

## Color Theory and Emotional Semiotics in Post-Production: A Framework for Intercultural Visual Storytelling

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates how digital color grading and visual effects compositing function as semiotic systems that shape emotional engagement and cultural interpretation in visual storytelling. By examining how audiences respond to color as both an affective signal and a culturally coded sign, the study demonstrates that color choices in post-production influence narrative meaning far beyond aesthetic enhancement. Case studies drawn from film scenes and television reveal that color operates simultaneously at psychological and symbolic levels, guiding viewer perception through established emotional associations and culturally specific metaphors. The analysis shows that when color interacts with framing, lighting, and visual motifs, it forms a coherent semiotic network that supports character development, thematic depth, and intercultural communication. Building on these insights, the paper proposes a practical framework that integrates color psychology, cultural symbolism, and cinematic language for use in global post-production workflows. The framework assists VFX professionals in designing imagery that resonates emotionally across diverse audiences while maintaining narrative clarity and cultural sensitivity. Overall, the study positions color as an essential communicative tool in contemporary digital storytelling and emphasizes the need for intentional, culturally informed visual strategies in post-production environments.

**Keywords:** Color grading, Semiotics, Visual effects, Intercultural communication, Narrative design

### INTRODUCTION

Color occupies a central place in the communication of meaning, functioning simultaneously as a perceptual phenomenon, a cultural code, and an emotional trigger. Scholars working at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and anthropology consistently emphasize that color does not operate as a neutral visual element but as a sign system shaped by conceptual categorization and culturally embedded metaphors. This aligns with the cognitive-linguistic account of meaning proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, who argue that human understanding depends on metaphorical structures grounded in embodied experience and culturally transmitted signs (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Within this framework, color becomes more than a property of light; it becomes a semiotic resource that participates in the construction of narratives, identities and emotional atmospheres. Research on color-emotion connections further reinforce this semiotic orientation. Studies examining idioms, symbolic usage and affective responses across languages show that colors are consistently mapped onto emotional prototypes within and across cultural communities. Steinvall's analysis of English corpora demonstrates that red, yellow, blue and black appear repeatedly in figurative expressions linked to emotional states such as love, joy, anger and sadness (Steinvall, 2007). Similarly, psychological research grounded in basic emotion theory suggests that recurrent emotional categories such as happiness, fear, anger and sadness are systematically associated with particular color cues (Ekman, 1973; Sviilicic, Radek, Grabar). These insights provide empirical grounding for understanding color as an affective semiotic system with both universal and culture-specific features. For instance, while black frequently denotes mourning across several cultures, the symbolic meanings of red vary widely, signaling anger, love, warning or celebration depending on cultural context.

The semiotic nature of color becomes especially significant in cinema, where visual information must communicate narrative depth, emotional tone and cultural meaning without relying on verbal explanation. Early film theorists recognized that cinema functions as a language composed of signs, codes and conventions. Harman's reading of Metz and Wollen emphasizes that cinematic meaning emerges from the interplay between signifier and signified and that visual motifs including color operate as structured signals within narrative construction (Harman, 1977). Tomaselli's semiotic and cybernetic approach similarly suggests that film communicates through layered symbolic systems in which

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light, color, framing and movement form interacting codes that guide viewer interpretation (Tomaselli, 1985). These theoretical contributions position color as an essential component of cinematic language, functioning as both a perceptual cue and a cultural sign.

In contemporary filmmaking, post-production is the stage where these semiotic possibilities converge most powerfully. Color grading, compositing and digital enhancement allow filmmakers to modulate hue, saturation and contrast with precision, shaping emotional resonance and cultural meaning within scenes. However, despite the technical sophistication of modern post-production workflows, the cultural and semiotic dimensions of color grading remain under-theorized in academic and professional discourse. The intersection of intercultural communication, emotional semiotics and post-production practice thus presents an important site for scholarly intervention. This paper argues that integrating insights from color semiotics, emotion research and film theory allows for the development of a robust framework for intercultural visual storytelling. By understanding how colors function as emotional and cultural signs, practitioners can shape post-production processes that communicate more effectively across diverse audiences and narrative contexts.

