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**Conference Proceedings**

**Title:** Groundhog day: is 1970's colour really back in fashion?

**Creator:** King, J.

**Example citation:** King, J. (2016) Groundhog day: is 1970's colour really back in fashion? In: *The 90th Textile Institute World Conference*. Manchester: The Textile Institute. (In Press)

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work.

**Version:** Published version

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/8912/>





**THE 90<sup>th</sup> TEXTILE INSTITUTE WORLD CONFERENCE**  
Textiles: Inseparable from the human environment  
25-28 April 2016  
Poznan, Poland

## **GROUNDHOG DAY; IS 1970's COLOUR REALLY BACK IN FASHION?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fashion trends have always been transient, it is the intrinsic nature of the industry to constantly evolve and introduce new ideas. The very meaning of the word trend is an ancient one and can be traced back to Middle English and High German where its meaning was to turn, spin or revolve (Raymond, 2010), with many fashion movements revolving in and out of favour.

The trends for Autumn/Winter 2014/15 demonstrate the cyclical nature of fashion; the key reference points are the 1970's in colour, garment silhouette, fabrication and accessories. But how often can a fashion style, movement or decade be reinterpreted or revived for contemporary consumers? Is it a true representation of the era?

The paper examines the origins of the current Seventies revival in terms of categorisation of colour and pattern, mapping the cultural drivers supporting it, using visual and verbal evidence to construct the timeline for the revival and the frequency of iterations of 1970's trends in the last five decades. Examination of garments from the period will determine how accurate, contemporary colours are in comparison to the original seventies colour palettes.

**Keywords: Seventies, fashion, forecasting, cycles, colour**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Fashion is in constant flux, and the adoption of a 1970's influence for is indicative of how designers consistently look to gain inspiration from a wide variety of sources and time periods. Colour is fundamental to the evocation of a specific time period or fashion movement, with the early 1970's, is widely acknowledged as being notable for browns, oranges, avocados, purples and acid shades (Scully, Johnston Cobb, 2010). Colour and fashion trends are not created overnight and research has shown there is a slow evolution and adoption of such trends over a period of time, the bell curve model has been used to illustrate how a trend can be adopted early by a few fashion innovators, slowly growing until it is accepted by the mass market, reaching its peak before seeing a mirrored level in decline. Some believe colour cycles can be plotted and follow specific repetitive patterns (Brannon, 2000, King, 2012), even repeating on a regular basis over a predetermined

number of years, typically a seven year cycle; the most recent incarnation of the 1970's in colour and fashion terms was in the early 2000's. But if colour is an indicator of the zeitgeist of the era, just how reliable is this when inspiration is often taken from film or photographic materials which may inaccurately depict colour of the era?

The methodology for the research was to study garments from the Marks and Spencer Archive, held at Leeds Metropolitan University, to establish what the mass market colours of the era were and how they correspond with contemporary forecasted colours. Such a comparative analysis provided the key to the research question, whether or not the 70's revival is a reinterpretation or a faithful reproduction of the colours of the original era. These would be subsequently compared with the forecasted colours for the revival in 2014/15 from two major trend prediction sources.

Drawing on inspiration from a range of eras is not new, the fashions of the Seventies were in turn influenced by a variety of fashion styles from different eras creating a number of revivals. The 1950s were revived in the early 1970s (Brannon, 2000), as were the 1940s and even the 1930s (Wilson:1989). In response the Seventies have witnessed at least two modern day fashion revivals of their own, prior to the current trend; in the 1990s and again in early 2000s (Brannon, 2000). Clearly some dilution of key elements of early Seventies style is to be expected, as in turn the designers and retailers of the early Seventies were selective in their range of influences from diverse eras and fashion styles.

To appreciate the polarity of the contemporary fashion forecasting industry and that of its' 1970's counterpart, it is essential to understand the fashion industry of the time. During the period there were far fewer trend forecasting providers in comparison to the current market, basically there were a few dominant forecasting companies and fibre companies who also produced colour trends each season, resulting in little diversity. McKelvey and Munslow (2008:1) suggest that there was a shift from the 1960's onwards when the fashion industry moved at a far slower pace.

