

Realization of Strategic Color Lineup

Masaharu YOSHIMURA¹

ABSTRACT

The coloring of motorcycles is an important element that conveys the concept and appeal of the model to customers and greatly influences their purchasing motivation. During the author's assignment in Vietnam, I devised a "coloring strategy" to highlight the individuality of each model by reviewing the coloring of all models from a comprehensive perspective. Based on this strategy, the upper-grade models set the trend in coloring, and the entry models followed. This enabled us to provide customers with high-satisfaction products. Building on the example in Vietnam, we applied the "coloring strategy" to 50 cc scooters in Japan and reviewed the coloring for each model. This provided each different customer for each model with high-satisfaction color options, while also achieving a product lineup with high business contribution. Although conditions vary by region and market, such as differences in market background and production facility capabilities, the "coloring strategy", which aims to optimize the product lineup by highlighting the character of each model from the "color" perspective, can be applied to the development of various models.

1. Importance of Coloring in Motorcycles

The coloring of motorcycles is an important element in conveying the concept and appeal of each model.

Some customers have found colors that they like on the products that were on display at dealerships and ultimately bought them because they "like the color." Another feature of motorcycles is that customers select a motorcycle based on the image of themselves riding the bike with considerations to how the bike's coloring would work with their outfits. In this age when it is commonplace for people to wear their favorite colors for clothing, bags, and other items, the importance of motorcycle coloring is increasing (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Motorcycle coloring and user fashion influencing one another

The first thought that comes to a motorcycle designer's mind when studying the coloring of a product is how and under what circumstances the customer will be riding. Will it be for commuting or for leisure, or for getting around town every day? What will be the riding style? The designer considers the customer's lifestyle as such based on preliminary research and information. After considering the colors that may suit customer lifestyles, the designer carefully selects the color schemes and submit them as a proposal to the sales division. The color lineup for each model is determined through discussions to help ensure the optimal color variation in line with the concept of each model.

The author, a designer in the motorcycle development division, was assigned to Vietnam in the early 2000s. There, I was given the opportunity to be in charge of the coloring of all models sold in Vietnam and developed a bird's-eye view of the entire color lineup. As mentioned earlier, "color lineup" usually refers to the color variations for a single model. However, as I became in charge of the coloring of all models in Vietnam, I should inevitably see the color lineup of all models at the same time.

At that time, Honda had three models being manufactured and sold in Vietnam. Despite each model having several color variations, they all gave similar impressions and each model's unique concept was not fully expressed through their coloring. With this observation, I decided to develop a strategy for coloring schemes that would best showcase the individuality of each model, with the goal of achieving overall optimization. This strategy enabled us to break away from the duplication of colors and

¹ Design Center

images that may have been caused by siloed model planning, and to create a color lineup in which each model has a clearer individuality. This has made it possible to provide customers with the pleasure of choosing colors.

The following is a description of the coloring strategy developed.

2. Show Model that Led to Coloring Strategy Development

2.1. Assignment to Vietnam and sense of crisis

Honda's research and development of motorcycles for The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region is conducted by the Honda Research & Development Southeast Asia-Thai Office (HRS-T) based in Thailand. The coloring design for the Vietnamese models was handled by HRS-Singapore Office (HRS-S) at the time, however with the increase in attention on Vietnam as an emerging market, demand arose to establish a new research institute in Vietnam. In 2003, the author was assigned to Hanoi with the mission of establishing HRS-Vietnam Office (HRS-V).

I went out on the streets of Hanoi as soon as I arrived at my new assignment, and was struck by the abundance of motorcycles made by Japanese manufacturers, especially Honda, as well as their copies (Fig. 2). What surprised me was that many of the old and new motorcycles on the streets were of the same dark colors as in the past. There were a few brightly colored motorcycles on the road, but the number was limited.



Fig. 2 Street corner in suburbs of Hanoi in 2003

At two of the dealers we visited, we were able to talk to about 10 Honda vehicle users (Fig. 3). We got straight to the point and asked them about the coloring of their motorcycles, which had been of interest to us. Older users responded that Honda's colors are reliable and reassuring, while young users mentioned that Honda was their parents' generation's choice and that they themselves would choose a cool motorcycle made by a Japanese manufacturer other than Honda. We were aware that Honda motorcycles were chosen for their trusted toughness, but we now heard directly from customers that design and color were not among the reasons. In particular, the words of young users

made us realize the urgent need to enhance the design and coloring of Honda models to make them more attractive, considering the rejuvenation of the consumers expected to occur in the near future.



Fig. 3 Example of Honda dealerships visited

2.2. Dealer convention and show model

Just as we were beginning to think about how to make the livery more attractive, an opportunity presented itself. I was to meet the president of Honda Vietnam, a Honda motorcycle manufacturing and sales company in Vietnam, and headed for the hotel lounge with the director of HRS-V. In the lounge, the president and sales manager of Honda Vietnam were being given a presentation on the dealer convention that was to take place two months later. The dealer convention is a business meeting to which all Honda dealers in Vietnam are invited to attend, where outstanding managers are awarded and company policies for the next fiscal year are explained. The lounge of the hotel used for the meeting was the very site where the dealers' convention was to be held.

In the presentation by the advertising agency in charge of planning and management of the event, colorfully illustrated characters to be used in the "TOI YEU VIET NAM" ("I love Viet Nam") campaign after the dealer convention were being introduced (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Characters of "I Love Viet Nam"

When I introduced myself and told them that I was a designer, they asked for my opinion about these characters. Having been thinking of ways to enhance the appeal of the

coloring, I proposed that real motorcycles with the coloring of each of the characters be produced and displayed at the dealers' convention. I had heard that the convention had consisted mainly of the projection of presentation materials and explanations. The proposal was based on the idea that displaying actual motorcycle models representing the new set of characters would bring out the pizzazz of the models and make the appeal more impactful.

