and for some, black was a matter for personal physical appearance. The slimming visual effect was considered important. This is in line with the global trend in fashion when black is always considered as the most versatile color and easy to mix and match, so that it was not surprising when we found that all, for example, wore black and white at Met Gala 2023 because for fashion industry black is always a part of the trend.

Interestingly, although practitioners tend to choose black as their own practical choice, they saw and interpreted others' attire with the tendency to see bright colors as more pleasant. This is in line with the finding of (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994) stating that "black was rated as least pleasant." Black as personal practical choice seemed to indicate "monotone mood" and "sometimes boring". Yet, on another sense, since black is the most practical choice, it also brought comfort and provided pleasant feeling associated with the increased social conformity.

Another participant familiar with color therapy also stated her preference to experiment by "wearing colored clothing", something discussed by color therapist researchers such as (Gupta, 2021). Since there was no color therapy practice where instructor specifically mentioned certain color, this participant gained the emotive affect using physical embodiment as well as physical environment. This is in line with the finding of (Jonaukaite et al., 2020) stating the similar effect of emotion association could be aroused when "physically perceiving colors or reading color words."

Favorite color should be considered in situational context. When most participants mentioned that they have favorite colors, not all choose to wear yoga attire with that particular color. Two of participants preferred to use her favorite colors for small attributes they wore. For one participant, her favorite color red, would be too bright to be used for the whole body attire. For another participant, her favorite color purple could be used only for a certain occasion while for daily practice, she preferred other "safe" color, socially accepted as the norm.

The Hindu religion basis of the myth of yoga was stripped out. When acting alone, and not on performance stage, the interpretation of color was based more on personal values. The color choice of the yoga practitioners at their own studio reflected varied personal unique individual taste. None claimed that their personal favorite color has any relation with certain cultural myths and they focused on explaining on how the color choice has a certain emotional impact upon them.

Only when certain event asked them to wear certain dress code would they change their outfit to conform with the social identity. This might also explain the way participants chose their yoga apparels on the Fornas 2023. When the city appointed seven yoga practitioners to participate in the festival, white t-shirts were allocated. The practitioners chose black yoga pants and black hijab based on practicality, although one participant lightly related the color choice also with the "beyond-world" and "yin-yang" myth.

3. Fashion Color on Stage Performance

As observed during FORNAS 2023, the need for uniformity addressed the longing to be seen as part of a solid group, with specific attributes used to reflect a certain social identity. The colors chosen by the eight groups of asana performance were white, black, turquoise, deep blue, sea blue, and green tops, with dominant black yoga leggings. One group chose white yoga leggings. Uniformity was considered important factor for the judges to score. Those color choices seemed to resonate with global fashion color trends. As mentioned by (Varshini & Bharathi, 2022), the trendy colors of 2022/2023 in several European countries are also "blue-greens, light to dark greens and greys".



C. Green and Blue Color for the fashion color choice in Fornas 2023

Uniformity as a group seemed not only to reflect personal choice but also cultural views and social code. Since color could not be separated from the object and the social context, we could easily notice them from the performers' attributes and accessories. Some female wore hijab to cover their head, while some men wore traditional hats, all with the colors that resembled their tops. Golden pallet embroidered on the hat was not a common color used in traditional yoga and it was understandable because at that moment, different myths were at play. Moslem was represented in the use of hijab, batik as national and local identity was portrayed in the hats and belt and waist cover. Due to different complex cultural values they represented, different color myths and interpretation were used. In the community where Hindu is a minority, Yoga is separated from its Hindu religious trait and linked

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to a different set of values and beliefs. Some attributes could be linked to the cultural origin of the participants, some to Moslem as the major religion, while some others resonated with global values on sport/health spectrum.

Uniformity was also the reason behind the color choice because participants were all aware that the stage performance required them to become the objects under observation, and this led to different value attached to their bodies. This is in line with the thesis put forward by (Cavazzana, 2021) when discussing that the participants had different “reactions to their clothing and bodies when they were alone compared to when they were in the presence of others.”

