

Triangulation as an experimental approach: Interpreting the synergistic relationship between the visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks of typography used in brand marks of cultural festivals.

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Abstract

Typography is an important visible element of a cultural festival's brand mark, yet is overlooked within cultural festival research. An abundance of work has been published that examines cultural festivals from cultural, economic, tourism, and place-making perspectives, yet there is a shortfall in scholarly research addressing the key role typography performs to engage audience participation through cultural festivals' primary brand driver – the brand mark. This paper critically considers triangulation as a constructive and effective research framework for enquiry into typography deployed in the brand marks of cultural festivals and provides a roadmap to further research. Offering an analysis of how and in what way typography is being used in the brand marks for cultural festivals, this paper contributes a discussion of appropriate research methods in the examination of this material. Triangulation is engaged as a research technique combining the methods 1) content analysis, 2) case study (text analysis) and 3) a semiotic analysis of typography as a framework to advantage three perspectives on typography, capturing the complexities of the phenomenon. Through a pilot study of 20 cultural festival brand marks from English speaking countries in 2016, the findings show that triangulation of three methods is beneficial to uncovering a rich and nuanced understanding of the role of typography in brand marks. Although many research methods are available to design researchers, the authors argue that triangulation, is an appropriate method to analyze typography used in the brand marks of cultural festivals as it allows for the emergence of a heterogeneous understanding of the discipline.

Keywords: typography, brand marks, triangulation, content analysis, design research

This study was motivated by the discovery that we know little about how typography's visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks are deployed in branding cultural festivals. A substantial amount of literature exists that explores various economic, geographic, cultural development and social elements of the festivalscape (Gibson, Waitt, Walmsley & Connell, 2008; Johansson & Toraldo, 2017; Taylor & Kneafsey, 2016). The shortfalls in scholarly research investigating typography used in branding cultural festivals was discovered through enquiry conducted across academic journal articles and publications from the fields of communication design, marketing, cultural interpretation, branding and place-making. This paper presents a roadmap for researching typography used in the brand marks of cultural

festivals. First, the authors frame the discipline of typography research. Second, we discuss research methods available to design researchers. Third, we demonstrate the use of triangulation of three research methods 1) content analysis, 2) case study (text analysis) and 3) semiotics of typography. This is achieved in discussion of a pilot study examining 20 cultural festival brand

marks from English speaking countries in 2016. The preliminary results determined that 70% of the typefaces used in the brand marks emerge from text and not display typeface categories.

Additionally, no typefaces resided in the Blackletter category. The authors suggest that the Gothic script of Gutenberg's era bears no correlation to the contemporary cultural festivals brand positioning. Similarly, the omission of any Topical typefaces which reference time, place or style, highlights a lack of appropriate communication within these typefaces as is demanded from cultural festival branding. Initial findings also suggest that the primary role of case study (text analysis) in this pilot did not successfully generate the intended results and a change of approach within the case study is a course of recommendation. However, what was discovered indicated that 45% of the festivals in this study mentioned the key phrases—major, premier, famous or leading; indicating a place for further research into brand positioning statements. The preliminary findings from the semiotic analysis of typography uncovered a clever dichotomy within the meaning potential of the Edinburgh Art Festival brand mark highlighting the significance of a semiotic discussion in such a study. Lastly, the authors argue that although triangulation has been used frequently in science research and rarely in typography research it is a worthwhile instrument in the study of typography's visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks used in the brand marks of cultural festivals.

Literature Review

In the style of Bruce Archer, (Bayazit, 2004; Cross, 2006) it may be stated, that typography research is systematic inquiry whose goal is knowledge of, or in, the embodiment of configuration, composition, structure, purpose, value, and meaning of man-made letterforms, characteristics and systems. This definition of typography research, captures the breadth of previous research and proposes scope for future research strategies. The range of research methods used in typography research is comparable in its variety to the diversity of methods used in design research with a vast range of approaches drawn from the social sciences, the arts, the humanities and science among others traditions. An examination of the most appropriate research method with which to investigate typography, has not been previously attempted. With the evolution and maturation of the emerging field of typography research this is an important consideration and presents a challenge for researchers in typography.