While the president and sales manager of Honda Vietnam showed interest and agreed to the proposal, the director of HRS-V opposed to it. The reason for this was that, based on his extensive experience as a motorcycle development manager, he knew the difficulties involved in producing show models, from procurement of materials and prototyping to finishing. They only had less than two months to complete show model for the dealers' convention.

In order to move forward with this proposal, a concrete plan had to be created to satisfy the director of HRS-V and the staff of the vehicle production department at the plant. So I decided to prepare a plan and schedule to complete the show models in two months.

2.3. Request for cooperation to the plant

The day after the meeting, I attended a regular meeting attended by all department managers at the plant. There, I explained the plan for the show model display for the dealers' convention and its production plan. They did not object to the plan since the company president had agreed to it but raised a question about the procurement of paint colors shown in the character illustration. I explained that we, HRS-V, would develop and prepare the paints, and secured their commitment to cooperate.

2.4. Paint development and show model production

In order to procure the necessary paints, I requested a Japanese expat in charge of local procurement to set up a meeting with a paint manufacturer. HANOI SYNTHETIC PAINT COMPANY is a local paint manufacturer that has a technical cooperation partnership with KAWAKAMI PAINT MANUFACTURING CO.,LTD. (hereinafter, KAWAKAMI PAINT), which supplies paints to Honda motorcycle factories in Japan. A meeting was arranged with the Japanese expat dispatched from KAWAKAMI PAINT.

Immediately, we explained the concept of displaying real motorcycles at the dealers' convention and asked for cooperation in the short-term development of paints. However, they immediately responded as impossible to meet the deadline in under two months. New color development usually starts with creating a satisfactory color through repeated color mixing, then tested for performance such as weather resistance, including color fading, and compatibility with the environment of the actual motorcycle usage, mainly with adhesion. Some of the performance checks require time on the order of a year, making it impossible to develop new colors on this schedule.

In response to this, we reevaluated the necessary items

for this project and studied how to go about them. I first focused on the fact that most of the time during color mixing is spent on the exchange of paint color samples between paint manufacturers and designers, rather than on the actual process of color mixing. Another fact was that, since it is the sales staff who communicate the color direction desired by the designers, it is difficult for the nuances to be directly conveyed to the colorists. Therefore, I proposed that designers go directly to the manufacturer's color mixing site and judge color tones on the spot. This would shorten the time required for the development of the paints.

In addition, since new color development is based on the assumption of mass production application, it is common to use only pigments whose performance, such as weather resistance, has already been verified for short-term development. The number of pigments available is therefore limited, necessitating the time-consuming color mixing for any new materials. However, since the new colors are limited to show models, they do not need to have the performance required for mass production and we should be able to expect a wider availability of pigments and quicker color mixing.

I assured the paint manufacturer that, should the colors developed for this project be used in mass production, stipulated amount of time will be spent on its development. The manufacturer agreed to the conditions, thus marking the beginning of a development period of under two months.

After the color mixing at the paint manufacturer, the colors need to be checked again on the painting line at the factory, where the painting facilities are different. KAWAKAMI PAINT provided extensive support in this project, including sending a representative at the factory to help us reproduce the gorgeous colors on the painting line for the first time (Fig. 5).

In this way, the paint manufacturer, factory, and research institute worked together to overcome numerous hurdles, and the colorful show models were successfully completed (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5 Paint line at plant



Fig. 6 Completed show models

2.5. Dealer convention

The dealers' convention, where the show models were displayed, was a great success (Fig. 7). All eyes were on the display of motorcycles painted in new, never-before-seen colors. The visitors' reactions showed their strong interest in vibrant colors. This, combined with the sense of urgency I felt in our conversations with young users immediately after my arrival, became the turning point to seriously consider the need for immediate reflection to Honda Vietnam products in the future.

3. Strategic Color Lineup Concept and Mass Production Application

In September 2003 following the dealer convention, I was appointed by HRS-T, the research institute for the ASEAN region based in Thailand, to serve a dual role of color development manager and designer at HRS-V. Up until then, development was led in Thailand while coloring design was done in Singapore; with this instruction it

became possible to develop products for Vietnam by the local staff and Japanese expats assigned there. This was indeed the realization of what Honda Vietnam has been yearning for, to have its own development capability for their country.

3.1. Development that leverages "real" Vietnam

To take on the development work for ourselves, we first went back to understanding the lifestyle of motorcycle users in Vietnam.

It turned out that the majority of users use their motorcycles for commuting or for work during the day, then for recreational use with their family at night. The daytime use scenario is common globally, but I could not guess what "recreational use with family at night" meant. So, I went out at night and saw hundreds of motorcycles with two, three, or even four family members, riding happily together (Fig. 8). After arriving at work the next day, I asked a local staff member about the situation. He told me that many families do not have air conditioners or televisions in their homes, and that they ride around town as a leisure activity, enjoying the cool of the evening with their whole family. There is no specific destination, but rather city cruising with family and friends. The motorcycle is both a reliable and sturdy



Fig. 8 Users happily cruising in city at night



Fig. 7 Colorful show models showcased at dealer convention draws large crowd

partner, and a vehicle for leisure that is loved by the whole family.

Looking again at the color lineup of Honda motorcycles from this perspective, we found that they all had a sober, albeit sturdy, appearance. Other brands, however, were also offering vibrant colors fit for leisure. The earlier comment by the young users, wanting a Japanese brand other than Honda for himself, apparently stemmed from the imprinted image created by such observations. If this is the case, we could appeal to families and young people that Honda motorcycles, often used for work, by incorporating stylish and trendy coloring design.