'During the post war period, forecasting companies compiled stories and themes each season that were easier to predict. Themes were also more predictable and often fell into evolving stories that reflected the slower moving trends of the time'

The world economy was in turmoil, and changing rapidly from the relatively affluent period of the late 1960's. In the UK the oil crisis of 1973 and the coal miners strike in 1974 resulted in a power cuts and shorter working weeks. Fashion around the time reacted to the austerity of everyday life and embraced retro-chic, glam rock and ethnic styles, resulting in a broad range of colours and fabrics adopted by the fashion industry (Wilson, 1989). The preconception surrounding the dominant colours employed in fashion and interiors in the 1970's often encompass the colours reflected in such inspirations, browns, oranges, purples, avocado and yellows. Brannon (2000) mentions a popular sunshine yellow used in 1971, and a range of earthy tones influenced by the hippy movement, and these are the basis upon which perceptions of original Seventies colours are based upon.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to test the validity of revivalist colours faithfully reproducing the original, a number of printed dresses from the early 1970's were selected to view from the Marks and Spencer archive. These were initially selected using the online catalogue, and chosen for

the diversity of colours within the printed fabrics and the year of manufacture. The garments were then photographed during visits to the archive, and referenced against pantone textile colours. The same lighting and positioning was used for each garment selected, so as to ensure parity across the sample.

A range of colours were subsequently taken from the garments to comprise a colour palette for each year from 1970 – 1974, based on the year in which the garments were on sale in store. The resulting colour palettes were subsequently compared to palettes forecasted for A/W 2014/15 by Promostyl one of the leading trend and colour forecasters, ironically established since the mid 1970s, and those of colour specialists Pantone. Further research indicated clearly the revival of the Seventies in fashion had started earlier than 2014, as the forecasters would have initially discussed their ideas for that season up to 2 years earlier (King, 2012). However, the influences of the 1970's have continued to be popular although their impact is waning, as all trends eventually make way for newer, fresher looks.

'A sea change is in the air. As fashion drifts away from the flower-power boho of the 1970s we are starting to see a new mood come into play.'

Evans (2015)

The era continues to be influential into Summer 2016 and Evans goes on to cite prints as being a particular area influenced, illustrating recent catwalk collections from Alberta Ferretti, Valentino and Gucci as brands continue to promote the theme through print, crochet and silhouette. The key colours were identified as vivid brights, rich darks including marsala, the Pantone colour of the year 2015, all paired with white.

The influences of the 1970's evidently started far earlier than summer 2014, with Trend Analyst Li Edelkoot suggesting that commentators can be mistaken in their rush to label ideas and in particular, colour combinations, as revivals of specific eras. As early as 2008 when she noted that traces of the revival were being reported:

'With a surge of brights parading the catwalk....it is easy to mistake this colourful movement as a revival. Most fashion magazines have already labelled the colour comeback as a return to the 60's and early 70's.'

Edelkoot (2008)

Online trend specialist WGSN identified the trend for 1970s more specifically in their Nostalgic 1970s report, first published in August 2014 for the Autumn/Winter 2014/15 season.

'Catwalk designers look back to give collections nostalgic 1970s silhouettes featuring authentic details and colours such as top-stitching and warm browns'

WGSN (2014)

The Promostyl Autumn/Winter 2014/15 trendbook for women published in early 2014, features four key trends, of which the Curator trend follows the 1970s theme, specifically mentioning 'interior decoration of the 70's with its iconic colours and motifs inspires edgy elegance.' Promostyl (2014:73).

Pantone's colour report for 2015 noted that the season was selecting inspiration from a number of eras, as the Seventies originally did, from 'moments in American history – from the seductive '20s to the bohemian hippie and modernists of the '60s and '70s'

The theme also promotes warm reds and oranges, greens and browns, with base colours including black, white and ecru. In order to assess the contemporary versions of the revivalist colours, further work was carried out to identify colours used in the dresses from the Marks and Spencer Archive, all from the early 1970's.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF ORIGINAL 1970s COLOUR PALETTES**

The key elements of the research were conducted at the Marks and Spencer Archive held at The University of Leeds. A sample of seven printed dresses from 1970 – 1974 were selected and examined. Each dress was photographed, as was the printed fabric in order to establish a close up detail of the pattern. Each colour identified in the dress fabrics were then colour matched by eye using the Pantone Textile fan. In order to maintain the same conditions of lighting, the garments were inspected in the same position using the same lighting each time. A series of colour palettes were developed, one from each garment, reflecting the colours identified within the printed fabrics. The base colour of the fabric was also taken into consideration if it was visible and integral to the print.