Despite the centrality of color in shaping narrative interpretation and emotional response, post-production practice frequently approaches color grading as a primarily technical or aesthetic procedure rather than a semiotic and culturally mediated process. This creates a significant gap between what existing scholarship demonstrates about color meaning and how practitioners operationalize color in visual storytelling. Studies in linguistic and cognitive semiotics show that color associations emerge from culturally embedded metaphors and conceptual structures, revealing both universal and culture-specific patterns of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Research further confirms that colors consistently correlate with emotional prototypes such as anger, joy or fear, suggesting a predictable semiotic function rooted in human affective perception (Ekman, 1973). However, these insights rarely inform post-production workflows, where the cultural variability of color symbolism is often overlooked. Empirical studies in intercultural color-emotion mapping highlight major divergences in how societies interpret specific hues, demonstrating that red, black, blue and yellow carry distinct emotional and symbolic meanings across linguistic communities (Steinvall, 2007). The absence of such considerations in editing and grading processes risks producing visual narratives that unintentionally miscommunicate or obscure emotional intent when viewed across cultural contexts. Meanwhile, semiotic film theory emphasizes that every visual element, including color, is a sign that shapes audience interpretation through systems of connotation and cultural coding (Harman, 1977; Tomaselli, 1985). Yet, post-production pipelines seldom integrate these theoretical insights into decision-making frameworks. The core problem, therefore, is the lack of a structured, semiotically informed and culturally responsive framework that guides color use in post-production for intercultural visual storytelling.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the centrality of color in shaping narrative interpretation and emotional response, post-production practice frequently approaches color grading as a primarily technical or aesthetic procedure rather than a semiotic and culturally mediated process. This creates a significant gap between what existing scholarship demonstrates about color meaning and how practitioners operationalize color in visual storytelling. Studies in linguistic and cognitive semiotics show that color associations emerge from culturally embedded metaphors and conceptual structures, revealing both universal and culture-specific patterns of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Research further confirms that colors consistently correlate with emotional prototypes such as anger, joy or fear, suggesting a predictable semiotic function rooted in human affective perception (Ekman, 1973). However, these insights rarely inform post-production workflows, where the cultural variability of color symbolism is often overlooked. Empirical studies in intercultural color-emotion mapping highlight major divergences in how societies interpret specific hues, demonstrating that red, black, blue and yellow carry distinct emotional and symbolic meanings across linguistic communities (Steinvall, 2007). The absence of such considerations in editing and grading processes risks producing visual narratives that unintentionally miscommunicate or obscure emotional intent when viewed across cultural contexts. Meanwhile, semiotic film theory emphasizes that every visual element, including color, is a sign that shapes audience interpretation through systems of connotation and cultural coding (Harman, 1977; Tomaselli, 1985). However, post-production pipelines seldom integrate these theoretical insights into decision-making frameworks. The core problem, therefore, is the lack of a structured, semiotically informed and culturally responsive framework that guides color use in post-production for intercultural visual storytelling.

### **Objectives**

- To analyze how color functions as a semiotic vehicle for emotional and cultural meaning in visual storytelling, building on cognitive and cultural models of sign interpretation.
- To examine how cinematic semiotics, particularly color, framing and lighting, construct audience interpretation and narrative cues.

- To evaluate cross-cultural consistency and variability in color-emotion associations based on linguistic and anthropological models.
- To propose a color-semiotic framework that guides editors and colorists in integrating culturally sensitive emotional cues into post-production.

