

A Linguistic Analysis of Online Discourse Concerning  
**Helvetica** and **Arial** Typefaces

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the work described in this research paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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*I dedicate this paper to my parents, Breda & Liam.*

*Thank you for everything.*

*Words cannot express the gratitude and appreciation I feel.*

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## **THESIS SUMMARY**

This paper examines the online discourse of opponents and proponents of the Helvetica and Arial typefaces through linguistics methodologies.

The foundation of this paper comes from the Semiology theory that linguistic signs can be used to analyse non-linguistic signs. This paper examines the non-linguistic sign (typography) through the linguistic sign (discourse on typography), analysing the data through a multi-methodological approach.

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## SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

### 1. Overview

Typeface design influences the interpretation of text (Baines, 2005), but can text influence the perception of a typeface? In addition, what can the structural approach of analysing non-Linguistic signs through linguistic signs reveal about how and why typefaces prove controversial?

The foundation of this paper comes from the Semiology theory that linguistic signs can be used to analysis non-linguistic signs. This paper examines the non-linguistic sign (typography) through the linguistic sign (discourse on typography), analysing the data through a number of methodologies. The paper examines whether the non-linguistic sign acts as a signifier to proponents or advocates (i.e. what association is linked with the typeface).

The linguistic signs in this paper are online discussions regarding the merits of the typefaces, Helvetica and Arial. Using the web as a corpus<sup>I</sup>, a multimodal linguistic approach<sup>II</sup> analysed online content regarding the two typefaces to establish trends surrounding the discourse of the typefaces.

Due to the cap on word count, an appendix containing the data used can be accessed at the below address. The website is available here, the credentials for Trinity College Dublin login will be required:

[https://docs.google.com/a/tcd.ie/document/d/16jAbmJMjG\\_K5FxaJbFqRAtuZUNHNAylBKsp19uZKkd8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/a/tcd.ie/document/d/16jAbmJMjG_K5FxaJbFqRAtuZUNHNAylBKsp19uZKkd8/edit?usp=sharing)

### 1.1 Introduction

The basis for this paper originates from two stems: the first, inspired by the Roland Barthes' theory that one can analyze text as text<sup>III</sup>. The second concerns the ability of Internet discourse to influence popular opinion and the methods used by proponents. Although novel on a superficial level, closer examination of the online discussion

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<sup>I</sup> Web-based text is used as primary data for analysis.

<sup>II</sup> The term Multimodal refers to the implementation of corpus, sentiment, and discourse analysis that was implemented in the research of this paper.

<sup>III</sup> That the geometrical construction of text as opposed to the languages it is representing

between enthusiasts of Helvetica and Arial – two typefaces very similar in composition proved a suitable avenue from which to assess such a theory.

The reasoning behind the selection of the online medium for the analysis of such discourse is the shift in paradigm that has arisen from the integration of the Internet into everyday life. Since the Internet became omnipresent in daily life, no longer is communication a one-to-many channel. Instead, the online medium has transposed discourse to a many-to-many communication channel, the outcome of which is the reshaping of how popular opinion and decision-making is influenced (Walton, 2006). Before the expansion of the Internet, fields such as graphic and typographical design were heavily influenced in a top-down manner from design schools and publications. Few would influence the opinion of many (Beirut, 2006). However, since then, the many-to-many communication channels enabled by the Internet have created a digitized ‘word of mouth’ effect (Thurlow, 2010).

While the tools and platforms of the Internet permit individuals and groups to engage with others’ opinions, beliefs, and experiences, it also has changed the sensory ways that we communicate. No longer are individuals restricted to written language or speech to communicate, for now we can use imagery and audio as methods of communication.

Through understanding the conversations of the online debate, there exists the potential to determine whether typeface used in graphic or visual design is chosen due to aesthetic qualities, or if populist opinions contribute to their level of popularity.

This paper outlines the aims and outcome of the research, tracking and analyzing the online media discussions of selected texts for insight into the opinions of typographers, designers and laymen typography enthusiasts.

## **1.2 Text as both linguistic & non-linguistic sign**

The concept that a linguistic sign can analyse a non-linguistic sign is the core of Semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theory. However, the belief that meaning is taken from the ‘transmitter’ is arguably the foundation of typographical design. Now that so much of our reading and writing is online, there is greater appreciation of how the visual elements of a text are equally important as the



language of the text in communicating meaning. These are the two tools that speakers and writers use to make the three rhetorical appeals: Language and image.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote in 'Of Grammatology' (1967) that writing was a copy of verbal language and as such, typography was a mechanical reproduction of the verbal. According to Baines & Halsam (2005), Derrida viewed the speech and written language as "material forms of language" which, when combined, transformed into an additional layer of meaning. Derrida argued that it was the receiver, not the author, who determined the message. The reader interprets the message by way of their cultural references, understanding of signifiers and their own experiences. Baines & Halsam (2005) also argue that Barthes theorized the "death of the author" as the reader constructs their own meaning from a text.

Barthes and Derrida are not alone in their theories regarding the visual power of typography. Curator and graphic designer Ellen Lupton writes extensively on the subject. In her essay "Death of the User" from the book 'Critical Writings on Graphic Design' (2010), Lupton argued that how a text is used is more important than what the text means. Lupton extends this to the role of typography and design online, arguing that the change in medium resulted in design has becoming a "trans media enterprise". However, this change in medium means that the interactive environment is not just 'used by the user', but also collects information about its users. "Text is a game to be played" (Lupton, 2010), and although "we may play the text... it is also playing us."

By applying this assertion to an interpretation of Donna Harraway's theory that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs." (Harrway, 1985), then one argues that text is a cybernetic representation of the individual, that is to say online representation is then the binary, rather than cellular, version of a user. Thus, actions and interactions of a user online count as legitimate actions of the user in the offline world. If this theory that online data is a valid representation of the user in the offline, then online text is valid primary source material.

### 1.3 An overview of the Helvetica and Arial typefaces

Typography is an interface to the alphabet (Lupton, 2014). Outside focused directional messaging (i.e. advertising), typographical design is often in the background of a reader's conscious (Kinross, 2004). Readers usually ignore the typographic interface, gliding comfortably along literacy's habitual groove (Lupton, 2010).

Typefaces cause debate and arguments even among the non-designer community. The most famous being Comic Sans; a typeface famous for the hostility it faces. The design of the typeface aside, it is synonymous with non-professional designers and 'hack' design.

In contrast to Comic Sans, the typeface with its own dedicated movie, Helvetica has witnessed the construction of a cult of personality around it that associated with 'good taste' and contemporary minimalism. The non-design world associates the typeface with such up-market brands such as American Apparel, American Airlines, and Jeep.



Figure 1 Different weights of Helvetica typeface used in corporate branding: from top to bottom: American Airlines, American Apparel, and Jeep.

Helvetica and Arial have always been associated with one another, primarily due to Arial deriving from the form of the Helvetica typeface. This infringement of Arial on the Helvetica typeface has led many to revile Arial as plagiarism.

As with **Comic Sans** typeface, the typeface becomes a reflection of the skill or merit of the designer (Garfield, 2012).

### **Helvetica:**

Designed by Swiss designer Max Miedinger in 1957, this sans serif font has seen a resurgence in popularity over the past two decades. Associated with the clean-line minimalist style of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the typeface has gained a large fan base, both in and outside of the design field: the US National Park Service choose Helvetica for its Unigrid system that's purpose as a design system was to fit the design of its publication programs. The choice of Helvetica was due to its "crisp, clean details and typographic texture that make it aesthetically pleasing and easy to read" (Carter, 2007).

