

# Authenticating Typography in Cultural Festival Brand Marks.

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Typography is a dominant feature which performs a central role in the branding and advertising of cultural festivals. This paper discusses how typography can be used to achieve authenticity in cultural festival brand marks culminating in strong, durable branding. With few controlled studies examining this nuanced area there is a scarcity of research addressing the role of typography within this phenomenon. The aim is to evaluate the way these properties contribute to either effective or ineffectual brand communication for a cultural festival. Regarded as destination attractions, cultural festivals commit significant capital to branding events in an effort to capture the tourist dollar. What follows draws on a 4-year study of cultural festival brand marks a decade and a half into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Occurring between 2016 and 2018, 260 festival brandmarks were surveyed from a pool of 5408 from 18 English speaking countries. The methodological approach involves data collected in a case study method with a content analysis. We consider the significance of typography as it is positioned within communication design research reflecting on the current milieu of the discipline. The findings demonstrate that particular typefaces aimed to attract audiences and were seen as both unique in their application but also universally appealing; that Sans Serif trumps Serif typefaces and that typefaces signified differential conditioning underpinned by trade convergence. Finally, we offer a discussion of these findings to qualify the potential pathway to either effective or ineffectual brand communication capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to attract audiences.

**Keywords:** *Typography, Cultural Festivals, Brand Marks, Tourism, Design Research*

## 1 Introduction

Governments invest over 7.8 trillion (US) dollars per year into tourism-related industries and infrastructure; receiving revenues of an average 10% of the world GDP in return (Balakrishnan, Nekhili, & Lewis, 2011). The tourism industry globally supports one in every ten jobs. Tourism is an important economic activity in most countries with significant direct and indirect impacts (Manzo, 2019). Tourism is a competitive battle for prosperity, traffic and

growth underlined by rapidly changing trends. As one of the fastest growth sectors in the world international tourist numbers reached 1.4 billion two years ahead of forecasts from the United Nations World Trade Organisation in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). This is predicted to increase by 4% p.a. by 2028 to over 2 billion tourist arrivals (Manzo, 2019). Considered destination brands cultural festivals are included in the economic matrix of tourism and draw on and produce significant fiscal, social and cultural capital. Authenticity is the benchmark against which all brands are now judged (Grant, J., as cited in Beverland, 2009). Authenticity of typography's nuanced features in cultural festival brand marks can culminate in establishing strong, durable branding for cultural festivals. Our focus is on charting typography in the brand marks of cultural festivals across a range of international examples to discuss key qualities which accomplish effective or ineffectual brand communication. What follows typifies the salience of typography in brand marks seeking to exemplify typography's role in what is now a billion-dollar festival ecology. All brands desire a strong and solid reputation (Aaker, 1997) and this paper offers a potential pathway to that station by capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to attract audiences.

Typography is excluded from much academic literature examining the branding, tourism or place-making perspectives of the festival scape as such knowledge about the complex role it performs is limited (Amar, Droulers, & Legohérel, 2017). Contributing to the construction of knowledge in this area what follows establishes typography as an overlooked yet essential element of cultural festival brand marks. This is achieved by presenting a summary of the evolution of typography in this context with empirical examples from a controlled study of 260 festival brandmarks surveyed from a pool of over 5408 from 18 English speaking countries. The festivals occurred between 2016-2018 and the brand marks provide a portrait of design artefacts a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A case study method involving content analysis allows for a deep understanding of the phenomenon. The content analysis engages a contemporary typeface classification system to subdivide the typefaces used in the festival brand marks with findings from this technique informing a case study. The case study engaged cultural festival directors and designers of festival branding in semi structured interviews. The findings demonstrate that particular typefaces aimed to attract audiences and were seen as both unique in their application but also universally appealing; that Sans Serif trumps Serif typefaces and that typefaces signified differential conditioning underpinned by trade convergence. We discuss these findings to qualify the potential pathway to either effective or ineffectual brand communication capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to attract audiences.