Based on this idea, I carried out a study on the overall color lineup while reconsidering the position of each model in the entire lineup, as summarized in the next section.

3.2. Coloring strategy: Logic for color lineup optimization

At the time, Honda Vietnam offered the following three models with their respective unique characters. Their characteristics are described below (Fig. 9).

- Future (110 cc, USD 1,556): Upper-grade model with a sporty appearance. Its sales have stagnated after 5 years since its launch.
- Wave α (100 cc, USD 856): Entry model with strong sales for its affordable price; many copies in market
- Super Dream (100 cc, USD 1,431): Iconic base model that built the foundation of Honda Vietnam; preferred by users not wanting changes.

Based on the market situation of each model and its ideal position in the product lineup, the following coloring development policy was established after clarifying differences in trend acceptance between urban and rural areas, time differences in the propagation of trends, and differences in disposable income.

- (1) Upper-grade model Future is to be positioned as a trend-setting model and will be applied with two-tone colors and large graphics for a bold design expression.
- (2) Entry model Wave α is to be positioned as a trend-following model and will be applied with the two-tone coloring and bold graphics similar to Future, a few

months after Future's launch

- (3) The iconic basic model Super Dream is to be positioned as a solid choice for long-term customers who want a peace of mind; more subtle graphics will reflect the styling trends

The thought here was that the maximum effect of the color lineup could be achieved by creating a system in which Future showcases trends and Wave α follows suit, so that customers can see at a glance what the coloring and graphics have in common.

This system of correlating the coloring of all models and developing, producing, and launching them in an effective order was collectively named the "coloring strategy."

3.3. What is to be gained with coloring strategy

In my thinking, the following was going to become possible through the coloring strategy.

- (1) Customers of Future can enjoy the latest trend colors ahead of others.
- (2) Customers of Wave α can obtain a motorcycle with latest trend coloring on the upper-grade model a few months after Future.
- (3) Sales division can leverage the trends to establish a sales strategy and brand strategy.
- (4) Production division can disperse the man-hours required to launch new models, which used to be concentrated at the end of the year, and equalize production by offsetting the launch of new colors for Future and Wave α even by a few months.
- (5) Paint manufacturers and purchasing departments can systematically produce and purchase paints, thus stabilizing supply cost.
- (6) Development division can benefit from product brand image enhancement through a design-led approach and equalized development man-hours.

3.4. Preliminary coordination to realize coloring strategy

I took this coloring strategy, a system I had developed through simulation, to the president of Honda Vietnam and the head of the sales department. The idea was welcomed:

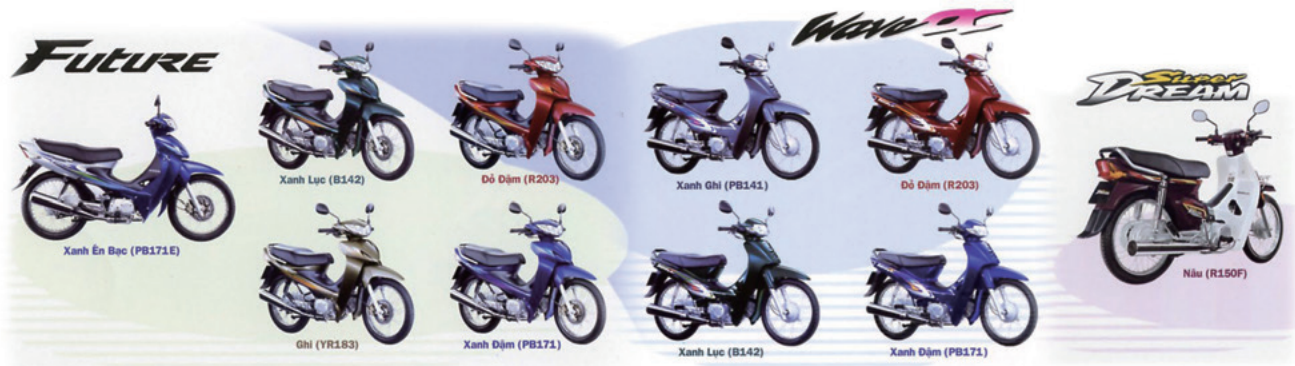


Fig. 9 Honda's lineup and color variations circulated at 2003 dealer convention

“This is the first time we have seen a strategic presentation of only color changes, and the I love Viet Nam campaign color presentation at the recent dealer convention was a great success, so let’s try product development based on this ‘coloring strategy.’”

3.5. Challenges and method for mass production of coloring strategy

A development in accordance with the coloring strategy immediately began. The challenge was the development and development period for the new colors.

Although we knew that there were no new colors suitable for trend-setting at the Honda Vietnam plant, we checked again the situation at the paint shop. Nine colors were introduced to the paint line in the six years since the plant’s establishment in 1998, six of which were used for the current three models. This was quite a limited number for an emerging market in the ASEAN region, where even a new research institute was being established.

There are two ways to develop a new color: one is to develop an original color exclusively for Vietnam in cooperation with a local paint manufacturer, and the other is to fine-tune a paint that has been mass-produced in Japan for use in Honda Vietnam. The former method has the advantage that designers can develop locally optimized colors that reflect the latest trends, but it requires a sufficient development period promised to the paint manufacturer. The latter method would use the data of paint formulation already proven in Japan and only requires fine-tuning to suit the factory facilities; however, it is undoubtedly more difficult to create colors that best works with the local mindset. Based on my conviction to develop colors in line with the coloring strategy in a short span of time, we chose to go with the latter method.

