



American Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation (AJIRI)

ISSN: 2833-2237 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 2 (2026)

PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Kolorcoaster: Painting Feelings One Hue at a Time

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Article Information

Received: March 07, 2026

Accepted: May 13, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026

Keywords

*Color Symbolism, Emotional
Mediation, Emotional
Representation, Narrative
Theory, Song Lyric Analysis*

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the color symbolism in Maki's album Kolorcoaster to examine how colors function as emotional symbols and how these symbols construct a coherent narrative of love and emotional development. Guided by Emotional Mediation Theory and Narrative Theory, the study explores how colors such as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, black, brown, and the full spectrum of ROYGBIV represent emotional experiences including attraction, stability, uncertainty, regret, grief, healing, and acceptance. Using qualitative content analysis based on Creswell (2018), the researchers treated the official song lyrics as literary texts and analyzed them through open coding to identify recurring symbolic patterns and emotional themes. The findings reveal that colors in the album do not simply describe emotions but function as symbolic mediators of emotional meaning within the lyrics. Bright colors such as yellow and blue symbolize emotional security and stability, shifting colors like red, green, and indigo represent tension and uncertainty, while darker or fading colors such as black and orange reflect grief, memory, and emotional integration. The study further shows that these symbolic colors create a cyclical emotional narrative that moves from equilibrium to disruption, loss, and new equilibrium, presenting love as a continuous and evolving process rather than a linear journey.

INTRODUCTION

Color as a symbolic carrier of emotion, finds one of its most vivid and accessible expressions through music, a powerful medium through which human feelings are conveyed, recognized, and articulated across a wide range of emotional meanings (Eerola & Saari, 2025). Similarly, Arjmand *et al.* (2017) established that listening to music can influence emotional responses and is closely linked to how individuals perceive and experience feelings. In this context, Way and McKerrill (2017) understood songs as multimodal discourses in which lyrics and musical elements converge to communicate symbolic narratives and emotional meanings.

Beyond its communicative function, music operates as a system of meaning wherein listeners interpret emotional signals based on sound, structure, and personal or cultural associations (Cañón *et al.*, 2019). Emotional Mediation Theory further explains that color associations in music are not fixed but are actively shaped by the emotional responses of the listener, making emotion the central mechanism through which musical meaning is constructed (Lindborg & Friberg, 2015). Because of these poetic and structural characteristics, songs can be interrogated through literary approaches, allowing for a deeper decoding of the thematic colors and symbols embedded within the musical text as a form of lyric poetry (Subhan, 2023).

In modern music, an album may represent a cohesive

narrative that explores a variety of emotional experiences (Shuker, 2021). Narrative Theory, as articulated by Todorov (1971), provides a framework for understanding how these experiences are organized into a structured emotional story that moves through stages of equilibrium, disruption, and resolution. A quintessential example of such cohesion is Maki's album Kolorcoaster. Through its tracklist: "Namumula (Turning Red)," "Kahel na Langit (Orange Sky)," "Dilaw (Yellow)," "Turning Green," "Bughaw (Blue)," "Indigo (with u)," "Nangungulila (Yearning)," "Itim na Ulap (Black Cloud)," "Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes)," and "ROYGBIV" the album employs the color spectrum as both a metaphorical and literal tool to construct what may be called the 'Color Coaster' of human intimacy, guiding listeners through a vivid emotional journey from passionate desire to wholeness. Despite the growing interest in this intersection of music and emotion, existing research has yet to explore how chromatic metaphors connect across tracks to reflect distinct stages of psychological development, including the cyclical patterns of human intimacy. Ritchie and Madill (2022) treated song lyric metaphors as independent elements outside the context of specific musical tracks. To address this gap, the present study applies Emotional Mediation Theory and Narrative Theory to analyze how sequential color metaphors across Maki's Kolorcoaster construct a shared emotional journey from a single personal romantic experience.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Color symbolism has been widely recognized as a meaningful system used to communicate ideas, experiences, and psychological meanings across different contexts. Lavrenova (2023) explained that colors function as semantic signs that represent shared cultural experiences and symbolic interpretations. Toppo and Ahamed (2024) further stated that colors can create “chromatic narratives,” where changing color patterns guide the development of a story or emotional progression. Hanada (2017) also demonstrated that colors consistently correspond with emotional terms, showing how hues can serve as reliable indicators of psychological meaning.