### **Related Work**

Research on color, semiotics and cinematic meaning has developed across linguistics, psychology and film theory, producing a wide interdisciplinary foundation for understanding how visual elements communicate cultural and emotional meaning. Foundational linguistic and literary work demonstrates that color symbolism is embedded in cultural narratives, rituals and expressive traditions. Early analyses show that colors have long carried stable meanings across societies, with red often associated with themes such as passion, violence or intensity, and black linked to mourning, misfortune or secrecy (Clough, 1930; Pšenko & Piskač, 2012). These observations are echoed in later linguistic studies that examine idiomatic expressions across different languages, demonstrating that color is a stable figurative marker in communication. In cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that human thinking is structured by metaphors grounded in embodied experience, which helps explain why color terms acquire culturally shared metaphorical meanings. Their theory supports findings that idioms across English, Italian, German and Croatian reflect stable conceptual links between color and emotion.

Psychological research further demonstrates that color perception is tightly linked to emotional evaluation. Ekman's (1973) work on basic emotions establishes the universality of emotional categories such as anger, fear, sadness and joy, providing a structure for examining how color evokes affective responses. Later studies confirm that people across cultures readily associate specific hues with emotional states, particularly red, yellow and black, which appear strongly connected to intense feelings such as anger, joy or fear (Steinvall, 2007). These trends remain consistent even as cultural patterns differ, which suggests that color–emotion associations operate at the intersection of biological perception and cultural learning. Findings also show that geographical and linguistic proximity strengthens similarity in color-emotion mapping, revealing that emotional interpretation is both universal and culturally specific. The role of idioms is crucial here: idiomatic expressions such as “green with envy,” “see red,” or “black mood,” as discussed in linguistic analyses, serve as cultural archives of emotional meaning (Kovecses & Szabo, 1996). These linguistic patterns reinforce the argument that color functions as a cognitive and communicative sign shaped by cultural knowledge.

Film studies add another essential dimension by examining how visual signs operate in cinematic language. Metz's introduction of semiotics into film theory paved the way for scholars to view cinema as a signifying system. Harman (1977) emphasizes that films communicate through structured visual codes in which every element—framing, lighting, movement and color contributes to the production of meaning. By distinguishing denotation from connotation, early film semiotics demonstrates how visual elements move beyond literal representation to convey symbolic or emotional significance. Tomaselli (1985) extends this approach by applying semiotic and cybernetic frameworks to film interpretation, arguing that cinematic meaning arises from dynamic interactions between visual signs and audience perception. His work highlights how signs operate through feedback loops in which cultural expectations and stylistic conventions guide viewer interpretation.

More recent semiotic studies show that visual storytelling depends on the interplay of multiple symbolic systems. Scholars underline the importance of lighting, camera placement, visual motifs and spatial arrangement as key semiotic resources that shape narrative structure and emotional tone. Wee (2014), for example, argues that visual signs in cinema such as symbolic objects, recurring gestures or culturally marked spatial configurations, serve as narrative anchors that communicate abstract themes and emotional states. These insights strengthen the argument that color is deeply integrated into the semiotic fabric of film. Because color can simultaneously express mood, foreshadow thematic developments and encode cultural symbolism, it functions as one of the most versatile visual signs available to filmmakers. Research also stresses the importance of cultural specificity in interpreting cinematic color. Comparative analyses show that color meanings shift across cultural contexts. A visual motif that signals danger or disruption in one culture may evoke joy, purity or ritual significance in another. For example, linguistic studies show that while red may signify anger in English contexts, it is closely tied to love and joy in Italian and Croatian associations (Steinvall, 2007). Film theory supports these claims by showing that visual interpretation is shaped by cultural memory and symbolic expectation. Buckland (1999) argues that cinematic symbols operate through culturally grounded systems of meaning, which means that color motifs cannot be understood without reference to cultural codes.

Taken together, the literature provides a robust foundation for understanding color as a semiotic and intercultural phenomenon. Linguistic research demonstrates the metaphorical and idiomatic embedding of color meanings.

