Cultural investigation on typography in branding in the United States and in Brazil.

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CULTURAL INVESTIGATION ON TYPOGRAPHY IN BRANDING
IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN BRAZIL

By
Carolina Coimbra Ganon
B.A., University of Louisville, 2018

A Thesis
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Louisville, Kentucky

March 2018
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A Thesis Approved On

March 2018

By the following Thesis Committee:

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother,

Laura Ganon

and to the memory of my father,

Sergio Ganon

who supported me through my education years.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Meena Khalili, for her guidance through this thesis and design lessons. I would also like to thank my department professors Steven Skaggs and Leslie Friesen, for their valuable teachings in the past fours years. Thank you to my husband, João, who gave me reasons to expand my horizons and move from Brazil to study here and have incredible opportunities to grow. A special thank you to my grandmother, Laura, for being the most amazing English teacher. Many thanks to Catarina Soares, an incredible friend who has been always there for me for the past four years, helping me adapt to the American student life. Also, many thanks to my family members in Brazil: my sister Camila Ganon, and my stepfather Juca Serrado.
ABSTRACT

CULTURAL INVESTIGATION ON TYPOGRAPHY IN BRANDING
IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN BRAZIL

Carolina Ganon de Lucca

May, 2018

This cultural thesis is set to investigate the use of typography in branding, and how the same is influenced by cultural aspects, specifically in the United States and Brazil. The contrasting experience I have had as a student of graphic design in these two countries led me to discover the influence culture has in dictating the typography design use in branding. Typography, branding and cultural influences have been significantly researched in the past, but historically as three separate subjects, without focusing on the importance of their association and how they influence one another cross-culturally. Since the impact of graphic design and the power of typography is important to branding, global brands need to adapt and be relatable to multiple cultures. The aim of this thesis is to fill this existing gap between these three matters and show the importance of the connection between typography, branding, and culture, specifically across Brazil and the United States.
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INTRODUCTION

“Typefaces are an essential resource employed by graphic designers, just as glass, stone, steel, and other materials are employed by architects”. (Lupton 13)

Typography is more than just written words, it is an element of graphic design that contributes to the overall meaning and aesthetic of visual communication, working as a key component of graphic design. Typography, however, communicates more than the written meaning; it introduces important layers of definition to a brand’s message and reflects different cultural understandings. With that in mind, the poor usage of typography in culturally specific branding weakens the power of the design.

The main goal of my research is to confirm that the use of typography for branding purposes that deal with a cultural theme is –or at least should be– different according to the culture which it is referring to. The focus of my thesis will be the typography used in the United States and in Brazil, due to my personal experience of moving from my native country to the United States. I noticed that both countries used type differently when branding local brands, and most of the times they were expressing cultural identities intrinsic of each place. The issue that intrigued me, however, was that many local or global brands focused on the use of imagery to convey different cultural moods or qualities and engage the local audience, but hardly ever focused on typography to make that difference even more powerful. I expect that my work will influence graphic
designers to be more aware of the importance of typography in branding connected to cultural knowledge and recognition, specifically for brands and campaigns that connect to a cultural identity, and that eventually designers will make a better and more mindful use of type in their designs.

This thesis relies on the approach of symbolic interactionism, the theory that argues that human interaction and communication is facilitated by words and other symbols that have acquired conventionalized meanings (Blumer 1). These meanings differ according to cultural standards, so it is paramount that typography in branding reflects the particular aspects and the relevancy of each culture.

Typeface designs have always operated culturally, technologically and psychodynamically; they are constantly engaging in social interaction and have many semiotic implications in understanding how and why typefaces provide different tones to visual communications (Gosling). My research will delve into the two different cultural stances –Brazilian and American– and how they can be related to specific typography characteristics and effects on the viewer, which is useful to support a mindful typography use in branding; both local and global.

My hypothesis is that branding intrinsically relies on effective typography, which is utilized to give the linguistics a written form and to function as a visual communicative tool that reflects its cultural environment. Branding here with the meaning of “endowing products and services with the power of a brand” (Marion). The questions that arise are "What role does typography take in branding message throughout the communication
process in these two countries?" and "Is typography more than just a way of transmitting a verbal message, and does it differ according to each culture?"

