

Choosing Right Colors for Our Websites

Selecting the right colors for your website play an important role in determining the quality of a website design. Unfortunately, most of the website owners and designers pay little attention when it comes to the selection of colors. Before going into the technical details of selecting colors for your website, we need to understand some of the basic aspects of colors.

Colors & The Color Wheel

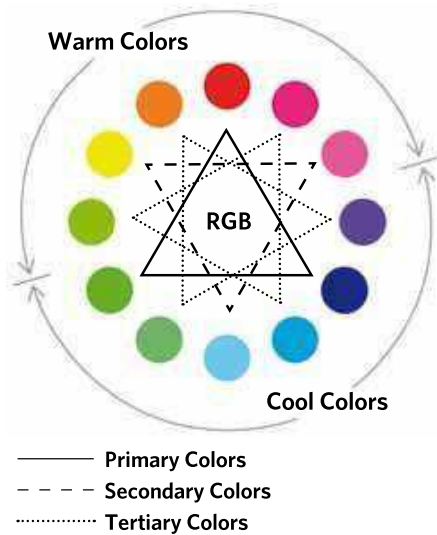


Fig. 1 : 12 Shade RGB Color Wheel

Color is the perceptual characteristic of light described by a color name.

Wikipedia says: *Color is the visual perceptual property corresponding in humans to the categories called red, yellow, white, etc.*

Ref: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color>

We are familiar with Newton's color wheel, the wheel we experimented in our high-school physics lab. An RGB color wheel is very much similar to that of Newton's color wheel. Instead of VIBGYOR, we use a combination of primary, secondary and

tertiary colors to make the RGB color wheel. Fig. 1 shows the 12 shade RGB color wheel. Here, the primary colors are placed equidistant from one another and the secondary colors are placed in between the primary colors. Tertiary colors are then placed between each of primary and secondary colors.

The color circle can be divided into warm and cool colors. Warm colors are vivid, energetic and tend to make a bolder impression in design. Hues from red through yellow, brown and tans fall under this category. Cool colors give an impression of calmness and gives a comfy feel to the viewer. Colors such as blue-green through blue-violet and gray shades of various colors come under cool category. White, black and gray are considered as neutral colors.

Color Harmonies

Color harmonies are a set of colors which contains two or more colors with some kind of relation in the color wheel. The different basic techniques widely used to define color schemes based on the color wheel is illustrated in Fig. 2.

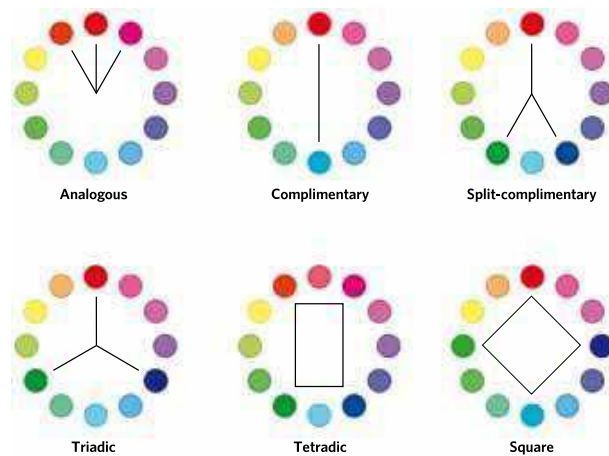


Fig. 2 : Various color harmonies

Primary Colors	Pure colors. Not possible to create these colors by mixing other colors. Red, Green and Blue are the primary colors in an RGB color wheel.
Secondary Colors	Colors generated by mixing two primary colors. Yellow, Cyan and Magenta are the secondary colors in an RGB color wheel.
Tertiary Colors	Colors achieved by mixing a primary color and a secondary color. Orange, Yellow-Green, Turquoise, Cobalt, Violet, Crimson are the tertiary colors in an RGB color wheel.



Hareesh N. Nampoothiri is a visual design consultant by profession, currently doing interdisciplinary research in ethnic elements in visual design in computer media. He has directed a documentary feature on Kathakali and penned a few books on graphic design. Kathakali, blogging and photography are his passions.