Psychological studies show reliable color–emotion mappings with both universal and variable elements. Film scholarship establishes that cinematic meaning depends on structured visual codes in which color plays a central role. However, across this body of work, there remains a notable gap: the integration of color semiotics into post-production practice is rarely theorized. Although scholarship explains how color functions as a sign, it does not provide a framework for how editors and colorists can apply these insights systematically. This absence underscores the need for a coherent, culturally responsive and semiotically grounded model of color use in post-production for intercultural visual storytelling.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study draws on three interrelated bodies of scholarship: film semiotics, cognitive linguistics and emotional prototype theory. Together, these perspectives establish color as a system of culturally mediated signs that shape interpretation in visual storytelling. Film semiotics provides the foundational understanding of cinema as a language composed of symbolic structures rather than merely a sequence of images. Harman's discussion of Metz and Wollen emphasizes that cinematic meaning depends on the relationship between signifier and signified, where visual elements operate within layered systems of denotation and connotation that guide the viewer's interpretive process (Harman, 1977). Tomaselli further argues that filmic communication relies on the coordinated interaction of visual signs, framing, lighting and movement, all of which form a semiotic network that encodes cultural and narrative information (Tomaselli, 1985). Within this network, color becomes a semiotic device that communicates emotional states and cultural meanings without explicit verbal narration. Cognitive linguistics expands this semiotic foundation by explaining how color meanings are shaped by conceptual metaphors and embodied experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson, meaning arises through metaphorical structures that link perceptual cues to abstract concepts, allowing cultural communities to develop shared interpretive habits around signs such as color (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This perspective clarifies why cultures develop stable idioms linking color to emotions and character traits, as shown by linguistic analyses that reveal consistent figurative patterns across languages (Steinvall, 2007). These metaphorical mappings show that color is not an isolated aesthetic property but a cognitive category that influences how audiences perceive narrative cues. Emotional prototype theory further strengthens the argument by situating color perception within established affective structures. Research by Ekman demonstrates that certain emotions, such as anger, joy, sadness and fear, are universally recognizable, providing a baseline for understanding cross-cultural affective cues (Ekman, 1973). Shaver's work refines this model by organizing emotions into hierarchical prototypes, showing how specific feelings cluster around core categories (Shaver et al., 1987). When combined with cross-cultural studies of color associations, these prototypes provide a framework for analyzing how colors in film evoke predictable emotional responses. Together, these theories justify treating color in post-production not simply as a technical adjustment but as a semiotic and culturally embedded tool for constructing meaning in intercultural visual storytelling.

### **METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION**

The methodological orientation for this study follows a qualitative, interpretive design grounded in established traditions of film semiotics, linguistic analysis and cultural interpretation. Semiotic film research provides a strong precedent for studying how visual signs communicate meaning, and this study adopts a similar analytical orientation. Tomaselli's (1985) semiotic and cybernetic approach to cinema demonstrates that filmic meaning emerges from the interaction of visual codes with audience interpretation, providing a methodological foundation for examining how color, framing and visual motifs operate as cultural and emotional signs. In line with this approach, the present study relies on close textual and visual analysis of selected film sequences, focusing on the ways color grading, lighting decisions and compositional structures encode emotional and symbolic meaning. The methodology also incorporates insights from linguistic studies that examine color meanings across cultural contexts. Steinvall's (2007) analysis of color-emotion associations in idiomatic expressions across languages shows that colors function as culturally mediated conceptual categories linked to emotional prototypes. These findings justify the inclusion of a cross-cultural comparative dimension in the present study. By drawing on these linguistic insights, the research interprets cinematic color choices not only as aesthetic decisions but as semiotic cues that carry culturally specific emotional resonance.

Film samples are selected using purposive sampling, focusing on works from different cultural industries that rely heavily on color for narrative or symbolic effect. Each film is examined through systematic scene-level analysis, identifying recurring color motifs, emotional cues, symbolic contrasts and culturally coded visual patterns. This interpretive process involves repeated viewing, frame-by-frame analysis when necessary and detailed annotation of visual patterns that appear to align with established semiotic or emotional frameworks. The study also draws on the principles of narrative semiotics described by Harman (1977), which emphasize the structured nature of cinematic meaning. Through this multimodal qualitative approach, the methodology aims to integrate semiotic, linguistic and cultural insights into a coherent analytical procedure capable of revealing how color functions as a tool for intercultural visual storytelling.