The first part of this thesis focuses on typography. I analyze the semiotics, historic, and psychological aspects of type, and how they can all influence the use of type in branding design. The focus is to understand basic concepts of type as visual signs and their psychological effect on the viewer, to then recognize their role as part of visual identity systems for brands. Next, I take into consideration the historical evolution of typography in Brazil and the United States. The two countries have had two very different histories of economic development, and that influenced the study and the production of type design in each country. I explore the history of typography since the invention of the movable press, the relationship to branding as well as other important factors –such as artistic styles and economic factors– that affected the evolution of type, branding and main communication methods.

Section two targets the cultural facet of both countries: individually and together. I acknowledge the use of type in local companies and their branding, logo design, brand system, and packaging. I also reference to the study of cross-cultural psychology to support the understanding of the effects of multicultural interaction aspects, and as a common factor with the typography field. The common ground of psychological effects from these two fields allows for a link between cultural characteristics and typography use that can be taken into consideration in cross-cultural branding design.
The methodology I use in the process of completing this research includes ethnography and survey research, in order to determine the process of using type in branding in the United States and in Brazil. In this thesis, I focus on a theory-driven approach, using existing knowledge and literature to generate my argument. The survey that I conducted supports the theoretical research and provides valuable insight between individuals that live in Brazil or in the United States. With my survey, which is explained in detail in the last section, I am able to identify psychological and visual patterns of each cultural identity, and representative brands of each culture. The analyzed results support the labeling of designated typography in branding for each country, in a way to serve as guide and suggest how type use can be even more effective. As for the survey methods, I used a qualitative questionnaire and statistical methods to analyze and determine how typeface use in branding can be compelling in cultural and cross-cultural interactions.

My goal with this thesis is to emphasize the importance of typography in branding and how the place in which it is used affects the whole visual effect of the branding message.
SECTION ONE: SEMIOTICS, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF TYPE

Graphic design draws from many fields, including semiotics, rhetorical methods, perception sciences—such as physiology and psychology—, and human factors (Skaggs 14). Rhetoric is a device used to persuade or make effective communication and it is considered an outcome of semiotics, whereas human factors cover ethnographic and cultural aspects, demographic, and any study of groups of individuals. For the matter of this thesis, I will divide and explain the typographic analysis into semiotics, psychology, and culture. Semiotics provides the understanding of typography as a visual element loaded with meanings and symbolical information in their form (Skaggs 14). Psychology supplies the awareness of how the semiotic meanings affect the human perception and the moods that each class of typography can create depending on the forms and shapes of the letters. The third element—culture—explains how the effect that type creates on the viewer can be related to intrinsic characteristics of particular cultural identity. Historical aspects of typography are essential to be taken into consideration as well because although there are universal landmarks of trends and progress, Brazil and the United States have had different access to typography education and production, which affects how each country, and their brands value and deal with typography. As a result of this, the
type-effect classification between typography and mood becomes a helpful tool to be used when relating typography to culture.

Semiotics, A Universal Understanding Of Type As Visual Signs

Semiotics is the study of signs, their functions and their effects (Skaggs 39). Any symbol is the result of transmission of meaning from an object –physical or visual– to an individual. The study of semiotics provides the fundamental notion of congruence. From a semiotic perspective, the physical and mental concepts are peripheral. Instead, they focus is on the actions of signs, and how they tie together the imaginative internal world with the external reality (Skaggs 41). When a symbol is transmitted, the comprehensive sense of what it represents embodies its visual appearance, and to the extent that detachment from one another is impossible. As I have mentioned in the introduction, typography is an essential resource for graphic design, and therefore a significant sign of branding. It intrinsically belongs to the field of semiotics as well. Type is a graphic symbol, and semiotics explains that when a symbol arises - a complete interpenetration of ideas and imagery of things comes along with it, since the character is always multi-layered and encompasses many different meanings.