Emotions are essential components of human experiences and are shaped by cognitive and sensory processes. Trost *et al.* (2024) found that emotional reactions are stimulated through the activation of affective systems in the brain, allowing individuals to experience emotional engagement in real time. Eerola *et al.* (2024) proposed through the EPISODE model that emotions emerge from structured and evolving experiences influenced by different stimulus features. Fuentes-Sánchez *et al.* (2021) additionally observed that emotions can be measured through subjective reports and physiological responses, confirming the measurable nature of emotional experiences.

Music functions as an important medium for communication and emotional expression by combining sound and lyrical elements. Rohmiyati *et al.* (2023) emphasized that figurative and idiomatic language in songs strengthens emotional depth and enhances listener connection. Strle *et al.* (2026) observed that musical genres influence emotional interpretation and shape symbolic associations among listeners. Hu *et al.* (2025) further argued that musical experiences contain multidimensional emotional patterns that create more nuanced affective responses.

The relationship between color, emotions, and music demonstrates a complex system of crossmodal interaction where different sensory elements share common emotional meanings. Lin and Zhang (2024) proposed through the Emotion Mediation Hypothesis that color and music are connected through emotional congruence rather than physical similarities. Whiteford *et al.* (2018) found that auditory characteristics and visual color representations consistently align based on emotional qualities. Simoës-Perlant *et al.* (2026) also explained that emotional congruence between sensory stimuli influences psychological processing and attentional responses. These studies suggest that color, emotions, and music collectively create an interconnected framework for expressing and understanding human experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs qualitative content analysis based on the framework of Creswell (2018) to examine how color imagery in the lyrics of Kolorcoaster by Maki functions as a symbolic system that shapes emotional meaning. Guided by Emotional Mediation Theory

and Narrative Theory, the study analyzes how colors mediate emotional experiences and how these emotions are structured into a coherent emotional progression across the album. Purposeful sampling was used to select songs that represent different emotional phases of love, including Namumula (Turning Red), Kahel na Langit (Orange Sky), Dilaw (Yellow), Turning Green, Bughaw (Blue), Indigo (with u), Nangungulila (Yearning), Itim na Ulap (Black Cloud), Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes), and ROYGBIV. The primary data consist of official song lyrics obtained from reliable and authorized sources. Lyrical lines that explicitly or implicitly evoke color imagery were selected, reviewed, and transcribed for analysis. Using open coding, the lyrics were analyzed to identify color symbols, emotional meanings, and mediating functions, which were then grouped into broader themes such as emotional stability, tension, grief, and healing. These themes were further organized into an emotional narrative structure of equilibrium, disruption, loss, and new equilibrium to explain the album’s cyclical emotional progression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows that color in Kolorcoaster functions as a central symbolic device that expresses emotions such as desire, nostalgia, hope, regret, uncertainty, grief, and completeness. Each color reflects the speaker’s intent emotional state, while the sequence of colors across the songs reveals clear progression from intense attraction and instability to reflection, loss, healing, and eventual wholeness. Rather than presenting isolated feelings, these recurring color symbols work together to construct a unified emotional narrative love and its transformations. Thus, color serves not only as lyrical imagery but as the main symbolic language that organizes both the meaning of individual songs and the overall journey of the album.