Originally labelled Neue Haas Grotesk, it became more popularly known by its North American rebranding, Helvetica. As the original name suggests, the design of the typeface attempted to improve on the grotesque typefaces of the nineteenth century. Along with Univers typeface, Helvetica heralded in a new age for typographical design, one progressed from the grotesque of the 1800s and more applicable than the early 20<sup>th</sup> geometric sans serif of Futura and Gill Sans.

Often described as the 'Invisible typeface' (Bennett, 2006), its uniform, upright character enables this "anonymous sans serif" (Lupton, 2010) to be adaptable to a wide spectrum of design.

The design community, however, does not fully agree with the enthusiasm for Helvetica, with many in the design field stating that the use of the typeface and incorrect application degrades the design practice. Renowned typographical designer Karl Gerstner criticized Helvetica as "too smooth" and for producing a too even a colour (Kinross, 2007). He did not see the functionality of the font, arguing that it only worked in a graphical design setting, but was not functional in terms of legibility and readability in text body.

Helvetica much like Arial is also not free from controversy, regarding its own originality; its form is similar to the typeface Akzidenz Grotesk.

**Arial:**

A popular typeface among personal computers users but this font proves controversial in design circles. Considered less mechanical and ‘harsh’ than other humanist fonts, the Arial typeface has been dividing opinion for over thirty years. Arial is one of the most popular typefaces among non-design users, listed as third for popularity on the official Microsoft site (Most popular fonts in Microsoft products, 2015), it has a broad fan-base. The bellicosity towards the typeface (and its fans) stems from the perceived fraud or plagiarism behind Arial’s creation. Few can argue the moral high ground behind the commission of Arial, as the driving force of inspiration was finance, not aesthetics.

Designed by Robin Nicholas and Patricia Saunders for Monotype, Microsoft bought Arial for their operating system as an alternative to Helvetica. Linotype, the owners of Helvetica would require a license fee, which Microsoft was not prepared to pay. However, after its introduction into Windows 3.1, designers quickly noticed the similarities between the elements of both fonts, such as widths and glyphs. Features as shown in figure 2, demonstrate the design features of Arial that are obvious plagiarism of Helvetica. Fonts from both typefaces look near identical when compared. It is clear that Arial was born from the design of Helvetica; however, there are those who argue that it is not the worst offender. In ‘Just My Font’ (2010), author Simon Garfield cites Akzidenz Grotesk Book and Nimbus Sans Bold are primary examples of other typefaces that similar to Helvetica.

# Arial & Helvetica

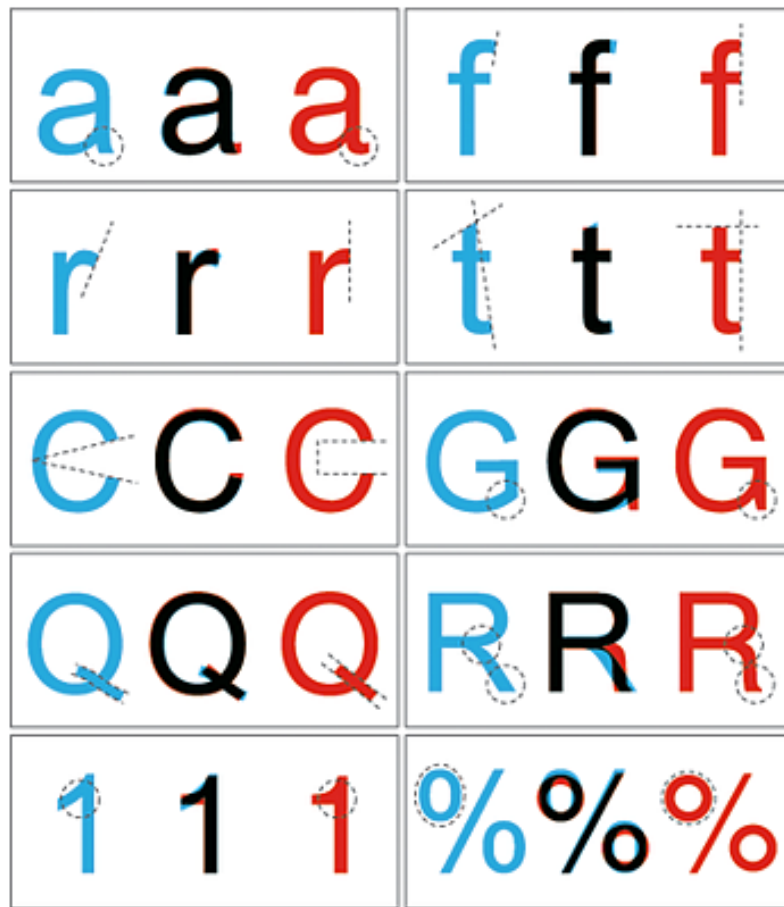


Figure 2 A more comprehensive table on differences between the typefaces (ragbag, 2009)

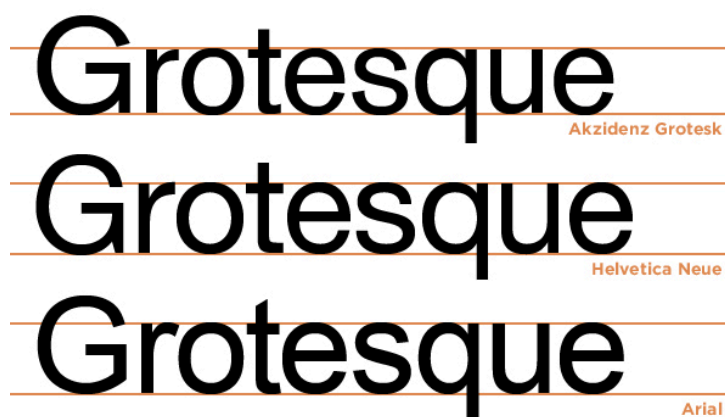


Figure 3 A more comprehensive table on differences between Helvetica, Arial, and Azidenz Grotesk (deviant art, unknown)

**SUMMARY:**

The problem that this paper seeks to examine is the discourse surrounding the Helvetica and Arial typefaces. Both typefaces are similar in form and both are based off another typeface - Arial is derived from Helvetica, while Helvetica has its design origins in the typeface Azidenz Grotesk. The paper is based on the Semiology theory that linguistic signs can be used to analyse non-linguistic signs. The linguistics methods provide a clearer understanding both sentiment and discourse analysis enabling the evaluation of text at both lexical and context levels.

## **SECTION TWO - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2. Overview**

The following section serves to establish an overview of the different theoretical fields applied in the thesis in order to establish each theoretical contribution's relevance for the thesis at hand and the problem statement as well as to clarify the connections between the theoretical fields, in addition to reviewing the literature that informs the thesis. The correlation of online text understanding was required of the corpus methodology, as the data collecting is fundamental in research. The Structuralism approach to linguistics was researched as it angled how the collected data was evaluated.

To knowledge of the author, no other work has specifically studied linguistic aspects of online discourse of typefaces.

### **2.1 Corpus Linguistics and Web as Corpus Methodology**

There are two types of language analysis: Structure and Use. Until recently, the study of structure was the primary focus of linguistic study (McEnery & Wilson, 1996).

However, Corpus Linguistics allows linguists to analyse the use of language in an authentic context, that is to say that the use of language is naturally occurring (i.e. if observed by a researcher, individuals are liable to guarded or self-conscious).

The definition of a Corpus is systematic collection of real-world application texts, by which linguistics can analyze data. The name Corpus originates from the Latin word for body.