## **2 Background - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Tourism & Place Branding**

Tourism, defined as the activity of traveling to a place for pleasure emerged as an expression in 1811 (Webster, 2019). In recent times, consumers have become interested in the appearance and settings within which they live, work, and take vacations (Weaver, 2009). This interest feeds industry practices driving the competitive demands of place that have evolved into a complex sector. Far reaching, expensive and where branding is big business place branding is based on the conceptual domains of urban and city policy and of

tourism. It is the application of branding principles to a place or destination, whose goal is to distinguish the destination from other locales. A city's brand is increasingly considered an important asset for urban development and an effective tool for cities to distinguish themselves and improve their positioning (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007). People respond to places as they respond to brands, places can acquire and lose equity like brands and are accompanied by visual identities just as product brands have logos (Anholt, 2010). Scholars argue that a place's prosperity and progress can only be assured through creating and maintaining positive brand images (Govers & Go, 2009). Places need to operate like businesses if they are to respond to increasing global competition and technological change (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). Places unwilling or unable to cultivate a competitive brand will find it increasingly difficult to win their share of the worlds – consumers, investment, talent, cultural exchange, respect and attention (Anholt, 2007).

## **2.2 Cultural Festivals**

A key dimension of human society, cultural festivals occupy a significant place within our community, cultural and social ecology (Phipps & Slater, 2010). Defined as a one off, annual or bi-annual events festivals celebrate places, histories, cultures or events (Gibson, Waitt, Walmsley, & Connell, 2010). They have long contributed to the social fabric and cultural and economic development of towns and cities around the world (Taylor & Kneafsey, 2016). They are also a major source of income and tourism at local and national levels (Pessoa & Deloumeaux, 2015). Serving the discourses of place making and city making, festivals are often strategically conceived with the purpose of promoting a 'distinctive city' (Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011). Possessing the hallmarks of destination branding or place brands cultural festivals share some of the attributes that influence visitors' decision to visit such destinations. (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wandhill, 2005; Esu & Arrey, 2009). As destination brands, festivals and other cultural events are seen as a means to contribute to a positive image of a place and to create employment opportunities to further economic growth (Herrero, Sanz, Devesa, Bedate, & Del Barrio, 2007). Strong brands drive demand and pricing power (Aaker, 1997; Badenhausen, 2018) in all economic sectors. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival illustrates the power of a cultural festival to successfully engage with the attributes of place branding. With a value of over £200 million, the festival is Scotland's most lucrative event well ahead of the St Andrews Golf Tournament and The Royal Military Tattoo (Ferguson, 2019). Similarly, the world's largest outdoor festival, Glastonbury, is estimated to be worth £82 million (Tremethick, 2016). If Glastonbury Festival was a country it would have a GDP of nearly £6 billion, ranking it 150<sup>th</sup> on the global league tables behind Guinea and above Somalia (2016).

## **2.3 Typography**

The art of arranging letterforms, typography, in combination with colour and graphic features performs an essential role in cultural festival brand marks (Meyrick & Taffe, 2017). Typography is a highly visible brand element, which retains a lasting legacy in the digital age. The functions and limits of typographic meaning are much debated. Warde ascribed that typography is best when inconspicuous, like a fine crystal goblet – revealing, rather than hiding the beautiful contents therein (Warde, 1955). We argue however, that there is meaning beyond the linguistic carriage of letterforms. Here typography is not an end to a

message, but the beginning to additional signs of meaning potential (Swann, 1991). Interpreted as a semiotic system (Brownie, 2009; Serafini & Clausen, 2012; Stöckl, 2005; Van Leeuwen, 2006), the visual rhetoric of typography can possess an augmented meaning that when contextually based reflects particular cultural values (Kostelnick, 1990, 2007; Welhausen, 2018). Over 70 years ago McLuhan denoted that the medium through which a message is communicated carries a message independent of the content it conveys (McLuhan, 1962). The evidence of the power of fonts with meaning potential, has been sufficient to establish legal argument with the European Court of Justice, which in 2003 granted brands the power to invoke 'unfair advantage' and 'detriment' against other brands using similar fonts and typefaces in similar categories (Thangaraj, 2004). Typography performs a particular role in a cultural festival brand mark, with precise communication of brand values to recipients paramount for the success of a brand message (Kay, 2006; McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). Here, typography is relied on to establish the symbolic values and representations of the key features of cultural festivals - urban freedoms; rich histories, cultured places, playfulness and stimulation that seek to subvert our daily existence while performing the task of engaging local, national, and international visitors and participants (Gibson & Stewart, 2009).

### **3 The Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to provide a key introduction to the fundamental role of typography in cultural festival brand marks establishing how authenticity can be achieved through the nuanced treatment of type in particular contexts. This paper offers a potential pathway to that station by capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to attract audiences. Considered destination brands or place brands we position cultural festivals against the backdrop of global tourism situating the history and importance of cultural festivals in society. This is achieved to ascertain a hallmark of usage not currently documented in academic scholarship subsequently forming a baseline to further investigate the power of typography within this phenomenon. We consider the impetuses behind the ways typography materializes across a large corpus of evidence. Allowing for a discussion of the social and cultural associations and implications of typeface usage. Providing connections between the current milieu of contemporary typography research the findings demonstrate that particular typefaces aimed to attract audiences and were seen as both unique in their application but also universally appealing. That Sans Serif trumps Serif typefaces and that typefaces signified differential conditioning underpinned by trade convergence. We offer a discussion of these findings to qualify the potential pathway to either effective or ineffectual brand communication capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to attract audiences.