Research Methods

Research methods are a systematized plan whose purpose is to establish the strategy for research and the course an investigation will follow. Although there are numerous definitions of what a research method is, Crotty (1998) states that, 'research methods are the concrete techniques or procedures we plan to use – the certain activities we engage in so as to gather and analyze our data' (p. 6). As mentioned, the assortment of research methods available to design researchers can be tricky to navigate. The use of qualitative research methods is

popular in design research. However, there are many research methods available for use including action research, surveys, interviews, questionnaires and meta-analysis. Though, for this pilot study which is part of a larger project with the purpose of examining typography used in the brand marks of cultural festivals, the authors have chosen triangulation as the key research method, intending to reveal the complexities of reading cultural festival's brand marks. The three methods trialed are 1) content analysis, 2) case study (text analysis), and 3) a semiotic analysis of typography. The rationale is to facilitate a quantitative and qualitative interpretative approach allowing the visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks of typography to be identified and characterized across a pilot study.

Triangulation

The purpose of triangulation as a research method is to enable three ways to examine material; to substantiate a study; and clarify disparate results by placing them in dialogue with one another (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). By incorporating three research methods the authors aimed to facilitate deeper examination of typography used in brand marks for cultural festivals. With the depth and breadth of findings and nuanced appreciation of the cultural subject matter greater than what either 1) content analysis, 2) case study (text analysis) or 3) a semiotic analysis of typography used in isolation might offer. An analysis capable of extending across the visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks of typography obliges employing research methods supportive of contradictions, allowing for an exploration of the tensions of the phenomena (Olsen, 2004). Gaining three viewpoints upon the elements studied – that is the essence of opinions in qualitative methods mixing with quantitative methods will ensure that the study is robust facilitating a deep understanding of the topic (Olsen, 2004).

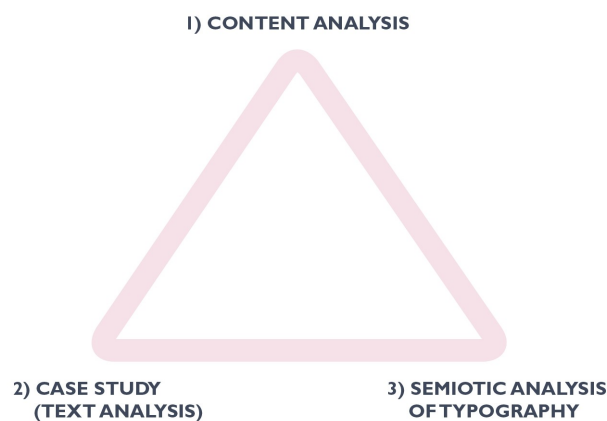


Figure 1. Triangulation of Research Methods used in this Study. Meyrick, T. (2017).

1) Content Analysis

Content analysis is a quantitative method which allows for patterns in communication to be made visible. Described as the study of human communication, content analysis is surprisingly, rarely used in design research. However, it is the longest established method of text analysis among the set of empirical methods of social investigation (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000).

Scholars have claimed that the only way to logically assess communication content is

through quantitative content analysis (Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). The approach to an assessment of communication content is to reduce the text being studied to a unit by variable matrix and to analyze that matrix quantitatively against a study's research questions. Achieving this, enables unique insight into the structure of the content of the text. The approach is rule based and systematic, placing categories centrally within the analysis which allow distinct patterns in the typography to emerge. Here, the visual syntax and practical mechanisms of typography are assessed through the application of a quantitative content analysis. The iteration and frequency of typeface attributes is quantified illuminating patterns of use and application. However, the authors proceed knowing that meaning within the cultural artefact under investigations is complex and a content analysis will only capture a part of the whole under investigation.