According to McEnery and Wilson (1996), it is a methodology in and of itself. Paul Baker (2010) discusses how corpus-based linguists can utilize their corpora to test their research, or that of other theorists. The authentic data that the corpus holds proves a more reliable methodological path for analysis that provides an objective view of the data.

Web as Corpus (Gatto, 2001), Research Methods in Linguistics (McEnery, 2001), along with Adam Kilgarriff and Gregory Grefenstette's paper Web as Corpus (2003) were pivotal in arguing the benefits of using the web as a corpus. All provided arguments that using the web as a corpus provides data that is reflective of authentic behaviour. McEnery and Wilson (2001) characterize corpus linguistics as a

methodology, rather than another factor of linguistics. In *Research Methods in Linguistics* (Litosseliti, 2003), Paul Baker writes that by relying on ‘real -world’ examples of language, rules and trends reflect how language is used. Arguably, one can label any collection of texts as a corpus (Gatto, 2001).

Maristella Gatto defines several important key issues regarding the changing face of corpus linguistics arising from the advent of the internet and its ability to provide data: Authenticity, Representatives, Size, Composition, Medium, Topics, Registers and text types, and issues regarding copyright. The last four characteristics provided a foundation of knowledge for understanding how the web influences the data used within the research. In the 2001-revised edition of his book, *Corpus Linguistics*, Tony McEnery described the possibilities that the ‘World Wide Web’ engendered for the construction of enormous data banks, which unlike the traditional methods allowed for the simple storing and filtering of samples.

## **2.2 Structural Linguistics and Semiology**

The literature discussed in this section was vital in understanding Structuralism theories and their potential for application in understanding underlying meaning in text. The works of Saussure, Strauss and Barthes were pivotal primary sources on Structuralism and Semiology.

The theoretical inspiration for this paper originates from the works of Roland Barthes. The primary resource is Barthes’ work regarding Semiotics, ‘Image, Music, Text’ (Barthe, 1977), primarily the third chapter, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’. In this chapter, Barthes explores what messages that images contain, and if they can contribute in creating or affecting an individuals’ ideological outlook or opinion. The concept of examining ‘text as text’ is asking how ideologically charged are signs and if they can transmit a message to the viewer. Although this paper is concerned with analysing on a linguistic level the discourse surrounding online discussion of the Helvetica and Arial typefaces, the theory of semiology proves relevant when discussing the motivation behind proponents and opponents of said typefaces. According to Barthes, text comes from structuralism as it is a guiding principle in how we think of the world. Text provides two levels of meaning - literal and concealed (interpretation).



In Roland Barthes' seminal work, *Elements of Semiology* (Barthes, 1977), he is expands upon continuing on Saussure's work, he cites *Course in General Linguistics* when arguing the existence of a "science of signs". Saussure theorized that words are signs and that relationship between words to the world is symbolic to what they reference to a concept.

This science of signs, according to Saussure, in languages are the most important system of signs responsible for human communication and are therefore the model for the study of other symbolic systems. Intellectual and linguist Claude Lévi-Strauss, another key figure in Structuralist Linguistics, also influenced Barthes' work; applying Saussure's theory to anthropology and reaching the conclusion that all myths and societies were linked by one universal system.

Although labelled outdated in by many in contemporary linguistics (Litosseliti, 2010), the works of Roland Barthes and Saussure were crucial to the understanding of semiology and structural linguistics.

### **2.3 Discourses, a Structural Approach**

In 1952, Zellig Harris developed a methodology named 'discourse analysis'. This methodology stemmed from the structural linguistics model. Harris claimed explicitly that discourse is the next level in a hierarchy of morphemes, clauses and sentences. He viewed discourse analysis procedurally as a formal methodology, derived from structural methods of linguistic analysis: such a methodology could break a text down into relationships (such as equivalence, substitution) among its lower-level constituents. Structural analysis was so central to Harris's view of discourse that he also argued that what opposes discourse to a random sequence of sentences is precisely the fact that it has structure: a pattern by which segments of the discourse occur relative to each other.

### **2.4 Metaphor Identification Procedure**

Research on the MIP method concluded that it was most appropriate for metaphorical analysis of the dataset.

Created by the academic collective Pragglejazz, Metaphor identification procedure (MIP) is a method used for identifying words with a metaphorical use in both in text based and spoken discourse. It is most appropriate for analysis in languages where

meaning is concentrated in the lexical and does not rely on inflection (Steen, 2010). Thus, the method is appropriate for the English language data (and arguably most papers where data is web based, due to the domination of the English language in the online sphere).

An assiduous method, MIP is comprised of four stages:

- (a) Read the entire text and establish an understanding of the text.
- (b) Establish what the lexical units in the text are.
- (c)
  - (i) For each lexical unit, establish its contextual meaning within the text.
  - (ii) Then, establish a basic meaning of the lexical unit.
  - (iii) Determine whether the basic or the contextual meaning is appropriate for meaning within the text.
- (d) Determine whether the lexical unit is metaphorically used.

The MIP method is a method for metaphor detection that is comprehensive and thorough in structure. Establishing an effective analysis method for this aspect of the paper was crucial for a full understanding of the text.

## **2.5 Argumentation**

In *A Rhetoric of Argument* (2003), author Jeanne Fahnestock defines argument as a “deliberation about the ideas and actions”. She argues that Argument is an activity that allows both individuals and society to form and determine our belief systems. The expanded concept of Argument transposes the concept of a vocal expression of anger and other negative emotions into a way of “establishing and testing out ideas”.

According to Jeanne Fahnestock (2004), the context in which argument occurs can be divided into four: Personal, Interpersonal, Professional, and Public.

Argumentation schemes are the methods used by proponents of a position to convert others to their way of thinking. In *Critical Argumentation* (2008), Douglas Walton asserts that there are three goals of critical argumentation through which to analyse argument: (1) identify, (2) analyse, and (3) evaluate. By analysing a proponent’s argument by deconstructing it into the three stages, it enables a greater clarity of the reasoning, scheme and primary motivation of the proponent argument.

As in this paper, Walton refers to the term ‘argument’ as a proposition that is asserted that aims to support or object to a claim in question. Defining a successful argument means that it gives a good reason, or several reasons, to support or criticize a proponent’s claim.

## **2.6 Argumentation in online discourse**

In relation to the Internet, communication bypasses the traditional model of “leaving the head of the speaker, and going via a tube, into the head of the listener” (Finch, 1999) According to Locke Carter in his paper, *Arguments in Hypertext: A Rhetorical Approach* (2009), arguments in hypertext are constructed differently than they are in a more traditional format. Carter argues that loss of linearity in the argument structure allows online arguments to become flexible in their style and form. The traditional paradigm of the author determining the flow of the argument rarely exists in online discourse. The works of Locke Carter proved crucial when confronting the fragmented nature of the data.

### **2.6.1 Rhetoric**

The linguistic Nelson Francis said “Words do not have meanings; people have meanings for words” (Finch, 1999).

Douglas Walton provides a comprehensive guide on Rhetoric in both *Critical Argumentation* (2008) and *Media Argumentation* (2007). However, at points, he fails to provide applicable methods of analysis that are transferable to this research. This was most notable when addressing issues surrounding rhetoric online. As mentioned in a previous section, due to the primary medium of communication being the medium of either the Internet or Internet-based platform, the fragmentation of text online causes difficulties during data analysis.

*Arguments in Hypertext: A Rhetorical Approach* (Carter, 2009) covers issues relating to analysis of online lexical units. Since the development of the Internet, the potential of the medium has opened the possibilities for rhetorical analysis. Carter’s work stresses the importance of understanding that the visual elements of text are becoming as equally important as the text itself; caps lock, misspellings and other visual cues in the text are to be considered when analysing rhetoric online.