Emotional Representations of Color in the Lyrics of Kolorcoaster

Color serves as a powerful symbolic device in music, expressing complex emotions such as love, uncertainty, grief, and acceptance. In Kolorcoaster by Maki, colors like red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, black, and the full spectrum function not only as visual imagery but as structured representations of emotional experiences and the speaker’s development. Songs such as Namumula (Turning Red), Kahel na Langit (Orange Sky), Dilaw (Yellow), Bughaw (Blue), Turning Green, Indigo (with u), Nangungulila (Yearning), Itim na Ulap (Black Cloud), Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes), and ROYGBIV illustrate how colors correspond to shifting emotional states—from stability and security, to conflict and uncertainty, and ultimately to grief, reflection, and integration. This study analyzes how these chromatic symbols mediate emotional meaning, showing that the album presents love as a dynamic, evolving process shaped through symbolic interpretation rather than a fixed experience.

Chromatic Stability and Emotional Security

“Kung meron mang kulay ang aking nagsisilbing tanglaw / Ikaw ikaw ay dilaw”

(If there is a color that serves as my light / You, you are yellow.)

“Dabil ikaw ang katiyakan ko”

(Because you are my certainty.)—Dilaw (Yellow)

“Bughaw ang dagat at langit, nakakalula sa lalim ang ‘yong puso”

(The sea and sky are blue, and the depth of your heart is breathtaking.)

“Puwede bang dito na lang tayo habang-buhay?”

(Can we just stay here forever?)—Bughaw (Blue)

“Mundo ay biglang nagliliwanag, ‘di na mabilang ang kulay na nakikita”

(The world suddenly becomes brighter, and the colors I see can no longer be counted.)

“R-O-I-G-B-I-V, oh, it’s love” —ROYGBIV

Colors like yellow, blue, and the full spectrum function as symbolic mediators of emotional security, shaping love as something stable, illuminating, and life-sustaining. Drawing from Emotional Mediation Theory, these color images operate as structured signs that actively guide emotional interpretation, not just reflect it. This is reinforced by empirical research showing that brighter and more saturated colors are consistently associated with positive emotional states such as happiness, calmness, and affection (Jonauskaite & Mohr, 2025; Dael *et al.*, 2016), suggesting that such associations are culturally reinforced rather than purely instinctive.

This suggests that the experience of “safe” love is not purely natural or spontaneous—it is constructed through culturally familiar symbols of brightness and clarity, teaching listeners how to recognize and even idealize emotional stability. In effect, the songs do not just describe love as safe; they train the listener to feel it as safe, reinforcing a model of love that is comforting, certain, and worth holding onto.

Semiotic Tension in the Warning Spectrum

“Namumula / Sabi ng utak, ‘Tama na”

(Turning red / My mind says, ‘Stop already.)

“Bakit lagi na lang sa tao na hindi banda”

(Why does it always happen with someone who isn’t ready?) —

Namumula (Turning Red)

“Am I, am I fallin’ in love again?”

“I don’t know where we’re goin’” —Indigo (with u)

“Pasuhap-suhap mong mata ano nga ba tayo talaga”

(Your glancing eyes—what are we really?)

“Kung may pagtingin ka rin sa akin”

(If you also have feelings for me.)—Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes)

“Oh no, I’m turning green while I’m missing you”

“If I really wanted you to stay / Why did I keep on saying goodbye” —Turning Green

Colors such as red, green, and indigo act as unstable and competing symbols, mediating emotional conflict, hesitation, and contradiction between desire and restraint.

Emotional Mediation Theory frames emotions as active forces that organize behavior and meaning-making, which explains why these songs portray love as a constant negotiation rather than a fixed state. This instability is supported by studies showing that certain colors—particularly red—carry multiple and often conflicting meanings, ranging from love and passion to danger and caution (Jonauskaite & Mohr, 2025), while qualitative research further demonstrates that color associations are highly context-dependent and capable of producing contradictory interpretations (Clarke & Costall, 2008).

This means that emotional confusion is not a failure to understand love—it is actually produced and intensified by the very symbols used to interpret it. The “warning” spectrum shows how individuals are pulled in different directions by emotional cues, revealing that modern romantic experience is shaped by instability, mixed signals, and the pressure to interpret uncertain feelings correctly. In this sense, the songs expose love as a space of risk, where meaning is never fully settled.