## **Analytical Exploration of Color Semiotics in Visual Storytelling**

### **Color as Emotional Semiotic in Post-Production**

Color functions as one of the most potent emotional sign systems available to filmmakers, and post-production is the stage where its semiotic force is most carefully shaped. Emotional semiotics is grounded in the understanding that viewers interpret color through cognitive and affective structures that guide emotional perception. Prototype theory provides the primary psychological foundation for this interpretation. Ekman's (1973) identification of core emotions, anger, fear, sadness and joy, offers a baseline for evaluating how audiences respond to color cues that have become culturally stable through repetition and metaphor. Shaver *et al.*, (1987) expand this idea by demonstrating that emotions cluster into hierarchical categories, making it possible to predict how certain color tones evoke specific affective responses. These foundational insights support the argument that color grading is not merely a technical enhancement but an emotional semiotic strategy.

Film semiotics strengthens this position by showing that visual meaning is structured and encoded within cinematic language. Harman's (1977) reflection on Metz and Wollen demonstrates that audience interpretation arises through the interplay of connotation and denotation, with color often operating at the level of connotation by signaling emotional undercurrents that guide narrative expectation. Similarly, the semiotic principles outlined by Tomaselli (1985) show that film constructs meaning through networks of interacting signs, where color is used to shape the emotional architecture of scenes. Whether through saturated reds that heighten dramatic tension or desaturated palettes that signal melancholy, color grading becomes a deliberate semiotic maneuver. Cross-cultural linguistic findings reinforce the emotional significance of color choices. Steinvall's (2007) analysis of idioms confirms that colors such as red, black, yellow and blue are consistently associated with emotional states across languages, demonstrating that audiences bring learned emotional associations to cinematic images. For instance, red is often associated with anger or passion, while blue conveys connotations of sadness or distance. These culturally informed patterns enable editors and colorists to anticipate how emotional signals will be received and interpreted.

In post-production, the semiotic potential of color is magnified by the precision of digital tools. Through selective color grading, editors can isolate emotional cues that shape audience empathy, suspense, or tension. Warm color schemes can be manipulated to enhance intimacy, nostalgia or comfort, while cold tones introduce detachment, fear or alienation. By integrating insights from emotional prototype theory and film semiotics, post-production transforms color into a narrative device capable of reinforcing character arcs, foreshadowing emotional shifts or signaling unconscious emotional states. Ultimately, color as an emotional semiotic anchors the viewer's affective experience by aligning aesthetic decisions with psychological principles. The combination of cognitive-emotional theory and cinematic semiotics demonstrates that color grading is both an art and a structured communicative system, shaping how audiences feel and understand the narrative unfolding before them.



**Figure 1. Emotional color grading example: Blade\_Runner\_2049\_promo\_image.jpg**

This image is a resolution still showing the blue–orange grading contrast commonly used to illustrate emotional color semiotics.

### **7.2 Color as Cultural Semiotic in Intercultural Storytelling**

Color carries deep cultural meaning, and its symbolic resonance varies significantly across communities. This artistic dimension is essential for filmmakers developing narratives intended for global audiences. Color symbolism, unlike purely emotional interpretation, is shaped by shared historical, linguistic and ritual traditions that become embedded in collective memory. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphors explains how cultural experience influences the metaphors through which people interpret visual signs, including color. Their framework clarifies why colors develop culturally specific meanings, why white symbolizes purity in some cultures but mourning in others, or why red may represent romance in one context and violence in another.