### **2.6.1 Other argumentation schemes**

In his book *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation* (2008), author Douglas Walton defines the subclass of argument, Appeal to Popular Opinion (or argumentum ad populum) as “ a large majority (everyone, nearly everyone, etc.) accepts A as true ... this would be evidence that A is generally accepted.” This subclass, commonly

referred to as Popular Opinion, as a form of rhetoric, involves using the popularity of a proposition to justify or assert its truth, regardless of factual backup. The Appeal to Popular Opinion can be summed up in the following form: Proposition A is approved by everybody. Therefore, A is true.

The following two critical questions match the argumentation scheme for appeal to popular opinion:

What evidence, such as a poll or an appeal to common knowledge, supports the claim that A is accepted as true?

Even if A is generally accepted as true, are there any good reasons for doubting it is true?

A typical problem with appeal to popular opinion is that in many instances no serious attempt is made to back up the first premise, by giving a real reason why everyone's accepting A is a good reason why you (the respondent) should accept A. The structure of the argument aims to pressurize the respondent to accept A or to feel left out of the popular group that accepts A.

In a study published by The Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, researchers from three American Universities found that the more individuals that expressed a certain viewpoint, the quicker it took hold among the wider group (Levisohn, 2008). The study conducted with 1,000 students, each provided with opinions, not their own, that they were required to argue about a selected topic. The experiment conducted with a percentage of the participants exposed to a certain viewpoint. Researchers concluded that the greater the exposure participants had to a viewpoint throughout the experiment, the greater the 'popularity' of that opinion at the end of the experiment.

Proponents of the 'Position to know' use this style to provide validation for their argument. This validation stems from the assertion that an individual's knowledge of a subject or field provides more weight to their argument. While it is generally the case that an expert or someone with extensive knowledge is correct, it can prove a fallacy in an argument.

## **2.7 Negative Affect, Disgust & Aesthetics of Ugly**

Works by Aurel Kolnai, Winfred Menninghaus and Ben Highmore were crucial in understanding the power of negative language, especially in the context of the visual.

In the 'The Affect Reader' (Gregg, 2010), an essay by Ben Highmore examines the theoretical foundation of the philosophical field of Aesthetics. Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, Highmore's essay explores the how material experiences and the sensual world "greet the sensate body". Aesthetics is not merely art theory. Aesthetics covers the passions (fear, grief, etc.) and the high and low emotions (humiliation, shame, disdain, etc.). It is concerned with all these elements and that contributes to its power. Aesthetics theory states that certain experiences are inherently better than others are. Aesthetics is "moral improvement", where the improvement is aimed at the sensation, sentiment and perception.

In contrast, the 1929 essay by Aurel Kolnai examines the visceral emotion of disgust. In Winfred Menninghaus's book on the same subject, she writes that unlike other forms of rejection, disgust has a "sharper physiological colouring". Kolnai described disgust as an attraction that fascinates and overtakes the physicality of the individual. Kolnai describes the sensation as being similar to that of fear- the visceral feeling in both the "physiological" and "moral sphere".

## **2.8 Research questions & hypothesis**

Presented in the introduction to the paper were a series of questions regarding online debate concerning typefaces, specifically two that are similar in design. While the paper focuses solely on the two typefaces, the underlying goals and motivations behind the research are applicable to other areas of online discourse regarding design.

- What are the motivating elements for an individual to engage in online debate over an arbitrary design?
- What causes the observed bias towards a particular typeface and those who use it?
- How proponents and opponents of a typeface argue their position?

After defining broad questions, a more cohesive field of research was devised, which this paper aims to examine.

Due to the lack of academic research regarding such a topic, conducting a comprehensive examination of the research question, would require using multiple subfields of linguistics in the research methodology: discourse analysis, pragmatics, semantic analysis and semiotics. The multimodal analysis approach was necessary as lexical items can convey different meaning depending on their situation or use. It was determined that context-dependent analysis was required in addition to sentiment analysis.

## **SECTION THREE - METHODOLOGY**

### **3. Overview**

This section discusses the outline of the research and the methodology implemented in conducting the analysis of the data sourced. The section examines the collection of data, the implications of data sourcing, the effect of using web as corpus and other methodological approaches used in this paper. Section 3.3 describes using the web as a corpus and the implications that it has on the research, while Sections 3.4 catalogues the dataset used at the foundation of the research. Finally, the subsections of Section 3.4 detail the selection of dependent and independent variables, plus the reasons for methodological decisions taken.

### **3.1 Web as corpus**

This methodology was selected based on the subject field that the paper is concerned with, online discourse. There were a number of issues with this methodology: aside from the academic opposition mentioned in Section 2, the varying nature of the web and the platforms that exist within the web contribute to inconsistencies that can affect the data. This inconsistency is a by-product of the unstable nature of the Internet. In addition, as with the difference in language depending on its use (i.e. the difference between how a language is taught and how native speakers use it) (McEnery, 2001) there is exists a difference between how people communicate in the online and the physical worlds.

As discussed in Section 2, using the web itself as a corpus presents a series of issues. Unlike the traditional concept of a corpus, where data represents a finite sample that represents a quantifiable result, web as a corpus source does not provide such certainty. This uncertainty is characterized by the constant change, non-finite size, and the chaotic structure of the web. The exponential growth of the web results in 'low-survival rate' (Gatto, 2014) of data due to the uncertainty of webpage life. According to Gatto (2014), any experiments conducted using this methodology cannot be replicated due the dynamic nature of the web.

Although the implications of using the web as corpus were considered, after much deliberation it was decided that the implications that it could have on the dataset and result were an evolution of issues that exist with traditional corpora. Chomsky (Mc

Energy, 2001) warned against corpora due to the issues that arise from isolation of data from its wider context, thus skewing the results.

### **3.2 Dataset**

Online forum conversations, comments, community centred articles, and blog posts were chosen as areas in which to collect data. In order to validate the decision, key questions surrounding the influence of online media discussion were researched. In the first phase of research, the debate between proponents of the opposing typefaces was examined on a sentiment level. This involved developing a strategy by which to evaluate this. The reason for this was due the fact that typography is no longer limited to traditional graphic or print designers due to the levelling influence of the Internet and the resources that it provides.

While approaching the online discourse as empirical material for categorization analysis is not new, analysing how the visual representation of text is discussed through text is an area that has been overlooked.

As discussed in Section 1, the two typefaces generate heated debate about typographers, designers and typography enthusiasts. In addition to the data concerning the typefaces, focus mechanisms of self-identification and formation of in-groups and their differentiation from out-groups by commenters. The findings from these areas of research attempt to answer a number of questions surrounding individuals and their motivations for engaging in online debate about the chosen typefaces. Are identities created and maintained in a condensed public mode of communication? Do these extend to the physical world, and if so, is it correlation or causation of the online debate? What are the pragmatic tools that help to achieve the creation of these divisions in debate?

Initially, the scope of the data extended to online correspondence of debate regarding the merits of one typeface over the other; however, over the course of the research phase this extended to include single comments or posts. After processing the data collected, content analysis in an examination of the text content of the data was performed. By analysing the content of the text, the data of the content was fully examined in both a contextualized and decontextualized way.



Applying the principles of quantitative variation analysis to discourse items presents a number of challenges, including the task of circumscribing the variable context and accounting for the multi-functionality of the variables.