Chromatic Grief and Emotional Integration

“Nangungulila ikaw babala / Wala akong magagawa”

(I’m longing for you—it’s up to you now / There’s nothing I can do.)

“Hindi ka hindi ka hindi ka hindi ka sa akin”

(You’re not, you’re not, you’re not, you’re not mine.)—Nangungulila

“Kapag itim na ang ulap / Tuwing bumububos ang ulan sa aking mga mata”

(When the clouds turn black / Every time rain pours from my eyes.)

“Oh, sana kasama pa rin kita”

(Oh, I wish you were still with me.)—Itim na Ulap

“Kabit hindi na kita nakikita ah”

(Even if I can no longer see you.)

“Hanggang may kahel na langit maiisip kita”

(As long as there is an orange sky, I will think of you.)—Kabel na Langit

The fading or absence of color mediates grief, absence, and emotional processing, shifting the listener from immediate pain toward reflection and acceptance. Emotional Mediation Theory describes art as a “public world of feeling,” where symbols transform private emotions into shared, interpretable experiences. This is supported by findings that achromatic tones such as gray and black are strongly associated with sadness, low energy, and emotional withdrawal (Jonauskaite & Mohr, 2025), while studies on cross-modal perception show that emotional meaning organizes how individuals interpret sensory elements like color and sound, allowing feelings to be structured and understood over time (Whiteford *et al.*, 2018).

This implies that healing is not simply about “moving on,” but about reorganizing emotion through symbolic meaning, where loss becomes something that can be understood, remembered, and integrated into identity. The absence of color does not erase emotion—it stabilizes it, allowing grief to transition from overwhelming

experience into a structured form of memory. As a result, the songs suggest that emotional resolution comes not from forgetting, but from learning how to live with and reinterpret what remains.

The findings show that color in Kolorcoaster operates as a dynamic symbolic system that shapes emotional experience, moving from stability and security, to tension and uncertainty, and finally to grief and integration. Bright colors construct love as safe and certain, while shifting hues reflect conflict and emotional instability, and the absence of color signifies grief and acceptance. Overall, the album presents emotions as evolving and actively interpreted through color, portraying love as a continuous process shaped by both clarity and ambiguity.

The Emotional Narrative Constructed Through Color Symbolism

The emotional narrative in Kolorcoaster by Maki is constructed through shifts in color symbolism that represent a cyclical process of emotional change rather than a linear progression of love. Instead of treating each song as an isolated stage, the album forms a pattern of emotional movement that begins with formation, attraction, memory, and perceived stability in Namumula (Turning Red), Kahel na Langit (Orange sky), and Dilaw (Yellow), transitions into disruption, regret, clarity, and uncertainty in Turning Green, Bughaw (Blue), and Indigo (with u), moves into emotional loss, grief and acceptance in Nangungulila (Yearning) and Itim na Ulap (Black Cloud), and finally reaches a new equilibrium through integration, Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes) and ROYGBIV. In this structure, ROYGBIV does not function as an ending but as a synthesis of all previous emotional states, where joy, pain, regret, fear, and healing are combined into a unified understanding of love. Overall, the album suggests that love is not a straight path but a cyclical process in which emotional experiences are continuously formed, broken, and reintegrated into deeper meaning.

Equilibrium (Emotional Formation and Temporary Stability)

"Hindi tumitigil kabit pula"
(It doesn't stop even when it's red.)
"Puso'y di makontrol, parang may humihila"
(My heart can't be controlled, as if something is pulling it.)—*Namumula (Turning Red)*
"Hanggang may kabel na langit maiisip kita"
(As long as there is an orange sky, I will think of you.)
"Sa bawat paglubog ng araw, nandyan ka pa rin"
(In every sunset, you're still there.)—*Kabel na Langit (Orange Sky)*
"Ikaw ang katiyakan ko"
(You are my certainty.)
"Pag kasama ka, mundo'y tumitigil sa pag-ikot"
(When I'm with you, the world stops turning.)—*Dilaw (Yellow)*