2) Case Study (text analysis)

A qualitative empirical enquiry situated within a study's real-life context, the case study method is widely used in design research. Its role in this paper as part of the triangulation framework is tested to survey written information from accompanying websites of the selected brand marks. Yin (2012) proposes, case study objectives are to gain a deep understanding of the case through guiding frames. Yin (2012) maintains, there is no recipe book for analyzing evidence, he recommends it is critical to piece together fragments into broader themes, relationships and matrixes. The case study method lends itself well to substantiating the content analysis and uncovering the theoretical keystones of typography, adding a layer of complexity and offering richer description of the case being studied.

3) Semiotic Analysis of Typography

In social semiotics, the process of communication is not reduced to a linear pathway with a singular accuracy of reproducing the message, rather communication is an open dialogue that allows for meaning exchanges within the site of cultural production and the social context (Halliday, 1978). When understood as a semiotic resource, typography performs as a social and culturally shaped mode used in representation and communication to make meaning within our environment (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Conceptualizing typography as a semiotic resource with its own actions and modes offers researchers a rich palette for an analysis evaluating typography's role in branding cultural festivals. Here the use of semiotics serves to elucidate the visual syntax - the arrangement and construction of letterforms; the practical mechanisms - of placement, mediums and display; and the theoretical frameworks that underpin the history, usage and meaning potential of typography thus revealing the scope of significance and implication of usage. Brownie and Van Leeuwen (Brownie, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 2006) maintain that semiotic potentials of typography occur when pictorial qualities and expressive elements are evident in letterforms. This moves beyond what Warde's and the Modernist argued for, that of 'invisible typography'. Massimo Vignelli didn't argue for typography to be expressive either. Noting that one can write the word 'dog' with any typeface and it doesn't have to look like a dog, yet Vignelli offers that there are people that [think that] when they write 'dog' it should bark. The typography used in brand marks for cultural festivals often do indeed 'bark' combining a full suite of graphic features and as such semiotic potentials are rich, thus a semiotic analysis is well suited to this study.

Discussion

The 20 brand marks for this study were randomly sampled using a numerical survey on the top 200 results from a Google.com search for the term '2016 cultural festivals'. The resulting 20 brand marks emerged as 8 from the UK, 3 from Canada, 1 from Singapore, 5 from Australia, and 3 from the United States of America. A 1) content analysis was achieved by placing the brand marks in a matrix against Bevington and Chong's (2013) typeface classification system.

Indicators of typeface attributes demarcated the brand marks into unit-by-unit variables. Bevington and Chong's system (Figure 2) formally divides typeface attributes into either, display or text categories. Grouped under text is serif, sans serif and slab serif. Grouped under display are blackletter, topical and freehand. Although further groupings and extensions of typeface classification are allowed for, these were not applied in this small study.