Due to the size of the corpus, the small selection of sampled data allowed for a closer analysis of text and its context. Rather than focus solely on sentiment level, the choice of a broader discourse analysis provided the best methodology to fully consider the motivations of the proponents behind the data.

### **3.3 Corpus Analysis**

The focus of the research during the analysis of the corpus data was centred on two questions:

- How varied are the nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives used to describe the Helvetica and Arial typefaces?
- What roles does language play helping to understand the discourse at a more in-depth level?

By answering the above questions, the results provided illumination for the paper's central research areas as stated at the end of Section 2.

To address the first question, the intended search terms were determined. It was decided to keep the search terms to the names of the typefaces 'Helvetica', 'Arial', "Helvetica typeface" and "Arial typeface", as this would return data from a wide range of sources. Gathering data from a wide variety of sources was important to the project as it would allow for a greater illumination on the discussion of typography outside of typography and graphic design enthusiasts. By mining for data using industry terminology, the fear was that the data produced would reflect design professionals only. The selected dataset contains 5,216 words with 175 unique lexical unit occurrences.

### **3.4 Sentiment Analysis - Overview**

To prepare the data retrieved from the corpus for analysis, a sentiment analysis was conducted to allow a full consideration of the data. To prepare the dataset for analysis, common fields were determined that would allow for comprehensive breakdown of the textual data. Table 1 contains the areas of language that the data

was analysed for on a sentiment based level. The following sections examine the key areas that are listed in Table 1.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Table 1</b>  |
| <b>Areas of Language in Dataset for Sentiment Analysis:</b> |
| <b>Sentiment: whole text</b>                                |
| <b>Sentiment: Selected text</b>                             |
| <b>Word Total</b>   |
| <b>Syntactic Construction</b>                               |
| <b>Noun</b>   |
| <b>Adjective</b>  |
| <b>Predicate</b>  |
| <b>Helvetica Positive</b>                                   |
| <b>Helvetica Negative</b>                                   |
| <b>Arial Positive</b>                                       |
| <b>Arial Negative</b>                                       |
| <b>Argument Scheme</b>                                      |

**Table 1 shows areas that the sentiment analysis assessed**

### **3.4.1 Sentiment Analysis - Nouns**

There were distinct nouns in the dataset. A major consideration in this section was the potential for misreading of data. Words such as ‘design’ or ‘type’ can be both a verb and a noun. Closer reading of the text allowed for distinction between both. This distinction is reflected in the data tables.

The ten most common nouns used were font, typeface, look, difference, print, format, world, original, pages, and text. These nouns accounted for 5% of all the nouns used. As we see in the next section, the most common nouns used do not correctly illuminate the discourse sampled. On the surface, it appears that discussion about Helvetica and Arial typefaces focuses on the aesthetic and usage of the typefaces, resulting in even handed on-topic debate. However, closer analysis discounts that assumption.

The most frequent nouns of each project indicated its major kinds of features. In relation to Helvetica, the most frequently used nouns were *font*, *design*, *text*, and *typeface*. The resulting categories are in the below Table 2. A surface examination Table 2 shows that most nouns described an aesthetic component. However, less than 30% of unique nouns related to design and aesthetic descriptions. The majority of these did not refer to the component itself, but to some functionality, described by its visual manifestation.

| <b>Table 2</b>  |                    |              |                |              |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>NOUN</b>     | <b>HELVETICA %</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>ARIAL %</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
| <b>Typeface</b> | 27.4%              | 14 / 51      | 5.8 %          | 3 / 51       |
| <b>Font</b>     | 20%                | 8 / 40       | 35%            | 14 / 40      |
| <b>Design</b>   | 26%                | 6/23         | 17%            | 4/23         |
| <b>Text</b>     | 36%                | 4/11         | 18%            | 2/11         |

Table 2 shows the most frequent occurrences of nouns in the dataset and data relating to their use in conjunction with either Helvetica or Arial

There is potential for further misreading at a surface level. Words such as Apple, Windows and Adobe proved problematic at this stage; technically, Adobe appears as the fifth most occurring noun, however in context, it is understood that this is not in reference to the building material, but to the popular software brand, Adobe.

### 3.4.2 Sentiment - Verbs

As mentioned in section 4.2, the overlap of words that can act as both noun and verb skewed the initial data, resulting in examination of the word in context.

| <b>Table 4</b> |                    |              |                |              |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>VERB</b>    | <b>HELVETICA %</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>ARIAL %</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
| <b>Be</b>      | 11.02%             | 24           | 10.64%         | 18           |
| <b>Use</b>     | 11.28%             | 6            | 10.41%         | 18           |
| <b>Have</b>    | 10.65%             | 5            | 10.41%         | 4            |
| <b>Choose</b>  | 11.23%             | 3            | 10.41%         | 1            |

Table 3 occurrences of verbs in the dataset and their use in conjunction with either Helvetica or Arial typeface

### 3.4.3 Adjectives & Adverbs

The top three most used adjectives in the data were *One*, *all*, *many*, *neutral* and *bad*. As just is also used as an adverb and used is used at points as an idiom, this results in the most common adjective being the word ‘bad’. In section 3.10, a closer analysis of the motivation behind its usage provides an insight into the power of negative association in language.

| <b>Table 4</b>   |                    |              |               |              |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>ADJECTIVE</b> | <b>HELVETICA %</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>ARIAL%</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
| <b>One</b>       | 31%                | 5/16         | 25%           | 4/16         |
| <b>All</b>       | 54.5%              | 7/ 13        | 7%            | 1/ 13        |
| <b>Many</b>      | 30.5%              | 4/13         | 30.5%         | 4/13         |
| <b>Neutral</b>   | 50%                | 6/12         | -             | 0/12         |
| <b>Bad</b>       | 54.5%              | 6/11         | 36%           | 4/11         |

Table 4 shows the most frequent adjectives that appear in the dataset and their use in relation to either the Helvetica or Arial typeface.

### 3.4.4 Sentiment - Conjunctions and Prepositions

The analysis of both conjunctions and prepositions in the dataset allowed for analysis on two levels: First, it allowed for features to attributed to both typefaces. For example, the words *and*, *or*, and *is* were used in direct conjunction with a descriptive nature of a typeface, while the words *with*, *without*, and *that* helped to indicate some

feature of a typeface. The words *from* and *at* were used in sentences that described more than the aesthetic nature of the typeface.

Due to the restrictions in word limit, the preposition ‘*is*’ is only examined in this paper – an appendix is available online.

There were 117 occurrences of ‘*is*’ within the dataset: 44 instances in relation with Arial and 55 times in relation to Helvetica. Examples of the preposition data are evident in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2. Again, due to restrictions, a sample selection of text of data highlights the sentiment used.

| <b>Table 5.1</b> |   |                      |
|------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>IS</b>        | <b>ARIAL</b>  | <b>NEG/ NEU/ POS</b> |
|                  | is just an ugly bastard son of Helvetica                  | NEGATIVE             |
|                  | <is> gawdawful.   | NEGATIVE             |
|                  | Arial < is > a knock off designed by<br>Microsoft         | NEGATIVE             |
|                  | Arial < is > a default Windows font                       | NEGATIVE             |
|                  | Arial < is > a tawdry, inferior knock-off of<br>Helvetica | NEGATIVE             |
|                  | Arial < is > everywhere                                   | NEUTRAL              |
|                  | Arial < is > one of the few choices<br>available.         | NEUTRAL              |

Table 5.1 Preposition ‘*is*’ used with lexical units of negative sentiment.

| <b>Table 5.2</b> |   |                      |
|------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>IS</b>        | <b>HELVETICA</b>                                      | <b>NEG/ NEU/ POS</b> |
|                  | Helvetica < is > great                                | POSITIVE             |
|                  | Helvetica < is > literally everywhere                 | NEUTRAL              |
|                  | Helvetica < is > perhaps the most popular<br>typeface | NEUTRAL              |
|                  | The answer < is > Helvetica                           | POSITIVE             |
|                  | It < is > ubiquitous                                  | POSITIVE             |

Table 5.2 Preposition ‘*is*’ used with lexical units of positive sentiment.

