

Effect of colour coordination of attire with poster presentation on poster popularity

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Poster presentations are used to disseminate new knowledge at scientific conferences and meetings and to provide opportunities for liaison within the scientific community. The factors that influence people's decisions to visit scientific posters are not well understood. Through a MEDLINE search, we found only 2 studies that addressed poster design and outlined techniques for making posters attractive to viewers.^{1,2} Neither study examined the influence of the presenter's attire on visitation rates. We therefore decided to determine whether the degree to which a presenter's attire coordinates with the poster influences the number of visitors at the poster.

The study poster consisted primarily of text set against 4 non-clashing colours (blue, lavender, green and yellow). The study presenter was given 2 blouses to wear during the poster session. One blouse (lavender coloured) coordinated with the colours of the poster, and the other blouse (rust coloured) clashed with the poster (Fig. 1). The blouses were similar in style, and both were ironed by hotel staff on the morning of the presentation. For the control poster, we selected one from the registered poster presentations that was similar to the study poster in theme (pediatrics in developing countries), location (adjacent to the study poster) and use of colour, and whose presenter wore neutral-

coloured clothing (Fig. 2). The control presenter gave consent to participate in the study and agreed not to change her attire or behaviour throughout the poster session. The presenters coincidentally shared many characteristics (sex, age, height, race, nationality and hair colour).

The study presenter began the presentation wearing the lavender-coloured blouse. Because of a delayed start to the poster session, we did not know how long the session would last or when the midpoint would occur. We therefore asked the presenter to change into the rust-coloured blouse after 22 minutes (when there were no visitors). After a subsequent 28 minutes she changed back into the lavender-coloured blouse (again when there were no visitors) for the remaining 17 minutes. Every 60 seconds, a study investigator (located in a secret observation point about 4 metres away) recorded the number of visitors to both the study and control posters. (A visitor was defined as a person looking at the poster or engaged in conversation with the poster presenter.) During the entire session, both presenters were asked to maintain their posture and resting hand position. Their method of greeting, engaging and conversing with visitors was controlled: the presenters were asked not to start a conversation with any potential visitor unless spoken to first by the visitor.

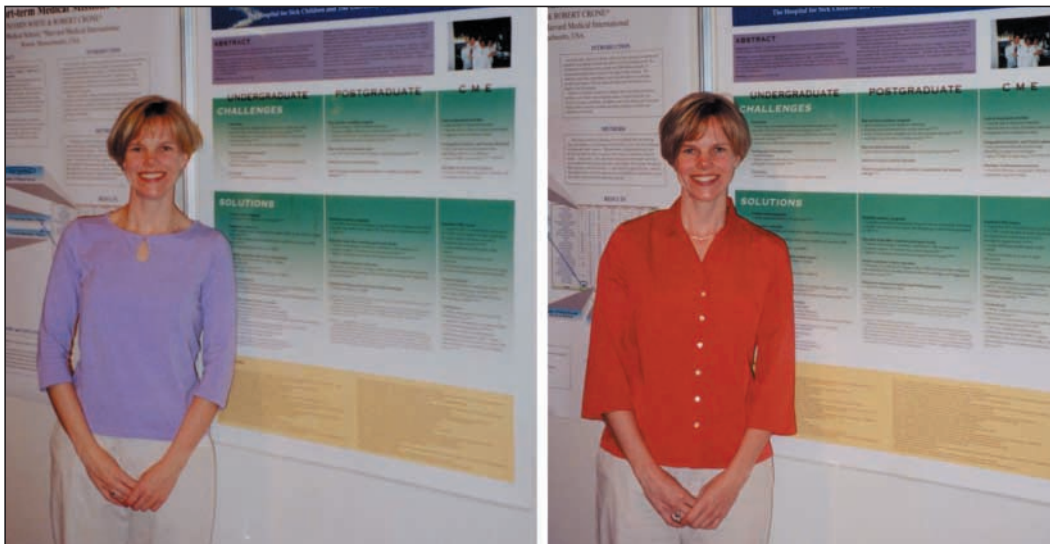


Fig. 1: Study presenter in lavender-coloured blouse (chosen to coordinate with poster colour) and in rust-coloured blouse (chosen to clash with poster).

The poster session lasted a total of 69 minutes (39 minutes for the coordinated-attire phase, 28 minutes for the clashing-attire phase, and 2 minutes for changing). During the coordinated-attire phase, the mean number of visitors per minute was 1.74 at the study poster and 1.03 at the control poster. During the clashing-attire phase, the mean number of visitors per minute dropped to 1.14 at the study poster and increased to 2.54 at the control poster (see Table 1 for the total number of visitors). Using χ^2 analysis, we found a statistically significant difference in the visitation rates depending on the colour of the presenter's blouse ($p < 0.001$).

Our study had several limitations. The study presenter may have altered her behaviour in order to affect the length of time visitors stayed at her poster. People may have decided to not visit the poster simply because they were not interested in the topic, or because they did not like the rust blouse regardless of whether it coordinated



Fig. 2: Control presenter, in neutral-coloured attire.

Table 1: Total number of visitors during poster session, by attire of study presenter

Attire of study presenter	No. of visitors		
	Study poster	Control poster	Total
Coordinated (lavender-coloured blouse)	68	40	108
Clashing (rust-coloured blouse)	32	71	103
Total	100	111	211

with the poster (however, 5 people were overheard by the observer during the clashing-attire phase to say that the presenter's blouse did not match her poster, and none visited the poster.) It would have been ideal to have conducted this study during several poster sessions; however, funding limited us to one medical education conference, which had only one poster session.

Visitation cannot be ensured simply by having the presenter wear attire that is colour-coordinated with the poster. However, the significance of our results suggests that colour coordination between the poster and the presenter's attire may substantially increase the popularity of the poster and the likelihood that the research will be disseminated.

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References

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