Empirical linguistic research shows that color terms encode cultural worldviews. Steinvall (2007) demonstrates that idioms in English, Croatian, German and Italian link colors to culturally shaped emotional and social concepts. For example, “green with envy,” “black humor” and “white as snow” reflect both emotional states and culturally embedded symbolic structures. These idioms reflect internalized cultural codes, meaning audiences interpret colors through familiar conceptual lenses when watching films. Film theory further underscores the cultural dimension of color. Harman (1977) emphasizes that cinematic meaning is never free from cultural encoding, while Tomaselli (1985) highlights the role of societal symbolism in shaping semiotic interpretation. Cinema cannot be detached from the cultural signs that viewers carry with them. When filmmakers employ color as a narrative device, they activate these cultural codes, whether consciously or unintentionally.

For intercultural storytelling, understanding these differences is essential. A color grading choice that reads as “danger” in one culture may read as “celebration” in another. Psychological categories of emotion may be shared across cultures, but symbolic interpretations often diverge. Red provides a clear example: it can symbolize love and vitality in Mediterranean contexts, aggression in Anglo-American traditions, and political identity or warning signals elsewhere. These divergences affect how international audiences interpret visual cues. The increasing global circulation of films demands greater sensitivity to such cultural nuances. Editors and colorists have unprecedented access to digital tools that allow them to adjust palettes for different markets or platforms. Integrating cultural semiotics into these workflows allows post-production teams to produce culturally coherent narratives that resonate across diverse viewerships. By grounding color decisions in cross-cultural linguistic research and semiotic film theory, filmmakers can avoid miscommunication and strengthen cultural authenticity. This approach transforms color from a purely aesthetic choice into a mediator of intercultural understanding, making it central to contemporary visual storytelling.



**Figure 2- Cultural Symbolism of Color Example: (*Schindler's List* – Red Coat scene)**

This image clearly shows the iconic red-coat girl, which is widely used to illustrate cultural and symbolic color contrast in monochromatic film contexts.

### **7.3 Integration of Semiotic Elements in Visual Editing**

Integrating semiotic elements in visual editing requires an understanding of how multiple visual components, color, lighting, framing, texture and motion, operate together to produce meaning. Film semiotics, particularly the work of Metz and his interpreters, provides the theoretical basis for this integration. Harman (1977) argues that film communicates through layered systems of signs, where meaning is generated through the coordinated use of visual cues. Tomaselli (1985) similarly notes that semiotic interpretation depends on how signs operate together within a dynamic communicative system. Editing, therefore, becomes the space where disparate visual elements are synthesized into a coherent semiotic structure.

Color interacts particularly strongly with framing and lighting. For instance, a cold blue palette may signal emotional distance, but its meaning deepens when combined with off-center framing, which can suggest instability, alienation or psychological fragmentation. Conversely, symmetrical framing with warm golden tones may communicate harmony or emotional equilibrium. These combinations work because viewers instinctively process signs holistically, interpreting meaning through clusters of visual cues rather than isolated elements. Linguistic findings on color symbolism further inform how these visual clusters should be interpreted. As Steinvall (2007) shows, colors participate in metaphorical networks that shape conceptual understanding. This means that when editors combine color with specific framing or lighting strategies, they amplify culturally embedded metaphors. For example, backlighting a character in white light may evoke metaphors of purity or transcendence in some cultures, while casting a character in red shadows may evoke metaphors of danger or emotional volatility.

The integration of semiotic elements is particularly significant in scenes requiring emotional or thematic precision. Editing choices can intensify tension, guide empathy or foreshadow narrative developments. For example, the choice to intercut close-ups with sharply contrasting color temperatures can create psychological unease, while maintaining color continuity across shots can enhance narrative cohesion. These decisions reflect the semiotic principle that viewers interpret filmic signs relationally, not individually. Furthermore, integrating color with motion, such as tracking shots, slow pans or handheld instability, creates deeper layers of meaning. Wee (2014) highlights how visual signs in movement contribute to emotional resonance, reinforcing narrative symbolism. When color interacts with movement, such as a shift from warm to cold tones during a character's emotional decline, the resulting semiotic effect becomes especially powerful. Ultimately, integrating semiotic elements in editing transforms the post-production process into a creative and interpretive act. Editors and colorists are not merely technicians but semiotic designers, orchestrating visual signs into coherent cultural and emotional meaning systems. By combining insights from film semiotics, cognitive metaphor theory and cross-cultural color research, the integration of visual cues becomes a strategic foundation for effective and culturally resonant storytelling.