Hence, semiotics can prove that typography goes beyond a simple visual representation of the written message; it raises type to the level of individuality and importance, connected with the memory of a culture, and a series of symbolic images that penetrates the history of local values. A well-chosen typeface acts as a tool to strengthen the cultural identification aspect, and it can build upon the imaginative perception of the
branding message mainly because a type is perceived visually and has psychological effects on the viewer. If cultural relevancy is an essential asset to the brand's positioning in the marketplace, its logotype can use a particular style of typeface that can inform the audience about the origin and nationality of the product or service before reading the verbal text. For example, blackletter was used in illustrated manuscripts throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, and Fraktur—which is a kind of blackletter widely used in Germany– became known as a German nationalist typeface; and it was even revived during Nazism to promote nationalism (Bain 18). That is proof that there is a reserve increase of information attached to typography, which occurs with the juxtaposition of historical and cultural signs and that increases the semantic meaning of the text.

When noticing type use in Brazil and the United States, designers might overlook cultural differences because the alphabet is substantially the same in the two countries. The difference between Western written languages and Eastern are much more apparent in their forms and shapes: all Western nations use the Latin alphabet as their written form, which includes Brazil and the United States. The structure of the letters in Eastern languages such as Russia, Japan, China, Iran, for example, have a direct difference in it that makes it easily recognizable and distinguishable from our alphabet. Even though Brazilian people speak Portuguese and Americans speak English, both countries rely on the Latin alphabet in their typography designs; although Portuguese utilizes accented characters, the essential letters of the entire alphabet are the same. The alphabet's similarities make it easy for designers to use any typeface in branding, independently of
the country in which they are designing. At the same time that it brings an endless possibility of type choice and gives a great deal of freedom of choice to designers, it also enables the misuse of typography in situations that typography can bring an essential layer to a design that needs to represent a specific cultural identity. Hence, it is imperative to understand different typographical psychological aspects and to be able to implement them in their adequate cultural environment when dealing with local and global brands.

To understand the semiotics of different typefaces is to recognize the importance of categorizing type based on their anatomical aspects and what they trigger in the viewers’ mind.

**Type Anatomy And Its Psychological Character**

Jan Tschichold, an important graphic designer, was a teacher and wrote many essential books on typography. He argued that different typefaces have different personas and that the typography’s “personality” must correspond to the character of the verbal text (Tschichold 13). Alongside other contemporary graphic designers, Jan Tschichold defended that the graphic design, including typography use, is not just graphic art, and that it is only supposed “to look good,” it is rhetoric, and it becomes an important asset to semiotics.

Therefore, typography affects the viewer and how the written information is perceived. Psychology and the understanding of the perception of different typefaces become an imperative asset to improve type usage, as specific typefaces can be more impactful and more appropriate for determined situations. Culture, historical values, and
lifestyle dictates typography usage and acceptance. To have this in mind when using
graphic design in branding is to comprehend the emotional and psychological meanings
that are carried by typography, and the possibility of amplifying the branding message is
empowering.

Typefaces can be roughly classified into one of three groups: serifs, sans-serifs,
and scripts style. Generally speaking, serif typefaces represent tradition,
authoritativeness, classical and trustworthy. The Times New Roman font is related to
confidence, and it is usually used in college writing. Sans serif typefaces typically look
stable, clean, modern, and universal. Helvetica is widely used worldwide in signage
design because of its high legibility and simple feel. For the most part, script typefaces
look personal, creative, friendly.

However, type form goes beyond these three general aspects, and there are many
ways to classify typefaces. While none of them is suitable for organizing all existing
typefaces, I focused on type families and their personality traits to create a classification
of typefaces that is suitable for my thesis and the goal of relating typography and culture.
My classification roughly divides typefaces into ten categories that match with a
psychological effect on the viewer, listed below. The designation does not propose a
universal model for type classification; instead, it introduces a possibility to organize and
create a common link between type and culture and provide fascinating insight about
efficient typography use in global branding.
I. The **Old Style or Humanist Serif** have a psychological effect on the viewer of a traditional and older look and feel. This type category refers to the first Roman types, created initially around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which emulated classical calligraphy (Lupton 46). The axis of curved strokes is usually inclined to the left, and there is a low contrast in character strokes so that the hairlines tend to look bulkier. In old style type design, serifs are almost always bracketed and are often angled. Sabon, designed by Jan Tschichold in 1966, is an example of an old-style typeface that stands for tradition.