I immediately contacted a local paint manufacturer and asked them to order color samples of all colors that had been delivered to Honda motorcycle factories in Japan. Several colors were selected from the color samples received, and local color mixing began. Colors that could potentially be trendy in Vietnam were selected, and as with the development of colors for show models, the designers were present at the color mixing site to facilitate rapid color development. Because the original color mixing data made it easy to reproduce the color tones, the color mixing was completed at the fine-tuning level.

3.6. Early coordination with Japan

In parallel with ordering color samples, the materials research department at the motorcycle development center in Japan was consulted about new color development methods in the coloring strategy, as testing and approval by the materials research department are important for paint development. In addition, we explained the development situation to the head of development of our technical partner, a paint manufacturer in Vietnam, and requested further technical support from the Japanese side. The

development of paints proceeded smoothly with the full cooperation of both the materials research department and the paint manufacturer, and the mass production of the new paints was on track as planned.

3.7. Realization of the coloring strategy and its result

Future, the first model under the coloring strategy, made its launch in the Vietnamese market with an extensive sales promotion program; it was with much fanfare, astonishing for a color change for a product that was launched six years prior. The prelude to this was a line-off ceremony held at the Honda Vietnam factory by shutting one of its production lines. This too was unprecedented for a minor model change involving only a color change, but I persuaded the president and plant manager that we should show the workers that Honda Vietnam is changing with the implementation of the new coloring strategy. (Fig. 10).

Honda Vietnam’s sales manager was also very active in realizing plans such as renting out clubs in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City for presentation events and exhibiting in a corner of downtown (Fig. 11).



Fig. 10 Line-off ceremony



Fig. 11 Night club used for launch event; invited first-customers’ “Future” parked at storefront

The Future in new colors, which was introduced with such a bang, received a favorable response from young fashion leaders, who thought it was cool and sporty (Fig. 12). However, the actual number of units sold increased only slightly. Sales personnel said that despite the stylishness of the coloring, it was “too new” and did not suit Future, and that they were not ready to buy it out of fear for a resale value risk and the eyes of others. This was an unexpected result, as we had thought that if it was cool, people would buy it. At the same time, there were also hints of Future customers seek to gain a sense of security that comes with the higher product price. It was not just about making it attracting. After hearing this report, the president of Honda Vietnam instructed the company to proceed with the coloring strategy and display Future models at storefront continue with the coloring strategy, so first put the Future on display at dealers. The number of shops displaying Future in their shops gradually increased. This was the start for customers to get accustomed to the new colors.

Six months later, Wave ZX, the second model under the coloring strategy, was launched as planned (Fig. 13).

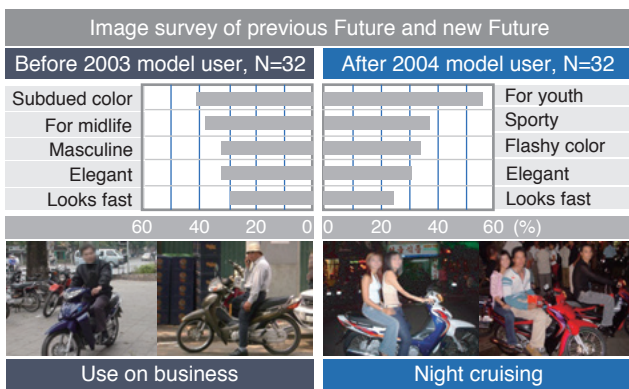


Fig. 12 Image survey of Future at launch

The differences between the existing Wave α and Wave ZX are a change in coloring to the Future image and the adoption of the name ZX to appeal to young users. In addition to the coloring and naming, the Wave ZX adopted front disc brakes, and was recognized as a new model, becoming the fourth pillar of the Wave ZX lineup following Super Dream, Future, and Wave α .



Fig. 13 Wave ZX with coloring inspired by Future

The sales volume of Wave ZX increased without affecting those of Future and Wave α . I believe that this is the result of a coloring strategy that created a virtuous cycle of trends by having the higher-end models initiate the trend and the lower-priced models follow them. At the time of my assignment, I was told by a young user that Honda was the choice of their parents' generation and that, if they were to purchase one for themselves, they would choose a Japanese manufacturer other than Honda. However, after the implementation of the coloring strategy, the image of Honda motorcycles was greatly rejuvenated. Honda has taken the first step toward becoming a brand that is chosen by people who say Honda's designs are cool because of their coloring (Fig. 14).

A year and a half had passed since I had been assigned there.

Future, the trend-setting model, underwent a series of model changes, including Future II and Future Neo, accompanied by changes in appearance (Fig. 15).



Fig. 14 Honda dealership with colorful models in 2006



Fig. 15 Future, Future II, and Future Neo achieved both evolution and continuity of graphics

Each model has a continuity in graphics to combine the graphics of trend to combine with a sense of security that the customers could recognize the Future at a glance. As Wave ZX and its evolutionary version, Wave RS, became hits by capturing trends, Future's position as a trend-setting model solidified. Despite its higher price range, Future gradually but steadily established itself in the market, recording 281% sales volume in 2006 compared to 2003. Fig. 16 shows the sales volume of each model.