### **4 Method**

The study from which this paper is drawn, samples cultural festival brand marks a decade and a half into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our unit of analysis emerged from a 4-year study of 18 English speaking countries and occurred in the time period of January 2016 to December 2018. 260 festival brandmarks were surveyed from a pool of 5408. The methodological approach taken involves data collected in a case study method with a content analysis. The criteria for selecting the range of countries encapsulates; alignment with the language competences of the researchers; enables a broad casting to include countries whose native tongue corresponded to the researchers; the authors considered it disingenuous to include

cultural festival brand marks from countries where languages other than English was used, as this misaligned to our knowledge and scholarship in this area. The brand marks were sourced via a scoping of 18 country websites where government, local council, tourism boards and organisation listings were trawled to create a master catalogue of 5408 cultural festivals. Using the website [www.randomizer.org](http://www.randomizer.org) we random sampled this master catalogue to generated a final subject group of 260 cultural festival brand marks. We anticipate that this final subject group represents the whole and is indicative of the large sample group.

Typography as it appears in the brand marks of cultural festivals are our phenomenological subject matter. We adopted a direct approach to examining the form and the configuration of artefacts (Cross, 1999), that result in a conscious investigation of the products of design. Research for any subject requires consideration of the extant theory within its field and the contrasting perspectives upon the phenomena of interest (Cash & Snider, 2014). In light of conjecture concerning preferred research methods in design research, (Cross, 1993, 2006a, 2006b), we support Archer’s exposition that design research is systematic inquiry whose goal is knowledge of, or in, the embodiment of configuration, composition, structure, purpose, value, and meaning in man-made things and systems (Archer, 1981). We frame this by engaging a case study method with content analysis, this approach allows for the emergence of a multifarious and propitious understanding of the phenomena of interest. We argue this tactic ensures a greater consideration of not only the form of typography but also a framing of its context, which is often overlooked in academic research (King, 1999; Rose, 2001; Thangaraj, 2004). Firstly content analysis, is used to evidence the form of typography across a large corpus of material gaining a ‘point of view’ of the brand marks under investigation. Secondly a case study method steps into the brand marks, allowing for deeper analysis of the materials. Here, we interviewed festival directors and designers of cultural festival brand marks and probe specific queries about typography.

Defined as the study of recorded human communication (Babbie, 2001) content analysis, is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Krippendorff, 2013). Using a content analysis method we applied Krippendorff’s five procedural processes – Unitising, Sampling, Reducing, Inferring and Narrating (Krippendorff, 2013).

*Table 1. Krippendorff’s Content Analysis Method (2013) and how this is used in this study.*

#	Krippendorff (2013) Technique	This study’s translation of technique
1	Unitising: Identifying the units of analyses.	Cultural Festivals in 18 English speaking countries between January 2016 - December 2019.
2	Sampling: Selecting from a study - those units.	Generate the master catalogue of cultural festival lists 5408. Use randomizer.org to secure a final subject group to 260 brandmarks, this is based on populations segments to allow for fluency

		and validity of sample size to populations size.
3	Reducing: The content of non-numerical data is reduced to its “essentials” by coding and statistical analysis.	We used Bevington and Chong’s (2013) typeface classification system to classify all festival brand marks.
4	Inferring: The frequency counts of the coded material and other statistical information about the phenomena under investigation are linked to the research question and the context, within which the material is located.	Engaged NVivo software to assist in the count frequency of the coded material. Our results inform our Case Study Method
5	Narrating: The results of the study are communicated narratively in reports, journals, and other outlets.	Our results are shared.

Source: Krippendorf’s Content Analysis Method (2013) and this study’s content.

From our final subject group we characterized and sorted frequently appearing attributes of typography evident in cultural festival brand marks. Bevington and Chong’s Typeface classification system divides typefaces along contemporary divisions, aptly representing the past 500 years of advances in typography (T. Childers, Griscti, & Leben, 2013). Although no typeface classification system is fool proof, the use of this particular system guideposts or frames our approach to developing a taxonomic system of typography in the brand marks. The features of the typefaces generally fit into what is known as Serif, Sans Serif, Slab Serif or Topical, Freehand or Black Letter categories. The process of sign posting eliminates what may have been the influence of the researcher, ensuring interpretation is limited (Krippendorf, 2013).