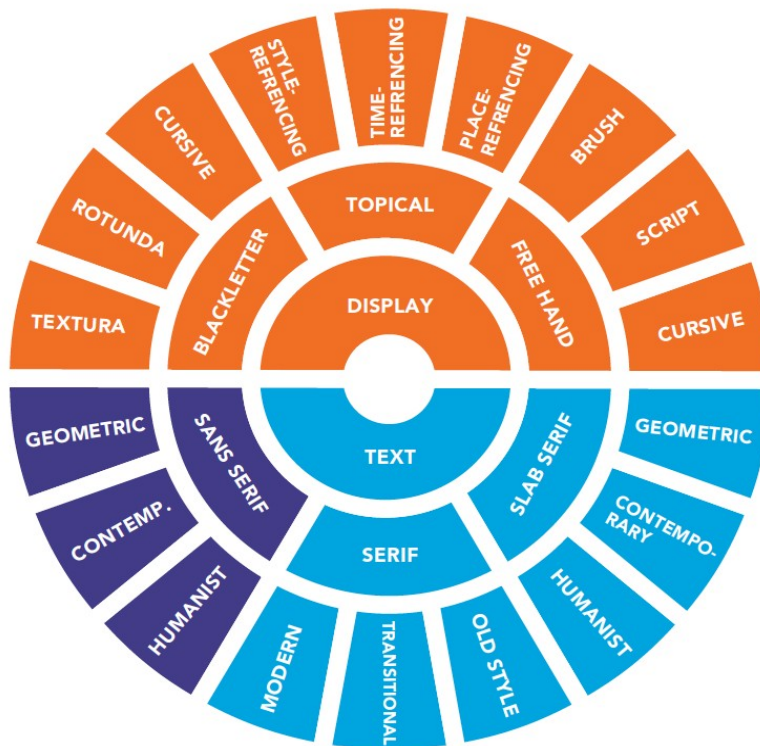


Figure 2. Typeface Classification System. Bevington and Chong (2013).

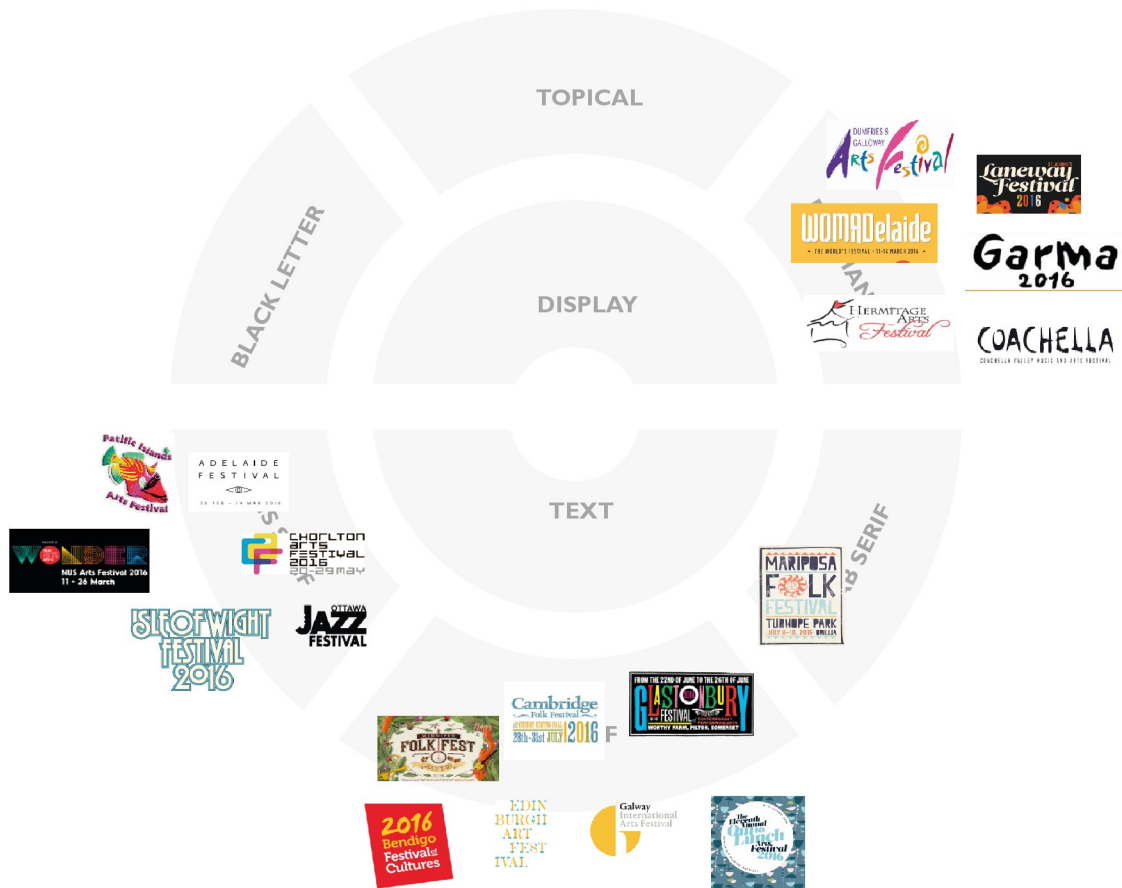


Figure 3. Pilot study diagram; position of typefaces in festival brand marks using Bevington and Chong's (2013) typeface classification system. Meyrick, T. (2017).