### 3.5 'Like, is this an issue?' – ISSUES WITH LIKE

The multi-purpose word 'like' proved a bigger problem than expected during the sentiment analysis stage. Preposition, Noun, Conjunction, Adverb and Adjective, the context of a statement can change depending on its usage. While this may not be considered a major issue is most analysis, in the context of research that is focused on favourable or negative opinion, it can invert a sentiment if read incorrectly.

As evident in Table 6, the lexical term 'Like' appears in the data in 18 instances. The word proves problematic on a sentiment level due to the flexibility of its usage in contemporary language.

Kathleen Hilton in her thesis "Face, knowledge and floor: analysing like usage through a combined variationist, discourse analytic and pragmatic approach" (2012) cites Andersen's work that states that semantic looseness and a lack of lexical commitment are at the core of like's multiple functions, describing it as a marker of 'loose talk.' Anderson explains that speakers use like to indicate a mismatch between the content of what they have said and their underlying thought, that what they say should not be taken too literally. Anderson also describes three types of semantic mismatches that like signals: approximation, hyperbole, and metaphor. Table 6 details the instances that 'like' appears within the dataset.

| <b>Table 6</b><br><b>Query word: "like"</b>                                       | <b>PREPOSITION</b><br><b>/CONJUNCTION</b> | <b>NOUN</b> | <b>VERB</b> |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|
| ""Try reading it."" She said something<br>< like >: ""Oh, yeah, it is smoother."" | TRUE                                      | -           | -           |
| It has spread < like > a virus through<br>the typographic landscape               | TRUE                                      | -           | -           |
| Led by the Macintosh and programs <<br>like > PageMaker                           | TRUE                                      | -           | -           |
| At a glance, it looks < like > Helvetica,<br>but up close it's different          | TRUE                                      | -           | -           |

|  |      |      |   |
|--|------|------|---|
| But to an experienced designer, it was < like > asking for Jimmy Stewart and getting Rich                | TRUE | -    | - |
| effect "I'm not Helvetica. I don't even look < like > Helvetica!" but gladly steps into the              | TRUE | -    | - |
| little more than a parasite—and it looks < like > it's the kind that eventually destroys                 | TRUE | -    | - |
| Helvetica? That's that font that looks kinda < like > Arial, right?" I'm pro-Helvetica                   | TRUE | -    | - |
| employ any of them in a specific design is < like > throwing the I Ching and becoming a typographical    |      |      |   |
| The bowl of "a" flows back into the stem < like > "s" in Helvetica, where as the bowl is                 |      |      |   |
| Helvetica can be spotted in commercial wordmarks < like > 3M, American Airlines, American Apparel        |      |      |   |
| vicariously hating on Helvetica, whether you < like > it or not. Arial & Helvetica or Helvetica          | -    | TRUE | - |
| paraphrasing Paul Rand, I believe: ...Helvetica looks < like > dogshit in text. And the haters might say | TRUE | -    | - |
| lot of chatter about this typeface looking < like > another, looking like another, ad nauseam            | -    | TRUE | - |

|   |      |   |   |
|---|------|---|---|
| <p>this typeface looking like another,<br/> looking &lt; <b>like</b> &gt; another, ad nauseam;<br/> and, while there is</p> | TRUE | - | - |
| <p>a typographic malapropism —<br/> ostensibly, &lt; <b>like</b> &gt; Che Guevara in<br/> retirement as Chief Financial</p> | TRUE | - | - |
| <p>kind of cool to be ‘in on the joke’ and,<br/> &lt; <b>like</b> &gt; the conspiracy loons, who<br/> revel in their</p>    | TRUE | - | - |
| <p>It’s oftentimes &lt; <b>like</b> &gt; that sweater<br/> from high school</p>   | TRUE | - | - |

Table 6 Instances of Like in the dataset



## **SECTION 4 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DATA**

### **4 Overview:**

Due to the scope of the paper, implementations of several analytical models were required: Pragmatic, Semantic, Argumentative, and Semiotic. This multi-method approach enabled a more in-depth structural-approach analysis.

### **4.1 Argumentation overview:**

As mentioned in Section 2, the order of argument is not linear in the online medium and this is evident during the discourse analysis of the data. Forums and comment sections to articles provide most of the data in the dataset. The data when taken on its own proves linear and coherent in argument, but when data is read vertically, we begin to notice the disruption to structure in argument.

The one-to many model of communication of traditional communication channels rarely exists in modern online communication. The channels chosen for the corpus were from sources of predominantly many-to-many communication models such as forums or articles that allowed for comments.

### **4.2 ‘Dialectic, Persuasion and Rhetorical’ argumentation:**

The style of Rhetoric proves one of the more favoured styles of argumentation among the proponents in the dataset. The core of any rhetorical argumentation the method employed and style of argumentation used (Walton, 2007). This style of argumentation has multiple methods, some commonly known (pun, oxymoron hyperbole) and others not.

As visual communication has become more omni-present in our lives, the rhetoric surrounding it is more prevalent online than in academia; the traditional scope of academia concerning typography focusing on the ‘engineering’ of typography, readability and legibility.

### **4.3 Popular Opinion and Expert Opinion:**

This section focuses on argumentation schemes that proponents use to argue for or against one or both typefaces. Tactics from Assertion of Fact to typecasting were evident and a number of semantic categories were evident during research. Appeals to

Popular Opinion and Appeal to Emotion appear as argumentation devices in the dataset.

The emphatic framing of opinion by the Assertions of Fact is a common method of argumentation by commenters. It appears in the dataset in 11 instances. Statements such as “In fact” aims to imply that their argument is fact based and not opinion based. An example of this from our dataset relates to an opponent of the Arial typeface stating, *“In fact, Arial is little more than a shameless imposter”* (file.id file2122129). Although one can argue about the origins of the Arial typeface, the sentiment from the full text does not expand upon this. Propositions with statements that do not expand upon or explain further are common among opponents of the Arial typeface.

In his book *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation* (2008), author Douglas Walton defines the subclass of argument, Appeal to Popular Opinion (or argumentum ad populum) as where “ a large majority (everyone, nearly everyone, etc.) accepts A as true ... this would be evidence that A is generally accepted.” This subclass is more commonly as Popular Opinion. Popular Opinion, as a form of rhetoric, involves using the popularity of a proposition to justify or assert its truth, regardless of factual backup. The Appeal to Popular Opinion is evaluated through the following form: Proposition A is approved by everybody. Therefore, A is true.

*“This font changed fundamentally the whole graphic design. Arial on the other hand is a knock off designed by Microsoft in order to avoid licensing fees.”* (file2122125)

The accusation of imitation is most associated with Arial. The Idioms ‘rip-off’ and ‘knock-off’ are only associated with Arial and not with Helvetica. Such idioms are not directed to the Helvetica typeface.