## 5 Findings

The findings of the content analysis demonstrate what the form of typography looks like in the brand marks of cultural festivals across a large corpus of design materials. The content analysis uncovered that Bevington and Chongs’ (2013) Text category incorporating Serif, Sans Serif and Slab Serif was used in 64.6% of the brand marks surveyed. Display typefaces, including Freehand, Topical and Black Letter were used 35.3% of the time. 63% of the typography was set in all Uppercase. 76% used a variety of additional graphic features in their brandmarks such a geometric shapes or elements including moustaches, wine glasses, film strips or shrimp. Arts festivals were the most frequent festival category in the randomized subject group. Findings revealed the most recurrent use of typography at 67.1% was Contemporary, Sans Serif Text typefaces, predominately set in Uppercase with additional use of graphic features.

Ask Siri how many fonts there are in the world, and her answer is, ‘perhaps 300,000’. We were curious, if there are so many different typefaces, why do almost 65% of cultural festival brand marks use typefaces that are so similar? Of those 67% belong to the contemporary Sans Serif category. We sought explanations to our findings and approached festival directors and designers, to contribute in a series of interviews which we framed in a case study. We interviewed festivals directors and communication designers in Australia, England and America, all who designed brand marks for cultural festivals, or made key decisions

about the typography in the festival branding. The set of questions specifically sought to determine how - *the typeface they used in their brand marks attracted the intended audience? We enquired - how the festivals specific use of typography was unique in the brand marks? How the typography in the brand mark was different from their competitors? And what their point of difference was in their specific typography usage in this context?* Responses were varied.

### **5.1 Typeface aims to attract audiences.**

Regardless of the kind of festival they designed for, such as arts, music, tech or performance all participants, stated that their use of the typeface attracted the right audience. Of these response, all participants noted that the success of their brand mark was indicative of 3 components; the typeface, the colours and the graphic features used. P.M. (2019, February 25). Personal Interview, stated that typography plays a key role in developing the right branding that will move tickets. D.J. (2019, January 21). Personal Interview, stated the aim was to reflect the avant-garde programming of the festival. Additionally, to push the language of typography imbued with a sense of visual warmth that elevated the small town festival he was designing for to big city status through branding, thus ensuring the branding worked hard for the festivals' position. F.A. (2019, February 11). Personal Interview, stated that, the Sans Serif Modernist typeface attracts both a new audience through the familiarity of the style of typeface prevalent in contemporary design and also retained the older audiences via recognizable features similar to that in early Jazz record albums from Blue Note and ECM recordings that the audience would be familiar with.

### **5.2 Typefaces as Unique**

100% of participants stated that their specific use of typography in their brand marks was unique. This is contrary to our findings where 65% of typography used in the festival brand marks are similar and reside in one category. Qualifying a response, in designing for an Jazz Festival, F.A. (2019, February 11). Personal Interview, stated he had looked to other type styles, including Serifs to be used in the branding yet the Sans Serif Modernist face 'spoke to everybody'. In his experience the face is a 'neutral platform, it's universal and classic'. Similarly, H.G. (2019, January 22). Personal Interview, stated his team attempted to change the typeface every year but essentially now try to use a font that is universal whereas in the past we have had more funky fonts that reflect the techy nature of their festival. He stated the current typeface is a modular font that is presented on an oblique, skewed right. D.J. (2019, January 21). Personal Interview, offered that, he used a dynamic contemporary typeface that could be modular in its application to a variety of media and channels. P.M. (2019, February 25). Personal Interview maintained that both her and the Creative Director of the festival are aesthetically aligned to the Swiss Style and find themselves gravitating to it.

### **5.3 Sans Serif Trumps Serif Typefaces**

In all the interview responses, Sans Serif typefaces trumped the use of Serif typefaces. F.A. (2019, February 11). Personal Interview, maintained he had looked to other type styles,

including serifs to be used in the branding yet maintained the Sans Serif Modernist face 'spoke to everybody'. D.J. (2019, January 21). Personal Interview, brought a flexible approach to resolving a new festival logo ensuring a dynamic contemporary form that could be modular in its application to a variety of media and channels. DJ was very clear that this wasn't going to mean going to a Script or a Serif font, rather this enabled the Sans Serif typeface to visually appear in a variety of different weights. Considering all of this, DJ had the freedom to choose his stylistic direction in the branding of the festival. Although not specified in the client brief, DJ manipulated letter characteristics of a Sans Serif face pushing them as far as they would legibly go to develop a new typeface that could be dynamic and event specific. His aim was to reflect the avant-garde programming of the festival.