The narrative arc begins with an emotional equilibrium

rooted in attraction, nostalgia, and perceived certainty. In this stage, Red signifies an intense attraction that overrides logic, Orange transforms this intensity into emotional continuity through memory, and Yellow serves as the primary symbol of security. This pattern reflects findings in romantic attraction research, which describe early-stage love as a high-arousal emotional state that dominates attention and decision-making (Bode & Kushnick, 2021). As this intensity stabilizes, nostalgia—represented by the orange hue—acts as a psychological anchor; studies suggest that nostalgia maintains emotional bonds and a sense of connection even in the absence of the loved one (Newman & Sachs, 2020). However, within Todorov's (1971) Narrative Theory, this phase is merely a "Temporary Equilibrium," an initial state of balance that is inherently fragile because it is built on emotional idealization rather than lived conflict, setting the stage for the inevitable psychological "drop" of the rollercoaster. The equilibrium stage shows how intense attraction is gradually shaped into emotional stability through memory and perceived security, creating a sense of certainty that feels real but is largely built on idealization. This stability is temporary, serving as a narrative foundation that will later be disrupted as the relationship moves into conflict and instability.

Disruption (Emotional Breakdown and Psychological Conflict)

"It was always you"
"Bakit ngayon ko lang nakita ang labat?"
(Why did I only realize everything now?)—*Turning Green*
"Hindi na 'ko bulag"
(I'm not blind anymore.)
"Sa pagluha ko, doon ko lang nakita ang totoo"
(Through my tears, that's when I finally saw the truth.)—*Bughaw (Blue)*
"I don't know where we're goin'"
"Should I stay or should I go?" —*Indigo with u*

A clear shift from stability to emotional disruption, where certainty collapses into regret, clarity, and uncertainty. Green introduces realization and hindsight, where love is reinterpreted through emotional regret. This aligns with research suggesting that regret is often shaped by reflective thinking and missed opportunities, which can intensify emotional distress over time (Roese & Epstude, 2017). Blue represents clarity gained through emotional pain and reflection, consistent with studies showing that emotional distress can promote meaning-making and self-awareness, allowing individuals to reinterpret past experiences more constructively (Forgeard, 2016). Meanwhile, indigo reflects emotional ambiguity where attachment and fear coexist, supporting findings that romantic relationships often involve mixed emotions, particularly when individuals experience both desire for closeness and fear of vulnerability (Harmon-Jones *et al.*, 2017). Overall, this stage shows that love is not linear but a dynamic process marked by contradiction, awareness,

and emotional instability.

This disruption stage captures the collapse of emotional certainty into reflection, conflict, and ambiguity. As attraction is reinterpreted through regret and awareness, emotional pain becomes a catalyst for clarity, while unresolved attachment produces internal tension between staying and letting go. Overall, it reflects love as a destabilizing process where insight and uncertainty emerge simultaneously, replacing earlier emotional equilibrium with psychological conflict.

Loss (Emotional Withdrawal and Acceptance of Absence)

“Hindi ka na babalik”

(You’re not coming back anymore.)

“Sanay na akong wala ka na sa piling ko”

(I’m already used to you no longer being by my side.)—Nangungulila (Yearning)

“Itim na ang ulap”

(The clouds have turned black.)

“Ulan sa mata ko’y hindi na humibinto”

(The rain in my eyes won’t stop anymore.)—Itim na Ulap

The narrative then moves into emotional withdrawal, where attachment fades into grief and acceptance of absence. Emotional intensity decreases as connection is replaced by emotional emptiness and heaviness. Black symbolizes emotional weight and sadness, where loss is no longer resisted but gradually accepted. This pattern aligns with research showing that grief is associated with reduced emotional responsiveness and a form of emotional blunting, where individuals experience diminished engagement with their surroundings (Fernández-Alcántara *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, grief has been described as a disruption in emotional regulation following the loss of a significant attachment figure, requiring individuals to gradually reconstruct their emotional stability over time (LeBlanc *et al.*, 2016). This stage therefore reflects a slow emotional fading, where letting go becomes the only form of resolution.