The use of ‘Position to know’ intends to provide validation for an argument based on the assertion that an individual’s knowledge of a subject or field provides more weight to their argument. While it is generally the case that an expert or someone with extensive knowledge can demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of their field, this is a fallacious argument, namely an appeal to authority. The following two critical questions match the argumentation scheme for appeal to popular opinion. An evaluation of the texts consider what evidence, such as a citation or common

knowledge, supports the claim that A is generally accepted as true? Even if A is generally accepted as true, are there any good reasons for doubting it is true? (Walton, 2006)

*“Helvetica was one product of that movement, and from the start, designers have railed against the homogenous, mono-culture it symbolizes” (file2122126)*

A typical problem with appeal to popular opinion is that in many instances no serious attempt is made to back up the first premise, by giving a real reason why everyone’s accepting A is a good reason why you (the respondent) should accept A. The argument intendeds to pressurize the respondent to accept A or to feel left out of the popular group that accepts A.

The appeal to popular opinion argues that a proposition is true if there is “universal acceptance” of that proposition. It is a form of argument based on widespread accepted opinion. Appeal to popular opinion is not be confused with ‘public opinion’, which centres its argument on the general public. Popular opinion in relation to this dataset is in relation to the opinions of designers.

Arguably, most of the discourse within the dataset could be said to fall under this subclass of argument. If we apply the content of the sample data to the argumentation scheme of Popular Opinion, we can assess the applicability of this hypothesis: if A is common knowledge, meaning that it is an assumption that would not normally be disputed, then that is evidence that A is generally accepted. Multiple commentators argued that “Arial is ugly”, then that is evidence that the aesthetic construction of Arial is unsightly is accepted. The arguments that disparage the aesthetic quality of the Arial typeface are rarely followed by an expansion on this claim.

As ‘Position to know’ is often used to provide validation for an argument, the dataset provides numerous examples where this is used to give weight to the opinion of the commentator. Direct examples are present with the dataset. Hyperbolic comments that asserted the authority of the designer to give weight to the proponent’s argument:

*“a professional designer would rarely—at least for the moment—specify Arial” (file.id file2122129)*

*“To professional designers, Arial is looked down on as a not-very-faithful imitation of a typeface that is no longer fashionable. It has what you might call a “low-end stigma.” (file.id file2122129)*

*Arial is notorious among [sic] designers as Microsoft's bastard son (rip-off) of Helvetica. (file.id file2122123)*

#### **4.5 Politeness Theory:**

Unusual for online discourse, was the noted civility of the online exchanges.

Proponents direct offensive language toward the typefaces, not other commentators.

The analysis of dataset presented a surprising conclusion to the Politeness evaluation, an outcome that is rare in a medium where deindividuation and depersonalization are the norm: responses appeared to be polite.

Brown and Levinson's Face Theory elaborates upon an individuals' expression of the four Maxims. Brown and Levinson's original Face Theory, along with Leech's expansion of that theory can be used to analyse the level of politeness found in the dataset discourse. Leech stated that for a statement or interaction to be deemed 'polite', the language had to adhere to the six maxims of politeness; there are tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim.

#### **4.6 Negative Affect & the language of rejection:**

The sentiment analysis of the dataset revealed a series of interesting results from word-length and its association with disinterest to interesting use of phrases or words. As discussed in Section 3, an interesting result from the dataset analysis was the most common adjectives used in the dataset. The most popular descriptive adjective used was the word 'bad'. As evident in Table 7.1, the word appears in the data 11 times.

The language of rejection is often of a visceral, emotive nature. Unlike positive or neutral statements, words pertinent to the negative are straightforward and clear in their intent. If examined through Aesthetic theory, the strength of the lexical units become manifestations of strong emotions and are symbolic of a moral standpoint on

the typeface. An examination of the lexical units through a semantic or discourse method reveal that the language of rejection tends to reflect a negative judgment by the proponents of the typeface (and those who use who use them):

| <b>Table 7</b>     |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>FILE ID</b>     | <b>Examples of Negative Lexicon</b>  |
| <b>file2122123</b> | it's a blatent [sic] rip-off   |
| <b>file2122123</b> | That's bad. That's really really bad   |
| <b>file2122123</b> | It's an ugly bastard son of Helvetica  |
| <b>file2122126</b> | The only thing that pisses me off more than Helvetica is Arial – a knock off |
| <b>file2122132</b> | Both are best avoided, especially Helvetica which is dated and gross         |

**Table 7 Examples of Negative statements within the text**

The statements relay what Kolnai classifies as the “tonalities of rejection” (Menninghaus, 2003): displeasure, contempt, and hate. However, only once does the language lean towards a display the ultimate form of rejection: disgust.

Although the assertion cannot be made that the proponent is disgusted by the typeface, the choice of the words *gross* and in morphine form, *avoid* are one level with the sentiments associated with disgust.

Although disgust is not prevalent in the discourse, the negative emotional driver of hatred is. Negative Affect words such as ‘*bad*’ and ‘*hate*’ are common. ‘*Bad*’ appears 10 times in the dataset, twice recurring in the same sentence. The accusation of ‘*bad*’ is levelled primarily at the Arial typeface, evidence of which is seen in Table 7.1. Where the Negative Affect is directed towards a typeface, it is labeled as TRUE.

| <b>Table 7.1</b>   |                  |              |
|--|------------------|--------------|
| <b>QUERY WORD: "bad"</b>   | <b>HELVETICA</b> | <b>ARIAL</b> |
| <b>That's &lt; bad &gt;, really really &lt; bad &gt;. Arial and Helvetica suck on web</b>                | TRUE             | TRUE         |
| <b>bastard son of Helvetica. But it is a very &lt; bad &gt; choice for web -</b>                         | FALSE            | TRUE         |
| <b>(rip-off) of Helvetica. It's just a &lt; bad &gt; copy of Helvetica - a really &lt; bad &gt; one.</b> | FALSE            | TRUE         |
| <b>just a &lt; bad &gt; copy of Helvetica - a really &lt; bad &gt; one. It's just ugly</b>               | FALSE            | TRUE         |
| <b>The best way to show that Arial is a &lt; bad &gt; text font-- and I think it's just awful</b>        | FALSE            | TRUE         |
| <b>Not that homeliness is necessarily a &lt; bad &gt; thing for a typeface</b>                           | FALSE            | FALSE        |
| <b>Spiekermann once wrote that there are no &lt; bad &gt; typefaces</b>                                  | FALSE            | FALSE        |

**Table 8 Instances of 'Bad' within the text. True indicates that the accusation was aimed at this typeface.**

#### 4.6.1 Hate and Hater

Unlike Disgust, to define the word Hate proves to be problematic; hate and hatred are not simple constructs with conventional usages. Does it fall into the extreme end of negativity or can it be classified as being undistinguishable from dislike? A word is widely used online is hate.

The insertion of 'self' into the argument extends beyond the Expert Opinion argumentation. It is a feature of in most proponents that include hate in their lexicon with statements such as "it's gawdawful" (file.id file2122124 ) appearing in the dataset. Unlike other misspellings that appear in the dataset, it can be argued that the misspelling of the term '*god-awful*', aims to mimic the phonetic pronunciation of the writer. By removing the 'O' and inserting '*AWD*', the writer could be reflecting a dialectical difference between the standard pronunciation and their own.

In contrast to the sentiment of other selected texts, the commenter has a specific issue with a geometrical element of the typeface. Conceivably, this reflects an understanding of the construct of the typeface.