Whilst most dresses were constructed using a printed fabric, one knitted dress was also selected and the colours examined within the knitted construction of the dress. Other variables to be considered as a part of the study included the variation in fabrics and their light absorption and reflection properties, and the potential degradation of colour over time. It has also to be considered that Marks and Spencer, although a major UK retailer, would not necessarily represent the full range of colours on offer at any particular time.

The resulting colour palettes were subsequently compared with the Promostyl colour palettes and those of Pantone from Autumn/Winter 2014/15 to establish whether there was any synergy between the original Seventies colours identified and the contemporary colour palettes of the recent revival of the era. Both companies provide Pantone colour references for their colour palettes, so there was parity between the colour naming systems.

## **RESULTS**

As expected, there was substantial variation in the colour palettes created by each dress. It was impossible to assess the dresses in the context of a full range of coordinated garments which would have been available at the same time as the archive is not sufficiently extensive to allow such a study. Had a wider range of garments from the same season been available for sampling, it would have allowed for a greater range of colours to be extracted from the year of garment origin. Typically a full garment range plan would comprise a number of dresses, skirts and tops, utilising knitted and woven fabrics plus coordinates, which would all complement one another and use most of the same colours from a particular colour palette. Also of note was the fact that other than base or outline colours such as white or black, all the dresses had very different colour compositions, resulting in a range of 33 colours in total across 7 dresses. Both the Promostyl and Pantone colour palettes were far more restricted, featuring 11 and 10 colours respectively.

None the less it was surprising to find that relatively few correlations could be made with the contemporary revivalist colours developed for A/W 2014/15 by Promostyl and the colours from the archive dresses. Promostyl compiled a palette of 11 colours including white and a dark charcoal grey, plus ecru for their Seventies themed colour and print story. Although many of the archive dresses did feature either a white or ecru base, or incorporated black to create outlines for some of the patterns, most of the remaining colours predicted by Promostyl did not appear together or as a part of the various colour palettes generated from the archive dresses.. The original Seventies colours identified from the archive featured oranges and yellows, plus browns, but did not accurately match any of the contemporary colours predicted by Promostyl, whose colours were far lighter than the originals.

There were a significant range of colours in the pink, purple and greens spectrum discovered from the archive which did not feature at all in the contemporary palette, although Promostyl did suggest one mid blue, Le Corbusier Blue, however, this could not be matched to any of the blues found in the range of dresses examined. Pantone proposed a similar blue, which again did not match any of the blues from the archive dresses.

When examining the Pantone colours for Winter 2014/15 the results were somewhat different. Of the ten colours featured many were similar to colours used in the archive palettes, and one in particular, Radiant Orchid, was an exact match to a violet featured in Dress 6 from the archive, and many other colours featured in the dresses were close to 60% of the Pantone predicted colours.. The Pantone colours reflected far more of the original Seventies archive colours than Promostyl, although browns and oranges took on a slightly different hue. However, the grouping was close enough to see immediate correlation to 4 of the dresses from the archive. This could be explained by several reasons, perhaps Pantone used their own archive to research the original colours, perhaps their magpie approach to the season resulted in a broader range of colours being proposed, rather than a more modernist approach to colour palette development, which Promostyl may have proposed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There have been a number of revivals of Seventies influences since the era ended, and the trend appears set to continue into Summer 2016, despite having been identified initially as potentially heralding a return to colours of the 70's as far back as 2008. Therefore the trend has had time to develop and to morph in to an alternative version of the original colours used. The range of dresses sampled indicated a broad range of colours were prevalent in a period between 1970 and 1974 in mainstream fashion of the time, as is the case in contemporary fashion colour. Within the Promostyl publication used there were four themes promoted, each with 11 colours to choose from, but only one theme directly referenced the 1970s era.

Nevertheless, the contemporary interpretation of the modern day colours bears little resemblance to the original colours found from the Marks and Spencer archive dresses. The sample used was relatively small, and perhaps a better result would have been achieved by using a larger garment sample, not wholly sourced from the Marks and Spencer archive but from a range of other brands available on the UK high street at the time. Conversely, by comparing a broader range of trend predictions for the season, it may

have been possible to identify additional correlations in colour palettes from the original era and the contemporary revival.

Undoubtedly the vision of today's designers and trend forecasters refers to original Seventies fashion colours, but eventually the lack of immediate correlation between the two periods it could simply be attributed to the changing tastes in fashion and the adaption of the original colours to suit today's consumer and market.

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