II. **Transitional Serif** transmits a meticulous design and classic look (Dodd, 45). These typefaces have sharper serifs and high contrast strokes (Lupton 46). This style was
established by the English printer and typographer John Baskerville in the mid-eighteenth century. This typeface’s form represents the transition between old style and modern style. Baskerville improved printing methods that allowed for much thinner character strokes to be reproduced while maintaining subtler character shapes. Hence, the strokes usually have vertical stress, while the weight contrast is more pronounced than in old-style designs; with serifs and oblique head serifs. The typeface Baskerville exhibits warm elegance and classic look, due to its intention of revival of interest in the classical (Dodd 51).

III. The **Modern or Didone** style feels refined and high-end (Dodd 53). Modern typefaces are radically abstract and move away from organic forms (Lupton 46). It was introduced by Giambattista Bodoni in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with thin, straight serifs, vertical axis, and the sharp contrast between thick and thin strokes (Lupton 46). Punchcutting for typefaces with such fine serifs required a lot of skill—not only in cutting but also in striking matrices and casting—and that intense labor translates into the type format as refined mood (Dodd 56).

IV. **Slab Serifs** transmit assertiveness and confidence. Slab serif typefaces became popular in the nineteenth century when many bold and decorative typefaces were used for advertising display (Lupton 46). These typefaces present heavy serifs with minimal or no bracketing, usually with subtle changes in stroke weight. Clarendon typeface is a slab serif that was typically used in nineteenth-century posters for theater publicity, “shouting for attention” (Dodd 66).
V. **Grotesque Sans Serifs** relate to simplicity and calm, yet proper. They were the first commercially popular sans serif typefaces. The character is uniform and upright, making it similar to the transitional serif style (Lupton 46). The fact they do not have serifs make them more direct and straightforward. The stroke contrast of the grotesque sans serif style is not pronounced, and its rounded curves support the stable but soft look. The most obvious distinguishing characteristic of these typefaces is their monotone weight stress. Helvetica, designed by Max Miedinger in 1957, is a grotesque sans serif and it is one of the world’s most widely used typefaces. The blandness and balance of Helvetica’s design imply simplicity and calm and makes it a great example of this group (Dodd 127).

VI. The **Geometric Sans Serif** style implies reliability and strength to the viewer. These typefaces rely on simple geometric shapes to their construction form. Strokes appear to be strict mono-lines, and character shapes are made up of geometric forms (Lupton 46). One example is the Futura typeface, designed by Paul Renner in 1927: the Os are perfect circles, and the As and Ms have sharp peaks based on triangles. Futura was a product of its time, vigorously representing the value of technology and machines as secure and reliable assets, translating that feeling into its forms and shapes (Dodd 103).

VII. **Humanist Sans Serif** typefaces have a more friendly and easy-going feeling. Their designs are created based on the proportions of Roman inscriptive letters and closely match the design characteristics and dimensions of old-style serif type. They are also intimately connected to the movement of the hand, showing the influence of
calligraphic variations in line weight. For that reason, the humanist style is a more “approachable” type of sans serif, since they have some relatable characteristics to people’s way of writing. Gill Sans, designed by Eric Gill, is seen as less mechanical and have forms that emulate classical Roman proportions (Dodd 119).

VIII. The **Formal** style evokes formal and polite feelings. Nowadays heavily used in wedding invitations, these typefaces appeared in the seventeenth century. Many of its characters have strokes that join them to other letters.

IX. **Casual or script** typefaces suggest informality and warmth. Designers create these fonts as if they were writing quickly, and many times appear to be drawing with a brush. Character strokes usually connect one letter to the next, giving the style a handwritten effect.

X. **Blackletter** is of dramatic and medieval appearance. These typefaces were used in manuscript lettering in Europe before to the invention of movable type. Currently, blackletter has also become associated with some beer brands that want to refer to European brewery culture, or heavy metal and rap bands that rely on dramatic style.