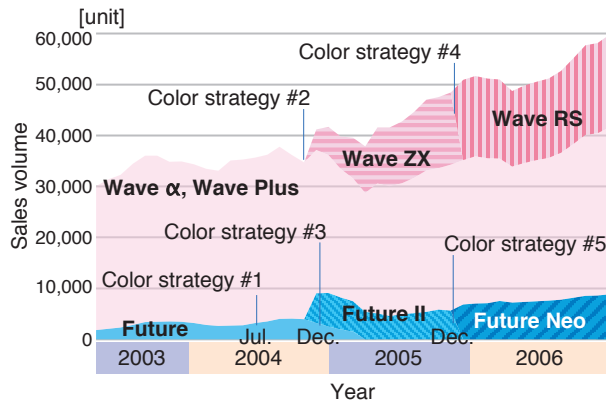


Fig. 16 Sales volume for each model of Honda Vietnam

Incidentally, the names of the model were taken from a provisional name that I used when I first started working on the coloring strategy to link the models, and they became official product names.

4. Applying Evolved Coloring Strategy to 50 cc Scooters in Japan

In 2009, the author returned to the development base in Japan and was appointed as the person in charge of color change development of the 50 cc Dio scooter for the Japanese market.

At the time, the domestic motorcycle market continued to decline due to various factors, such as stricter parking regulations, price changes due to emission regulations, and the global economic downturn⁽¹⁾. The 50 cc scooter market was also affected by the spread and expansion of electrically power assisted bicycles⁽²⁾ after 2007 (Fig. 17). Against this market background, 50 cc scooter manufacturers continued to increase color variations and introduce new colors in a rush to drive up purchase motivation (Fig. 18).

4.1. Five models and 30 colors of 50 cc scooter

The 2009 Honda 50 cc scooter lineup consisted of five models: Dio, a standard model for men; Cesta, a scooter equipped with a shopping basket and designed for housewives; Zoomer, a scooter for street-style youth; Scoopy, a scooter with high fashion appeal; and Today, a basic model. The color variation was 30 types in 23 colors.

The color palette of each model was repeatedly changed based on customer feedback and sales data, and because

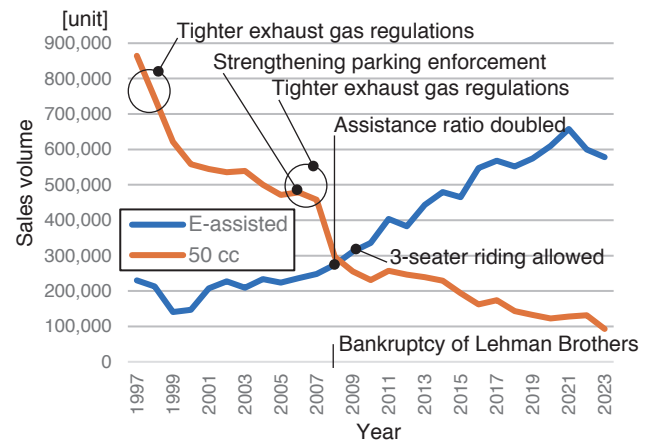


Fig. 17 Sales volume of 50 cc model scooter and domestic production volume of electrically assisted bicycles



Fig. 18 50 cc scooter market in chaos

the styling designers determined the coloring scheme for their respective product based on the trends, all the models had similar color configurations. These may have caused a lack of color differentiation among the models. In addition, retailers were unable to display color variations of all models in their stores, and customers were unable to check the colors on the actual products, causing confusion. Some customers were seen to buy a model other than the one they wanted, saying, “Since it’s the same color, I’ll just buy this model in the store.” It was apparent that the coloring, which was assumed to convey product appeal and the model concept, was not functioning.

Under these circumstances, changing the color of Dio alone would not be sufficient to convey the appeal of the product to customers, and would not solve the confusion that may have caused to customers and the sales floor. In order to get out of this situation, I thought it necessary to evolve and apply the “coloring strategy” rolled out in Vietnam that proved to be immensely successful, look at the entire 50 cc scooter lineup, and change colors to best suit each model. In order to realize the coloring strategy

for the domestic scooters, I thought it necessary to gain the authority of a development manager who could take charge of all five models and took on the responsibility.

4.2. Coloring strategy for Japan from 2009 to 2011

The first step was to create a positioning map as of 2009 [Fig. 19(a)]. A positioning map was not necessary for the Vietnamese market, as the three local models were intuitively recognizable due to their differences in size and character. On the other hand, the Japanese lineup of 50 cc scooters required differentiation among models with the same displacement. A tool was needed to make it easy to recognize the differences in characters at a glance, and so this gave us the idea of creating a positioning map. To make one that is simpler and easier to understand, the vertical axis was set as an image of age (old to young) and the horizontal axis as an image of gender (female/male). Today, which accounts for 56% of Honda 50 cc scooter sales, was placed at the center of the map. Next, Dio, Cesta, Zoomer, and Scoopy were mapped by age and gender according to their concepts.

Looking at the resulting map, it appeared that the models were well differentiated, but I felt a stronger sense of urgency about the fact that the sales of Today accounted

for 56% of the total.

It is understandable that Today is selling well because of its attractive balance of specifications and cost. This however meant that the lineup was not functioning: customers were buying Today because the other models were lacking in attractiveness, and because the models offered similar color schemes the customers would simply buy the lower-priced product. I therefore consciously created a wrap-around portion of the map to show the competition among the Honda models. The map also had the function of highlighting the different characterizations of each model, that is, the areas where the character needed to stand out.

Next, I began creating a positioning map not for the 2010 model to be developed this time, but for the 2011 model to be developed the following year [Fig. 19(b)]. This is what was evolved for the coloring strategy applied to Japan: rather than making a one-year fix, it was seen from a birds-eye view to clarify what should be done for a more comprehensive planning purpose for the models for their longer-term success.