1) Content Analysis

The content analysis revealed that although, as Cahalan (2007) states, there is a proliferation of typefaces, the typefaces deployed in the cultural festival brand marks populated only 4 of 6 categories. We hypothesise that the exclusion of typefaces from the Blackletter category emphasizes that the heavy angular Gothic script of Gutenberg's era bares no correlation to the contemporary cultural festivals brand positioning. Similarly, the omission of any Topical typefaces which reference time, place or style, highlights that the effective communication demanded from cultural festival branding drew no connection within the characteristics of these typefaces.

From the analysis, (see Figure 3) the following patterns surfaced; of the 20 brand marks, 70% (14) of typefaces reside in the text category. This broke down to 25% (6) sans serif fonts, 30% (7) serif fonts and 5% (1) slab serif fonts present. With a prevailing 70% of typography falling in this category, clearly the text category resonates with cultural festival brand positioning. This category is wide reaching and traverses over 500 years of typeface designs. A prevalent 30% of these fonts reside in the serif category further demonstrating that the classic, bracketed feet of the serif typeface which originally emerged from carved inscriptions to the printing

press and lead type continues to be relevant in the digital age. 25% (6) of the pilot study brand marks were positioned in the display category, notably occupying the freehand section. These letterforms possess adorning flourishes with decorative and illustrative characteristics.

1) Case Study (text analysis)

The second method conducted as part of the triangulation framework is a case study where a text analysis was trialed. The aim is to examine the written information, namely key text phrases available on the festival websites in the hope of making visible explicit links between those discovered and the patterns which emerged from the content analysis. We analyzed the festival positioning statement, the history of the event and any other available descriptive text. Positioning the key text phrases in a matrix, specific themes emerged. 45% of the festivals in this study mentioned the key phrase group— major, premier, famous or leading. 35% of festivals mentioned community. 30% of festivals mentioned culture and, or cultural tourism with at least 5% mentioning the terms up to 3 times. Engaging was mentioned in 25% of festival text and unique settings was noted in 20%. Other phrases noticed at minor percentages were sustainable 15% with at least 5% of these mentioning the keyword up to 3 times. An unusual theme that surfaced highlighted that 10% of the festivals didn't note any mention of the top 6 keywords; instead presenting, either no information – for a brand position statement; or the festival website used terms 'delicious food' and 'contributing to betterment'. This 10% were the largest of the festivals in the study, namely Coachella Valley Arts and Music Festival and Glastonbury Festival.

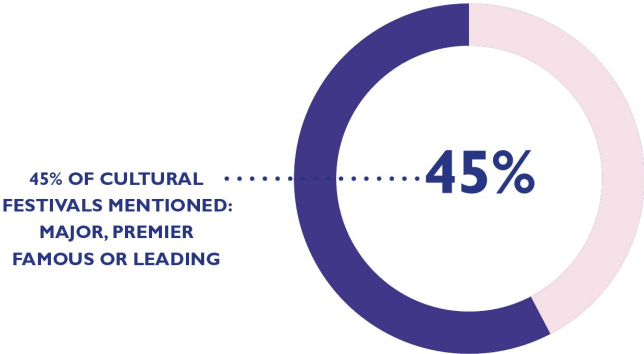


Figure 4. Case Study – Text Analysis (Festival websites mention of keywords Major, Premier, Famous or Leading) Diagram. Meyrick, T. (2017).