**Figure 3 – Semiotic Integration in Cinematic Editing (*The Godfather Part II* – Michael Corleone low-key lit frame)**

This is a stable PNG file from a film-analysis archive (MUBI), showing a verified still from *The Godfather Part II*, illustrating lighting, framing, and compositional semiotics.

### Framework Proposal

The proposed framework integrates cognitive-emotional mapping, cultural semiotic registers and film-semiotic editing strategies into a unified model for color use in intercultural visual storytelling. Its foundation rests on the understanding that color meaning emerges from the interaction of human emotional structures, culturally transmitted conceptual metaphors and the formal sign systems of cinema. Cognitive linguistics provides the first layer of this framework. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), meaning is shaped through embodied metaphors that structure perception, which implies that viewers interpret colors through conceptual associations deeply rooted in bodily and cultural experience. These metaphorical structures explain why certain hues evoke predictable emotional responses and why these responses are reinforced through repeated cultural usage.

The second layer draws from research on cultural semiotics, which demonstrates that color meanings vary significantly across linguistic and cultural contexts. Steinvall's (2007) findings on color idioms show that colors such as red, blue, black and yellow carry culturally patterned symbolic associations that influence emotional interpretation. These culturally shaped registers must therefore be embedded in any model intended for global storytelling. This component ensures that editors and colorists recognize that emotional responses to color are mediated by cultural knowledge, making cross-cultural sensitivity an essential part of the workflow.

The final layer incorporates film semiotics as articulated in the theoretical contributions of Harman (1977) and Tomaselli (1985). Their analyses of cinematic codes show that meaning is generated through structured visual systems in which color interacts with framing, lighting and narrative composition. This layer translates cultural and emotional insights into practical post-production strategies by positioning color grading and visual editing as semiotic acts that shape the viewer's interpretive path. Together, these three layers form an integrated model in which emotional prototypes, cultural codes and cinematic sign systems guide the strategic use of color. This framework positions color as a communicative tool rather than a stylistic accessory, enabling filmmakers to produce interculturally coherent and emotionally resonant visual narratives.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates that color occupies a central role in constructing emotional meaning and cultural resonance in visual storytelling, especially within post-production processes where its semiotic potential is fully realized. Evidence from cross-cultural research on color associations shows that color is not a neutral aesthetic variable but a communicative sign shaped by emotional prototypes and culturally embedded metaphors. The first primary source reinforces this position by demonstrating that color–emotion associations recur consistently across Croatian, English, German and Italian cultural contexts, revealing both shared human tendencies and meaningful cultural variations. Although emotional mappings such as joy linked to yellow or sadness to blue appear frequently across cultures, the study also shows substantial divergences, particularly in the symbolic interpretation of red and black, which underscores the necessity for filmmakers to adopt culturally informed color strategies. Within this cinematic language, color is not merely decorative but a deliberate communicative device that evokes mood, constructs character identity and signals thematic progression. When combined with the symbolic and metaphorical insights drawn from cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and the structured visual codes described in classical film semiotics (Harman, 1977; Tomaselli, 1985), these findings make clear that color is fundamentally tied to meaning-making within film. For these reasons, the proposed framework positions color as a semiotic tool rather than an aesthetic embellishment. By integrating emotional prototypes, cultural symbolism and cinematic codes, filmmakers and post-production specialists can create visual narratives that resonate more deeply across diverse audiences. The two primary sources collectively affirm that an interculturally sensitive and semiotically informed approach to color is indispensable for contemporary storytelling.

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