The most significant change in the 2011 lineup was the discontinuation of Scoopy, which led the “fashion” line and played a role in attracting female users, and the introduction

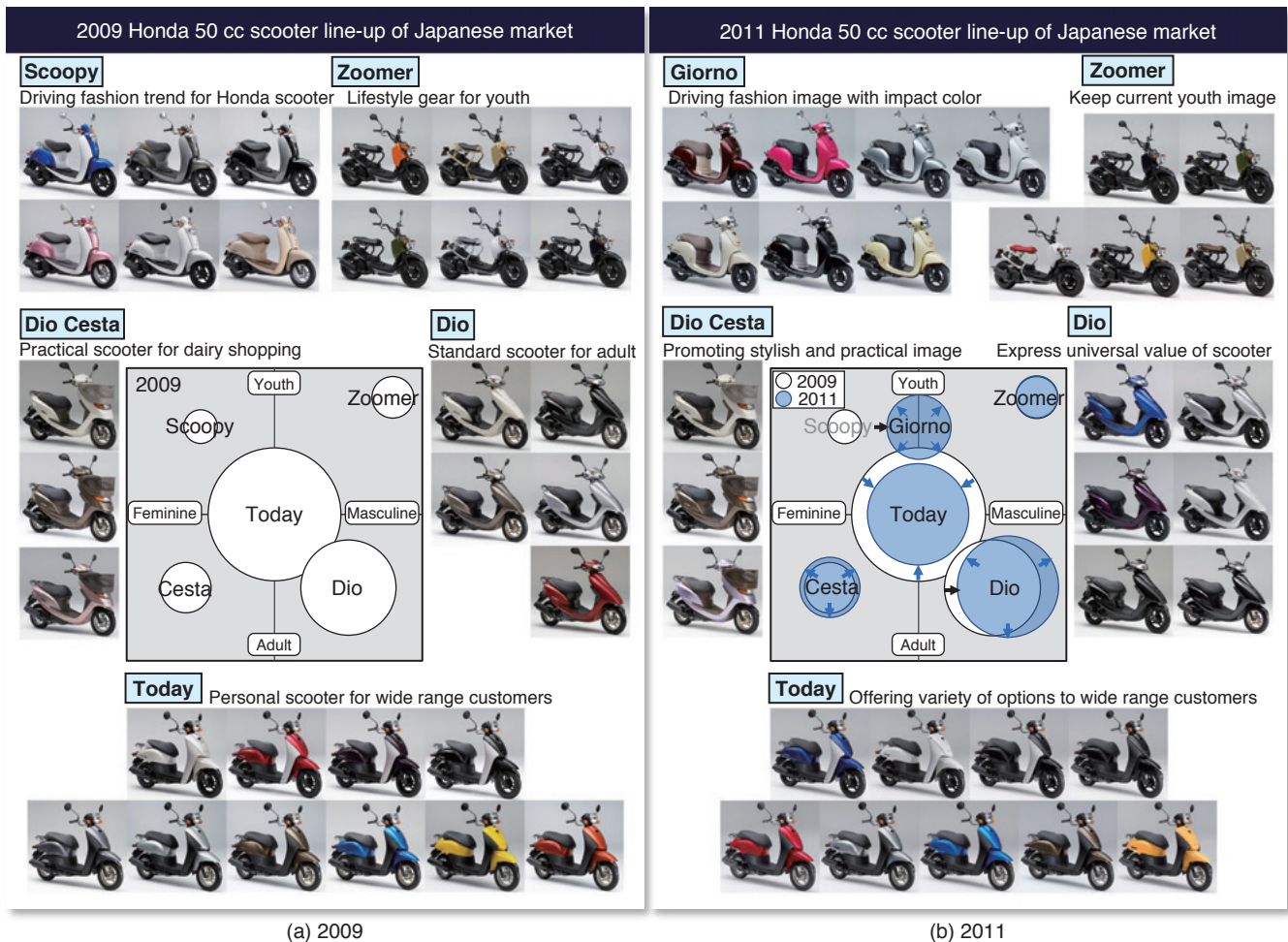


Fig. 19 Honda's Japanese 50 cc scooter lineup and positioning map for 2009 and 2011

of Giorno with a unisex image targeting all fashionable young people.

Therefore, Today was kept in the center of the positioning map, but the size of the circle was slightly reduced. The size of the circles for Giorno, as well as the continuing models Dio and Dio-Cesta were enlarged while help eliminating any overlaps with Today.

The goal was to make each model to stand out separately from one another in order to create a lineup where each has its own attractive coloring scheme. To this end, it was decided to offer a minimum number of basic color variations for Today to meet the needs of customers who demand for lower-priced products, while enhancing the entire product lineup by offering other models with their own unique coloring schemes matching their concepts.

There was no plan for Zoomer to change the color scheme for this year, but as 2011 was the 10th year since its launch, I proposed a limited sale of vehicles in a special 10th anniversary livery. Also proposed was a reduction in the number of colors, focusing on the current best-selling colors. Zoomer was to be positioned as a stand-alone model set apart from all other models with the intention to grow it as a city bike for the younger customers.

4.3. Result of coloring strategy for Japan in 2010

After creating the positioning map for 2011, I started the process of creating the positioning map for 2010 (Fig. 20).