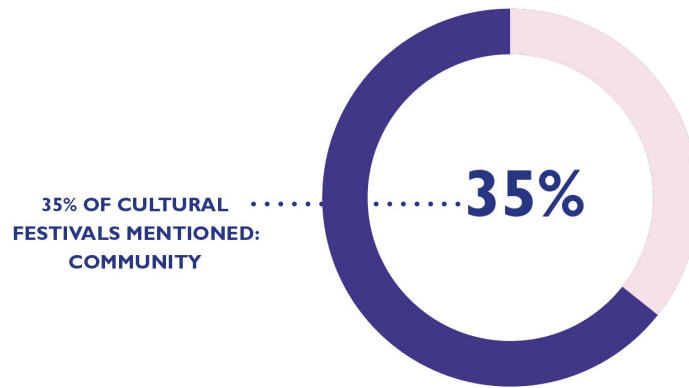


Figure 5. Case Study – Text Analysis (Festival websites mention of keywords Community) Diagram. Meyrick, T. (2017)

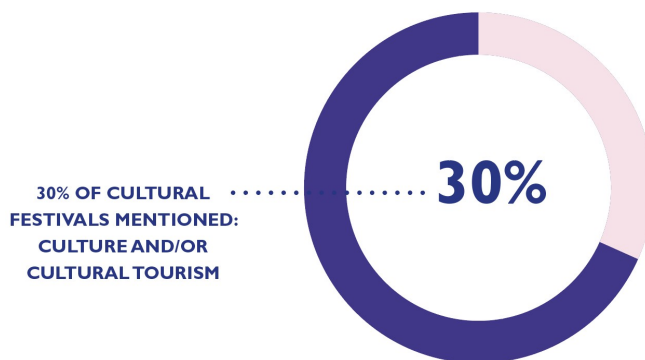


Figure 6. Case Study – Text Analysis (Festival websites mention of keywords Culture, Cultural Tourism) Diagram. Meyrick, T. (2017)

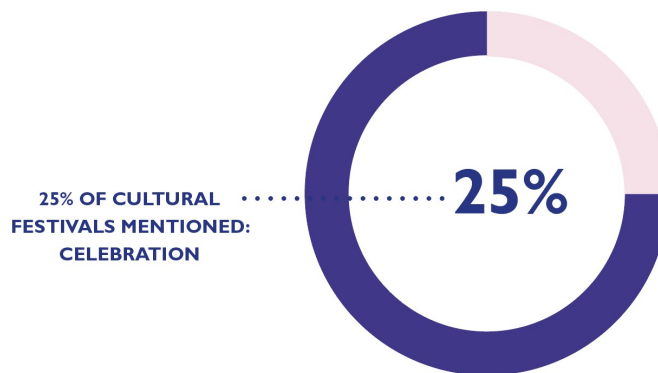


Figure 7. Case Study – Text Analysis (Festival websites mention of keywords Celebration) Diagram. Meyrick, T. (2017)

2) Semiotic Analysis of Typography

Thirdly, a semiotic analysis of typography was conducted as the final method in the

triangulation framework. The analysis is performed on the Edinburgh Art Festival (Studio', 2013) brand mark.

Initially, the visual appearance of the brand marks' typography appears as a serif typeface. Connoting homage to the history of the city of Edinburgh in Scotland, this deployment of the serif seeks to communicate with an audience acquainted with reverence intertwined with the prestige and provenance of the old style of letterforms. However, upon closer examination, the typography performs synchronously on an ancillary level, communicated via the decorative embellishments present in the letterforms in this brand mark. Graphic cyan elements appear as contrasting diagonal lines overlaid on the yellow characters. These are positioned in the exact location one expects the serif brackets. This reforms what may have been a modest older style typeface symbolic of stereotypical serif attributes to aesthetically communicate a value system that possesses an enhanced, fresher and more vibrant outward façade. The calculated line break in the words Edinburgh and Festival function in unison with the vibrant graphic overlay cleverly cementing and connecting the festival with a fun, fresh, cool and youthful audience appeal.



Figure 8. (Studio, 2013) Edinburgh Art Festival, brand mark.