This stage reflects the transition from emotional pain to acceptance, where attachment gradually weakens and is replaced by grief and emotional emptiness. As connection fades, loss becomes internalized rather than resisted, marking a shift toward emotional withdrawal and slow adaptation to absence.

New Equilibrium (Emotional Integration and Renewal)

“Sa mundong magulo, ikaw ang aking dulo”

(In a chaotic world, you are my end/peace.)

“Sa’yo ako unwi kahit saan man mapadpad”

(I will come home to you no matter where I end up.)—Abelyana (Hazel-Brown or Hazel Eyes)

“Di na mabilang ang kulay / it’s love”

(The colors can no longer be counted / it’s love.)

“Bawat kulay ng sugat, naging liwanag din”

(Every color of the wound also became light.)—ROYGBIV

The narrative reaches a new equilibrium formed through emotional integration rather than a return to simplicity. Brown represents emotional grounding and maturity after loss, while ROYGBIV symbolizes the integration of all emotional experiences—joy, pain, regret, and healing—into a complete understanding of love. This pattern reflects the concept of post-traumatic growth, where individuals develop deeper emotional insight and stronger relational perspectives after experiencing hardship (Wei *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, research shows that emotional development involves the coexistence and integration of both positive and negative emotions, rather than the elimination of painful experiences (Zięba *et al.*, 2019).

Importantly, ROYGBIV does not function as a simple ending, but as a synthesis of all prior emotional stages. The earlier phases—intense attraction, regret, uncertainty, and grief—are not discarded but are instead incorporated into a unified emotional perspective. In this sense, the “rainbow” represents not resolution through closure, but resolution through understanding. This supports the conclusion that love is not a linear progression toward a fixed endpoint, but a cyclical process in which emotional states are repeatedly experienced, reinterpreted, and integrated over time. The narrative therefore suggests that a complete understanding of love is only achieved by embracing the full spectrum of emotional experiences, rather than avoiding or separating them.

The new equilibrium reflects emotional integration, where earlier experiences of love, loss, and conflict are not erased but unified into mature understanding. Instead of returning to simplicity, stability is rebuilt through acceptance of both positive and painful emotions. This stage presents love as a complete, cyclical process where meaning is formed through the integration of the entire emotional spectrum.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings show that Kolorcoaster uses color as a dynamic symbolic system to express and organize the different emotions found in romantic relationships. Through Emotional Mediation Theory, the study demonstrates that colors do not simply represent emotions such as love, longing, happiness, regret, confusion, and sadness; rather, they actively mediate how these emotions are understood and experienced. Each color functions as a structured sign that shapes emotional meaning, and when taken together, they form interconnected patterns that construct a deeper emotional interpretation of love.

At the same time, using Narrative Theory, the study reveals that these mediated emotions are not isolated but are organized into a coherent emotional narrative across the album. This narrative reflects a progression from emotional stability, to disruption and conflict, to loss, and ultimately to integration. However, this progression is not strictly linear. Instead, the findings highlight that love is cyclical and continuously evolving, where emotions are

revisited, reinterpreted, and integrated over time.

Overall, the meaning of the songs emerges not only from individual color symbols but from how these symbols interact and develop across the album. Kolorcoaster therefore presents love as a complex and ongoing process shaped by both clarity and ambiguity. This study shows that the album goes beyond simple emotional expression, offering a structured yet relatable representation of human emotional experience that allows listeners to better understand the changing and interconnected nature of love.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the instructor who provided guidance, feedback, and support throughout the conduct of this research and the preparation of this manuscript. The authors would also like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God for his endless guidance, wisdom, and strength. I humbly offer all honor, praise, and gratitude to Him. Any remaining errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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