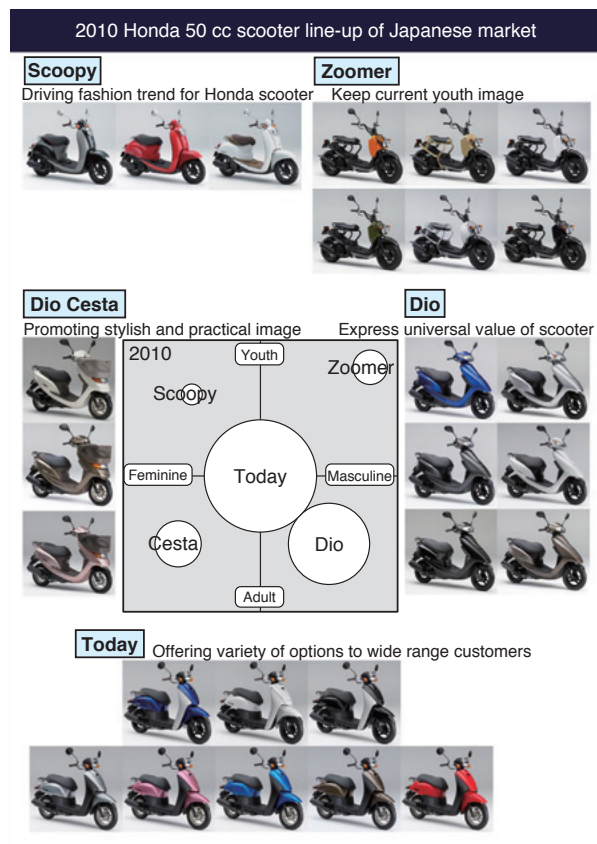


Fig. 20 Honda's Japanese 50 cc scooter lineup and positioning map for 2010

The first thing considered was how to handle Today. The color variation setting was changed from the previous all-round color variation to a setting which takes into account the color variation with keeping the regular colors, but a decision was made to reduce the number of colors as the year progressed, rather than doing it immediately at once.

Dio was given a color lineup of six colors to express a sense of luxury and power and to distinguish it from the Today model, as well as to be competitive against Company A's competing model and Company B's competing model with seven and nine colors, respectively. The color lineup was also intended to encourage customers to switch from Today.

As mentioned above, Scoopy was to smoothly pass the baton to its successor model, Giorno, which was to be launched in 2011 as a new fashion-oriented model. A team of young designers carried out color development of Giorno based on the concept of the return of real fashion scooter. Scoopy's color lineup for 2009 consisted of eight colors in three types (Special, Standard, and Deluxe) to cover a wide range of fashion-oriented preferences. To allow for a smooth linkage from Scoopy, the team narrowed Giorno's colors to three with a unisex fashion image (Fig. 21).



Fig. 21 Color lineup change in Scoopy from 2009 to 2010

4.4. Market reaction to coloring strategy for Japan

In 2011, the newly launched Giorno received a great response for its new concept of "The return of a real original origin fashion scooter". (Fig. 22).

Giorno sold approximately 16,000 units this year, whereas its predecessor Scoopy sold around 3,000 units per year. In contrast, the sales volume of Today, which previously accounting for the majority of 50 cc scooter



Fig. 22 Color lineup of 2011 Giorno

sales, decreased by approximately 9,000 units. These results indicate that the equivalent of those customers shifted to Giorno, and I believe that we were able to achieve one of our coloring strategy goals, which was to differentiate each model by its coloring scheme. On the

other hand, the reduction of the number of colors was still insufficient to avoid confusion at retail storefronts, so we decided to continue with the coloring strategy and work on the reduction of the number of colors in 2012. Fig. 23 (a) and Fig. 23 (b) show the lineups for 2009 and 2012, respectively.

Dio, Cesta, Giorno, and Zoomer have settled on the number of colors targeted by the 2011 measures, leaving only Today.

The task of narrowing down the color variations of Today, which were reduced by only one color in 2011 began in earnest.

At this point, the color selection process was going smoothly because other models were already available in a range of unique colors. The sales department was convinced by this proposal that there would be no problem in reducing the number of color variations as long as the color selection was in line with the coloring strategy. This was because the sales performance over the past two years had clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the coloring strategy.

Comparing the number of models in 2009 and 2012, the number of colors has gone from five models with 30 types and 23 colors to six models with 25 types and 17 colors. The coloring strategy has thus helped to settle the confusion that may have caused to customers and the sales front, as