The classification that I propose here is helpful to connect typography to cultural characteristics, as illustrated in the chart below. I used this chart to delineate the survey for this thesis: people that are not familiar with typographic terms were then able to name cultural aspects, which correlate to typography-related styles.
Many graphic designers make the mistake of disregarding typography in favor of other visual elements, such as imagery and color. These are also very important, but that does not mean that type should be neglected. The more the use of a combination of significant assets the more power graphic design will have. Further components about typography should be considered beyond just its readability or legibility: as a type has its mood and can be perceived differently, each typeface conveys their feeling and has a determined psychological impact on the reader. Letterforms have character, just as words do when we say them out loud.
Type & Branding In History

From the beginning of printing history to contemporary use of digital type, typography carries an intrinsic psychological and emotional impact on the reader. The association with particular cultures enables type to represent countries and nations and to symbolize movements and brands. On the course type history, different typefaces have borne their important milestones, have had a specific psychological impact on different cultures, and have triggered various moods in the readers. Typefaces are not created and designed in seclusion: they aim to address specific needs, which encompass either aesthetic, cultural, political, or functional aspects. Fraktur in Germany, Bodoni in Italy, and Caslon in England are examples of typefaces that ended up having national connotations.

Branding also promotes cultural impact and has historical value. By its definition, branding is the process of giving meaning to products or services by creating and building the concept of the brand in consumers’ minds. In this environment, graphic design is of enormous value in the strategies used by companies to help develop their image and personality and present it to the world, so people quickly identify their products and organization, giving them reasons to choose their products over the competitors. Branding has gained more importance over time, building a brand's image with the use of advertising and communications, product and packaging design, in-store
experience, pricing, sponsoring and partnerships, and the visual identity of the brand.

Typography comes to play an important role in branding as well.

A logotype is the most direct use of type in branding. The logotype uses typography or lettering to depict the name or initials of a company in a memorable way that also transmits one or more characteristics of the brand (Lupton 68). Logotypes can be designed using existing typefaces or custom-drawn letterforms. With this alone, it is possible to identify the importance of type in the creation of a brand concept and idea in the consumer’s mind. Furthermore, a complete visual identity consists of color, icons, patterns, print, and digital design, which designers build from a selection of brand designated typefaces.

In the survey completed for this thesis, I was able to identify brand patterns concerning their culture, which shows that brand makes part of cultural identity in the minds of individuals. In Brazil, for example, the brand Havaianas was mentioned 22 times among 45 Brazilian individuals as the number one brand that represents the mood of their country. How significant are these numbers? They show that Havaianas play an important role in the mind of the Brazilian consumer; almost half of the interviewees see their cultural identity represented in the brand and their entire visual identity (explained more on section two.)
In the United States, the results for the same questions were more spread out, which can also be because the number of essential brands in America is greater than in Brazil. However, there were also patterns: Ford and Apple were mentioned five times each among 42 Americans, followed by McDonald’s, mentioned four times, and Coca-Cola, mentioned three times. Overall, these three brands make up 40% of the American cultural identity among 42 interviewees, and these numbers are pretty significant.

**Figure 3.** Survey Graph: Brands Mentioned As Part Of Brazilian Cultural Identity

**Figure 4.** Survey Graph: Brands Mentioned As Part Of American Cultural Identity
Along with its important role in the branding process, typefaces have changed and evolved over different periods of time, adhering to trends, art movements, and statements, to express a mood, belief, or position in the world stage. Printing made for public display began to show its potency at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the creation of Gutenberg's printing press and the use of movable type. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, was when printing was massively used to advertise commerce and entertainment. Posters became a symbol of a new era of “conspicuous consumption” (Cramsie 149). The improvements in printing techniques allowed for designers to explore more significant and more colorful posters, which were the preferred medium used at the time. It was a time when the vernacular and art-nouveau styles were in vogue: many typefaces were either wavy and casual or decorative and swirly.