As part of performance, which color is considered best? The respond concerning the best color certainly depended on a lot of factors. However, on stage performance, color contrast seemed to play an important role as our visual perception of the movement of the yogi should not be distracted because of the lack of color contrast. In this case, the green and blue color chosen by some groups were at disadvantage as it unfortunately resembled the color of the wall and the backdrop of the stage.

That fashion and fashion color are a matter of individual preference could also be seen from the score given by the judges. Although most of the score did not have significant deviation, there was one occasion when wide deviation took place. For one participant in master class category, the average physical attribute score given by the five judges is 76,5, with the lowest score of 60 and the highest score of 90.

When Yoga and Fashion Industry Collide

The influence of globalization on fashion color is apparent. Even in India where the traditional yoga is originated. As mentioned by (Pruthviraj Ranavaade et al., 2016) “the color pallets were modified to represent a new fashion story for India”.

During FORNAS 2023, the fact that yoga has become a matter of commodification was also apparent in the detail used by the participants. (Demeter, 2006) once claimed that yoga modification is in resonance to “its increasingly diverse commodification in the form of mats, clothing, and accessories”. The use of international brand could be seen from the attire and the mats used, and for this reason, the color choice seemed to also reflect global trends, and global ideologies. (Kauppinen-Räsänen & Jauffret, 2018) discussed the role of color in marketing strategy due to “its ability not only to attract but also retain attention”.

The commodification can also be seen when producers of yoga mats considered the importance of addressing personal preference of color as a part of the marketing strategy. The embodied experience of yoga practice was then attached to the emotion aroused due to the color sensation that they felt as yoga practitioners touched and saw their personal mat. Similarly, producers also provided suggestion concerning the best yoga color for the clothes we wear. Global fashion marketing strategy affected yoga practitioners from the very beginning when they start to learn yoga up to when they need to perform publicly.

The complex personal, cultural and universal interpretation of a physical, physiological and psychological phenomenon known as colors probably became the reason behind different way participants selected yoga apparels in their wardrobe. As a physical phenomenon, the color chosen largely depended on situational context that allowed personal space. In this sense, personal situational setting provided more varied personal color choice while the more cultural setting was presented, the more uniformity was required, and the more cultural values and global myths were exercised. As physiological mechanism, color had largely been translated in terms of its practicality and its tendency towards heat absorption. In term of psychological phenomenon, color had complex meaning associated with personal taste, socio-cultural values and global settings. This particular research also founds similar association of color and emotions as discussed by (Achint Kaur, 2020), where colors seemed to relate to emotions as it was “culture” and it was at times “personal preference and experience”. The global trends seemed to have dominant impact in Indonesia compared to the traditional Hindu traits and myths from India, continuing the commodification of Yoga in Indonesia when, as stated by (Bhalla & Moscovitz, 2020), “the positioning of yoga consumption has evolved from Indian societies, where yoga was born, to Western societies,” along with its global color choice trends.

Yoga practiced among mental health community in Bandung, and in Indonesia increasingly leaned toward global commodification. Although “the globalized, commercial nature of yoga has enabled the growth of communities”(Puustinen & Rautaniemi, 2015), the commodification itself can potentially shift a lot of meanings for the sake of profit and financial calculation. The commodification itself, according to (Shearer, 2022) may lead to “Environmental Consequences”, “Social Consequences”, “Physical Consequences” as well as “Cultural Consequences”. Fornas 2023 and Yoga Practitioners Social media such as Instagram, for example, had shown us the physical consequences, with competitive yoga, and with injuries and pain for the sake of Instagram likes, something that goes far away from its original aim for health. Quoting (Antony, 2018), “yoga is divested of its religious connotations to discursively rearticulate it as a vehicle to achieve physical and emotional wellness,” and it shifted to become “an elite and exotic commodity that is accessible through consumerism”.

CONCLUSIONS

From this research we could conclude that yoga in Indonesia has become a part of global mental health commodification. Leaving behind Hindu myths and belief system, Yoga in Indonesia incorporated their own values and showed them through the use of attributes and fashion color. Color choice may represent personal preference, cultural traits, and even global voice. Yoga is seen as

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physical and mental activity, yet as mental health commodification, the practice of Yoga in Indonesia cannot escape the trap of consumerism, along with its environmental, social, physical and cultural consequences.

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