A common sentiment by opponents of one or both typefaces was “I [a]m not a hater”. Not a recent term, this noun has semantic significance in the lexicon of the Internet. Different from a critic, a ‘Hater’ is an individual or consensus is in conflict with. ‘Urban Dictionary’<sup>IV</sup>, a database of vernacular Internet terminology (i.e. Internet Slang) provides the top definitions of ‘hater’ in the context of the Internet as:

*“A person that simply cannot be happy for another person's success. So rather than be happy they make a point of exposing a flaw in that person.*

*Hating, the result of being a hater, is not exactly jealousy. The hater doesn't [sic] really want to be the person he or she hates, rather the hater wants to knock somelse [sic ] down a notch.” (ffile2122129)*

A ‘hater’ in this context is separate from the term ‘troll’. While online ‘trolls’ aim to cause offense or emotional hurt, a ‘hater’ is often an individual with an opposing view. As seen in section 3.9.4, analysis of politeness theory shows that the ‘face’ of proponents in the samples is positive due to unwillingness to insult or malign on a personal level.

*“before I get started — and I promise this won't take long — let me be clear, I am not, I repeat, not (in bold for emphasis) a Helvetica hater .” (file2122142)*

*“Most Arial haters (and they outnumber Helvetica haters 100:1) would, especially once the most differentiated glyphs are removed, be hard-pressed to tell it apart from Helvetica.” followed by “At least if you are going to hate, then hate consistently.” (file2122141)*

#### **4.6.2 The Aesthetics of Ugly:**

Although the word ‘ugly’ only appears three times within the data set, the link between ‘beauty’ and positivity is seen throughout the dataset.

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<sup>IV</sup> Originally conceived as a parody, it now serves as a glossary of Internet terminology and inversion of words online. It works on an up vote/down vote system.

The lexicon of rejection that presents itself within the dataset can be categorized as a reflection of Negative affectivity. A cognitive psychological term, it represents the negative emotions that range from Anxiety to Disgust that can be felt by an individual. Proponents of anti-Arial sentiments base their primary objection on the failings of Arial on its aesthetic moral grounding, it is declared ugly. The rancour expressed towards Arial in particular express a dislike for the typography based on a number of factors: The perceived unoriginality of the font and its association with un-professional designers.

Beauty is looked upon favourably by aesthetics as it is morally superior to unattractive works. *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno, 2013) defines ‘ugly’ as the “element that opposes the work’s ruling law of form”. As discussed in the above sections, the moral and aesthetic grounding of many of the proponents tends to the negative. The visceral reactions by many of the proponents of the text sampled in the data display strong negative affect by opponents of the typeface. In one sample (file2122123), the adjective ‘Ugly’ is used three times: “Helvetica looks ugly”, “Arial is just an ugly bastard son of Helvetica” The proponent of this anti-Helvetica and Arial position felt so strongly against Arial that they reiterate their views on Arial on final time: “It’s just ugly”.

The culture within the Graphic Design sphere in one where creating aesthetically ‘beautiful’ work is a priority. The accusation of ‘ugly’ is a serious one. By using the term ‘ugly’, they are revealing that what they signify the typeface with derives from aesthetic moral judgments. Nietzsche stated that all good things were once unpleasant things, thus ‘beauty’ is not innate, but rather an abstraction.

#### **4.7 Metaphor - MIP:**

Associative meaning, one existing over and above the customary denotation, is common among text segments that are larger than a single word. Metaphor analysis showed a number of negative and positive semantic effects in its findings. Opponents of a typeface used associative semantics in their arguments.

As the sampled data is from computer-mediated discourse, one must consider the meaning within the Internet lexicon. An example of a change in the meaning of lexical unit due to this is “It’s Vanilla IceCream” (file2122134)



A form of parole, the metaphor used undergoes a diachronic change from an association with a sweet, pleasant taste to an association with the bland and average. The use of the term ‘*vanilla*’ derives from vanilla extract being the basic flavoring for ice cream, and by extension, meaning plain or standard.

As detailed in Section 3, the results of the sentiment analysis demonstrated the high percentage of negative lexical terms appearing within the data, especially in relation to the Arial typeface. However, the sentiment analysis does not account for semantic prosody that occurs.

Semantic Prosody is the phenomenon of a favourable or unfavourable connotation being contained not in a single item, but instead expressed by that item in association with others. Semantic prosody indicates the phenomenon of words combining not just with chosen other words, but with chosen meanings, thus displaying their semantic prosodies that appear to be mostly either positive or negative. Statements such as “*Helvetica looks like dogshit in text*” (file2122141), “*Its like a high school sweater*” (file2122141), *Helvetica is the sweatpants of typefaces*(file2122141), *Helvetica is the fixed-gear bike of typefaces*(file id) and “*Arial owes its very existence to that success but is little more than a parasite—and it looks like it’s the kind that eventually destroys the host.* (file2122129)

## SECTION FIVE – DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### 5. OVERVIEW

#### 5.1 ‘Moral Objection’ – Meaning of intensity of language and negativity

The concept of engaging with strangers in an argument online is perplexing to many, especially an argument concerning the aesthetic features of typefaces. The purpose of engaging in online debate is multifaceted. However, in relation to the topic of this paper and the data analyses, a number of theories are considered.

An interesting observation from the dataset is that while strong emotive language is clear in its message, the positive arguments in the data are not. Positive propositions have a tendency to be opaque in intention and ‘drawn out’ in execution. A theory for this could be that in contrast to the negative propositions, the proponents are driven by such strong ‘moral’ judgments. For example, an argument in ‘praise’ of Helvetica argued that a positive factor in the font was that “it is ubiquitous”. Such a term is vague and it not as a straightforward statement.

The moral objection is also evident in the argumentation schemes used by opponents of a particular typeface. Users of typefaces were accused of ignorance, with claims made about their eligibility to understand typography:

*“Thus Arial has now overtaken Helvetica as the standard font in practically everything done by those who don't know any better.”*

In *The Psychology of Hate* (2010), Patrick Ciono presents Vitz and Mango’s theory as being “the aim (of hatred) is not to eliminate but maintain the relationship with the hated object so as to torture it” (Lockhardt, 2010). Ciono also lists Vitz and Mango’s assertion that ‘hatred’ is a defense mechanism, one that masks a series of underlying issues. One such issue was touched upon in Section 4, the Moral Standpoint.

Vitz & Mango state that “feelings of moral superiority are the most frequent observed rewards of hatred...forgiveness is viewed by many people as weakness; as giving up of power”. While the data reveals Arial as the target of negative lexical units, opponents of Helvetica were on equally negative.

## **5.2 Impact of online discourse upon typographical design trends:**

As the distinction between the online and the offline world becomes increasingly blurred, offline discourse is influenced more by discourse online (Thurlow, 2011). In *Digital Discourse*, author Thurlow Mroczek writes the “deterritorialization” that digital technology enables, allows versions of individuals to spread across the Internet. These cybernetic representations of ourselves extend to the influence our textual speech and discourse has. The democratizing leveller of the Internet allows for argumentation and discourse that is neither rigorous nor diligent. The implication in the offline that this may have on design when a typeface becomes associated of the unfavourable, as has happened with Arial. The conclusion is based on the result from the data, where analysis and evaluation of online discourse regarding Arial concludes that is of negative nature. Both the sentiment and discourse analysis demonstrated that was Arial was a signifier and non-professionalism in opponents’ opinions.

## **5.3 Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this paper conducted a linguistic study of the online discourse surrounding non-linguistic element. This element concerned typography, specifically the typefaces Arial and Helvetica.

The paper analysed the discussion surrounding both typefaces and noted differences between the two. The findings of this research conducted show that overall, opponents against one or both typefaces used negative association words. Rarely did sentiments show an argument based on positive attributes. An analysis of the text data at a more discourse-based level provided greater insight into the argumentation methods used by opponents and deduced the reasons for their motivation based on their various semantic usages. This paper also argued that the increased discourse online regarding the virtues of a typeface impact on design trends.

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