#### 5.4 Typefaces Signify Competitor Difference

All respondents sought branding that was different, this was obtained via three components of branding elements – the typeface, the colours and the graphics. F.A. (2019, February 11). Personal Interview, stated that their team had moved to use a specific colour (yellow) and as it hadn't been seen in metropolitan Jazz festival branding before. F.A. stated the position of the typeface as it appears alongside other graphic and colour elements made the difference, 'you don't need to have the type in an *italic*, **bold** and a **different colour** for it to work.' DJ and his team used a typeface which resided in the international swiss style of typography as it functioned well for the festival brand. The point of difference in the Festival branding was achieved via the use of large format type in the Modernist contemporary style. P.M. (2019, February 25). Personal Interview maintained, their approach to competitor difference was organic with the requisite that the on-ground experiences relates to the aesthetics of the overall brand, this emerges from a deep understanding of their annual theme working to create a unified whole.

## 6 Discussions

The identification, description and creation of value is the most important function of a brand mark (Mollerup, 2013). Organisations use their design programs to position themselves in a conceptual relationship with competitors thus an organisations identity is implicitly defined by the visual identity of other companies - it is differentially conditioned via trade convergence (Mollerup, 2013). Differentially conditioned brand marks are evident in the use of specific industries with particular motifs. For example, snakes have been used for centuries as symbols of worship, love, health and medicine and the repetitive use of this symbol enables the association of the symbol with medicine and pharmacy. Through this familiarity, when we see such symbols we associate them with particular industries. This is differential conditioning and it is now manifest in cultural festival branding through typography usage of Sans Serif typefaces. The use of a Contemporary Sans Serif is universal, it's modular and accessible and festival designers seeks this universality in their brand marks so use particular typefaces. The convergence of trade to reside near or next too competitors guarantees the attributes of these typefaces is relative to other festivals use of such typefaces and the attributes flow over to the similar brand marks.

Based on findings from this study, to achieve authenticity in festival brand marks, perhaps festivals need to occupy a space not too distant from competitors. L. Childers and Jass (2002) found that the effects on consumers perceptions of typefaces are influenced via 1) the consistent use of a typeface in a particular situation; 2) direct relations with the perceptual qualities of the type; and 3) abstract connotations. The results from the content analysis establish support of Childers and Jass' findings with 65% of festival brand marks residing in one category. Thus, consumer perceptions are met with the direct expectations of the consistent use of a typeface in a particular situation. The universal and modular features of the typefaces that festival designers sought to capitalize on ensures that the relationship with the perceptual qualities of the type are familiar to all. Due to this the consumers experiences with the perceptual qualities of type are generally positive and this assurance suggests favourable grounding of the typefaces qualities in consumers' minds. The abstract connotations of consumers perceptions may be cited to reflect any number of previous semantic assumptions. Here, the use of modular and universal traits capitalized on the use of Sans Serif typefaces and are presented as a tactic to encourage favourable meaning potential. Thus, authentic typography is constructed with consonance apt of the social and cultural implications of typeface usage in particular contexts.

## **7 Conclusion**

This paper provided a key introduction to the fundamental role of typography in cultural festival brand marks establishing how authenticity can be achieved through the nuanced treatment of type in particular contexts. We considered destination brands or place brands and positioned cultural festivals against the backdrop of global tourism situating the history and importance of cultural festivals in society. This was achieved to ascertain a hallmark of usage not currently documented in academic scholarship, subsequently forming a baseline to further investigate the power of typography within this phenomenon. We considered the impetuses behind the ways typography materializes across a large corpus of evidence. In this paper the findings confirmed L. Childers and Jass (2002) argument that there are three ways that typography may influence consumer perceptions. Achieved via 1) the consistent use of a typeface in a particular situation; 2) direct relations with the perceptual qualities of the type and; 3) abstract connotations. Providing connections between the current milieu of contemporary typography research the findings demonstrate that particular typefaces aimed to attract audiences and were seen as both unique in their application but also universally appealing. That Sans Serif trumps Serif typefaces and that typefaces signified differential conditioning underpinned by trade convergence. We offer that the culmination of these factors qualify the potential pathway to either effective or ineffectual brand communication capitalizing on the persuasive arrangement of typeface elements to achieve authenticity in attracting audiences.

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