Thus, connotatively the brand mark communicates to both a prestige audience through the initial visual appearance of the serif typeface and resonates, or denotatively communicates with a youthful, modern audience through embellishments. When this dual meaning potential is read in combination with the diverse array of festival acts performing at the events, there is a stable and assured communication well suited to achieve the desired market share. From the initial findings of this pilot study the third method demonstrated the rich possibilities of a qualitative analysis which were undiscovered through quantitative methods. Further research is recommended that would consider how typography performs as a socially and culturally shaped mode across a number of festival brand marks.

Conclusion

This paper offers a reflective approach to examine typography within a triangulation research framework. Revealing the complexities of typography's discourse this approach combines the triangulation of 1) content analysis, 2) case study (text analysis) and 3) a semiotic analysis of typography. The preliminary results of the content analysis, determined that 70% of the typefaces used in the brand marks in this study emerge from text and not display category typeface. No results resided in the Blackletter category, with the authors suggesting the script bares no correlation to the contemporary cultural festivals brand positioning. Similarly, the omission of any Topical typefaces highlights a perceived lack the effective communication within the characteristics of these typefaces. The authors aimed to align the identified patterns of typeface usage with the case study (text analysis) yet this resulted in an unexpected dead end.

The keywords identified in the case study (text analysis) presented no correlation with the typeface usage patterns. However, there are gains to be made here. This pilot study is part of a larger project and a secondary outcome is now possible with future investigations using triangulation steering away from a text analysis within the case study as the findings in this pilot study reported in this paper suggest it may not be worthwhile following this line of enquiry.

In addition, a semiotic analysis of typography deployed in the Edinburgh Art Festival brand mark uncovered a clever dichotomy within the letterforms. Accomplished through the potentials for meaning evident in underlying forms and overlaid graphic representations this highlighted that the letterform attributes effectively sought to reach a broad market audience.

A promising start to the triangulation framework, these findings suggest further research is advisable and although triangulation has been used frequently in science research and rarely in typography research it is a worthwhile method in the study of typography's visual syntax, practical mechanisms and theoretical frameworks used in the brand marks of cultural festivals. This paper set out to critically consider triangulation as a constructive and effective research framework for enquiry into the typography used in cultural festivals brand marks. The triangulation framework allowed the emergence of a heterogeneous understanding of the area which would have otherwise been obscured. Offering a solid foundation to evaluate the typography used in brand marks of cultural festivals, the significance of this paper lies in its potential contribution to typography research and in providing a roadmap to further research.

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Author Biography

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Tonya Meyrick is an academic and communication designer based in Melbourne, Australia. She is a faculty member at Deakin University and Course Director of the Bachelor of Design (Visual Communication Design). Her research focuses on the intersection and boundaries of typography, place branding, semiotics, education, technology and design. As a communication designer, Tonya works with national and international corporate, community and not-for-profit organizations. She is also a PhD candidate with Swinburne University investigating the application and implications of typography used in the brand marks of cultural festivals. Tonya is uncovering systematic and emerging practices to develop and test new methodologies that chart the ways metropolitan and nonmetropolitan cultural festivals engage typography to express, explore and celebrate a community activity, place, a history or event. Tonya has taught, studied and spoken internationally about typography and design and is generally a typography nerd.

Simone Taffe PhD

Simone Taffe is Associate Professor in Communication Design at Swinburne University of Technology, lecturing in branding, participatory and inclusive design methods. When joining Swinburne as an academic Simone formed a research focus that builds on 15 years of practical experience in the design industry. This experience includes seven years as design manager for the City of Melbourne and design manager for the leading Melbourne design consultancy Flett Henderson Arnold (now Futurebrand), being involved in large scale high public profile branding projects. Simone's research addresses participatory design in communication design. Her research has involved external funding and real-world projects that have gained national and international recognition in the field of Communication Design through published research papers and through real-world design applications available on the World Wide Web.