Tints & Shades

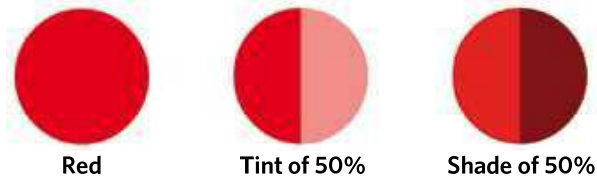


Fig. 3 : Making a 50% tint and shade of red

Are we restricting ourselves to these 12 colors while we suggest colors for our website? No, certainly not. For each color we have the option of selecting the tints and shades of that color. A tint is a result of adding white to the base color and a shade is a result of adding black. Fig. 3 illustrates the difference between a tint and a shade.

We can modify the 12 shade color wheel by adding white and black in different proportions. Fig. 4 shows the enhanced color wheel with tints and shades generated by adding white / black in 10% steps.

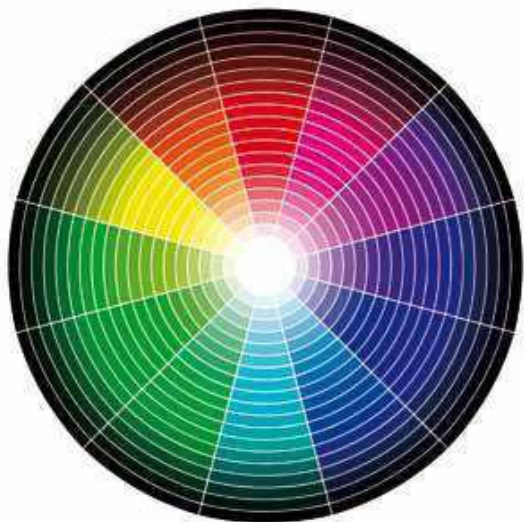


Fig. 4 : 12 shade color wheel with tints and shades in 10% steps

If we create a color wheel by adding white / black in 1% step we will get a color wheel with even more colors. Creating color harmonies thus become not an easy task as in the case of 12 color model. There are a lot of free web applications to help you in this. Adobe Kuler is a popular choice among the designers.

Using Adobe Kuler

It is easy to use the Adobe Kuler (Fig. 5) to generate our own color harmonies. We need to choose the base color and then the type of harmony we want to generate. Adobe Kuler will pick 4 other shades according to our choice.

Selecting Colors

In the 'Create' window in Adobe Kuler, we can set a base color first. It can be the prominent color (or its compliment color) in our logo or the brand identity. Once we set the base color, then

we can circle through various harmonies and select the suitable combination of warm and cool colors for our website. We can add the neutral colors (black, white, gray) to any set of colors based on any harmony.



Fig. 5 : Screenshot of the 'Create' option in Adobe Kuler

Creating New Harmonies

Adobe Kuler helps you to generate color shades using the existing harmonies. What about creating another harmony of colors? In other words, can we find a new relation between a set of colors in the color wheel? Unfortunately, Adobe Kuler does not provide an option to do that. We may need to go back to the 12 color model (of course, one with more tints and shades) to achieve that.

An Experiment with Kathakali

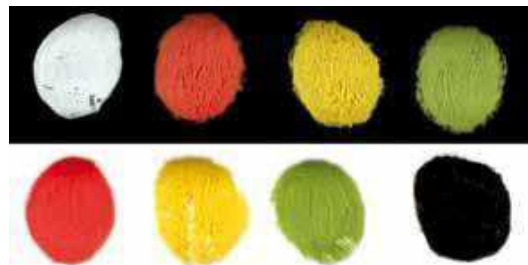


Fig. 6 : Prominent colors used in Kathakali

Kathakali is considered as one of the most colorful visual art form in our country. Kathakali artists mainly uses a set of 5 colors for doing their make-up including black and white (Fig. 6). We can ignore black and white since they are neutral shades. By plotting the colors of Kathakali in the color wheel, we will be able to generate a different harmony or a new relation between the colors. The color scheme (Fig. 7) is almost similar to analogous color scheme. It is possible to create such relations based on the other visual art forms as well.



Fig. 7 : A new color harmony in the RGB color wheel based on colors from Kathakali.