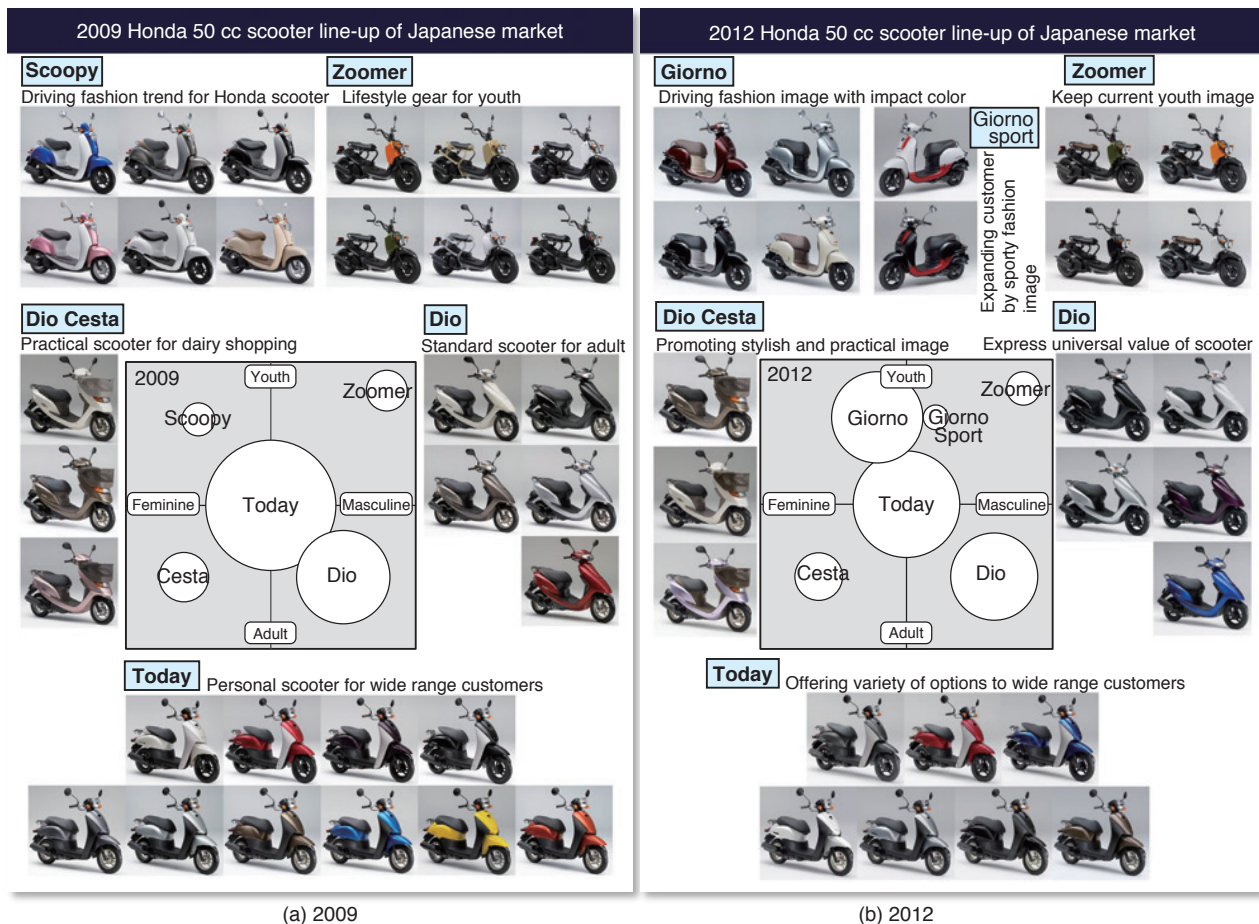


Fig. 23 Honda's Japanese 50 cc scooter lineup and positioning map for 2009 and 2012

mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The sales share of Today decreased from 55% to 38%, while that of Giorno, which was a model change from the Scoopy with a 4% share, increased to 27%. The sense of urgency about the sales of 50 cc scooters, which was heavily skewed toward Today, as described by the author at the beginning of this chapter, has been resolved (Fig. 24).

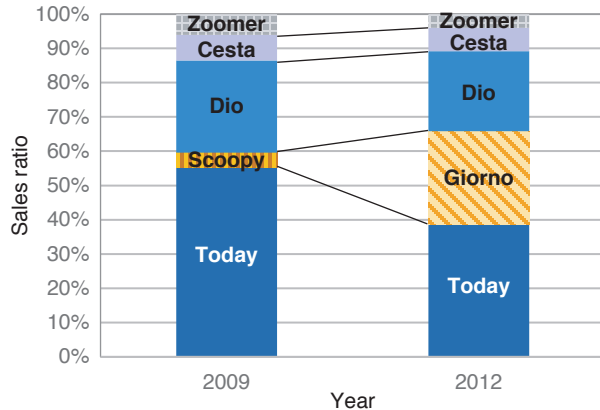


Fig. 24 50 cc scooter sales ratio of Honda

This is the result of adequate color selection based on differentiation and the clarification of the role of each model, and customers were now able to choose a color design that is in line with the individuality of each model. The color lineup that makes the most of each model's concept continues to be effective without blindly increasing the number of colors.

Furthermore, a comparison of sales volume between 2009 and 2012 in the 50 cc scooter market in Japan, where scooters account for 70% of the total, shows that Honda's sales volume increased by about 3% while other companies' sales volume decreased by about 10% (Fig. 25).

With this, I believe we have verified that the "coloring strategy" described here is a development method that can achieve maximal effect with minimal colors.

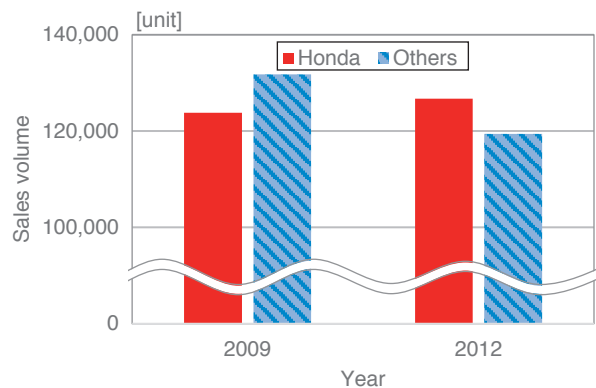


Fig. 25 50 cc model sales of Honda and other manufacturers

5. Summary

Some say that we are only talking about colors, and others say that changing colors of a product at hand is easy.

However, as this article has described, strategic coloring changes can yield maximum effect.

Recently, the world of coloring has been increasingly described by the term CMF (Color, Material, Finish), and Honda has also established a CMF group several years ago to develop attractive colors.

It is my belief that a very important thing in carrying out such development is to have clear objectives and goals: we should ask ourselves, "What do we want to do with the colors, and how?"

Using colors in a specific way may be a way to bring you closer to achieving a goal. Well, it may not be the color, but rather something the reader is in charge of...

I sincerely hope that this article will be of assistance to future generations in their thinking.

References

- (1) <https://jamaserv.jama.or.jp/newdb/> (accessed 2024/12/26) (in Japanese)
- (2) <https://jbpi.or.jp/business/statistics/production/electric/> (accessed 2024/12/26) (in Japanese)

■ Author ■



Masaharu YOSHIMURA