The Coca-Cola logotype, first designed in 1887, had an apparent influence of vernacular lettering style. The commonality between the Art Nouveau and the script was featured in many logos afterward. Coca-Cola has become a global brand that a glance quickly recognizes. The speed of recognition is due to its shape patterns, the internal and external word shape, and their color red. Even when applied to different alphabets, these characteristics are maintained to keep the brand’s core characteristics (see fig. 6). The Ford logos was also created in the late nineteenth century and relied on script-based logotype (Cramsie 155).

The Decorative Arts and Crafts movement also emerged at that time. It stood for traditional craftsmanship using simple forms, and often used medieval, romantic, or folk styles of decoration. William Morris was an important figure in this artistic movement in America, which tried to revive pre-industrial traditions of handcraft. The AEG logo evolution is an interesting way to analyze the different artistic trends that were happening between the late nineteenth to early twentieth century (see fig. 8). In 1896, the logo was composed by crafted initials in a decorative style. The first 1908 version resembles the vernacular form of the Coca-Cola logo, whereas the second 1908 version, designed by Hoffman, has a more unified geometric style. The logo is a rectangular rose made from an accumulation of squares. The combination of the designed elements created and
proposed by Hoffman at the time was one of the earliest examples of corporate visual
identity design, or branding (Cramsie 161).

![AEG Logo Evolution](image)

**Figure 8.** AEG Logo Evolution. Cramsie, Patrick. *The Story of Graphic Design: From the

The twentieth century represented the boom of modernism. Early modernists
wanted to break out of the tradition and the conventional, seriffed, and centered
straitjacket widely used by past design styles (Cramsie 229). The new generation of
modernists focused on commercial design, in other words, branding. The success and
power of design were to make simple visual elements represent many ideas and generate
different feelings, relying on the semiotics aspects of design. The motto was “Good
design is good business”, according to Thomas J. Watson Jr., IBM’s president in 1956,
and “good” branding was minimal and bold (Cramsie 232).
According to Patrick Cramsie in his book *The Story of Graphic Design*, logotypes are like people, their characteristics can be interpreted in many ways that form a universal aspect and psychological effect (Cramsie 232). When Paul Rand designed the memorable IBM logo in 1972, for example, his use of geometric serifs and counters with regular horizontal stripes promotes a feeling of great stability and reliability (see fig. 9). Herb Lubalin also created designs from powerful and active typography, showing that graphic design can be compelling with the use of smart typography without a pictorial image (Cramsie 236). Overall, the commercial prosperity of big American corporations showed the importance of modern graphic design in corporate branding strategy, creating specific and memorable identity systems. The Swiss style suited correctly to meet the need of brand consistency, in its simplicity and structured fashion.

During the 1960s, digital technology allowed the creation of letterforms with more intentional digital aesthetic (Cramsie 313). The digital use of typography promoted
new broad access to type design. This democratization of making typefaces had a paradoxical effect on type designer styles: the easy recreation of letterforms made it more difficult for an individual’s style to proclaim itself. On the other hand, developing countries like Brazil had better access to typography.

While the contemporary trend of graphic design is very extensive, and it is continuously relating to the three significant historical and aesthetic movements – vernacular, arts and crafts, and modernism– typography is valued differently depending on the culture it is inserted in due to historical differences of technological advances and access to information.

The purpose of typography in branding is to transmit the mood and emotional position of the brand, whether the letters carry it in a logotype, form of printed material, on the web or as any marketing material. The choice of typeface is indeed very important for the impact of the brand and its visual outcome, and cultural factor should be taken into account.

**Historic Difference Of Type Use In Brazil And In The United States**

Europe and United States have been the leaders in Western typography design and production. European and American designers have been leading the different artistic movements and design trends that have influenced the use of type in logotype and overall branding designs.
Historically, Americans were intensively influenced by the European culture until the 1920s –the Golden Age of the United States– had a profound impact in the country and all over the world, including in typography use. In the United States, the American economic strength was manifested not only with the export of materials and manufactured goods but also the export and dissemination of its own culture (Cramsie 228). American popular culture spread overseas during the 1920s: multiple art forms such as cinema, music, advertising, incorporated new kinds of imagery and typography in the United States and worldwide. The hand-drawn lettering was brought to the mass culture audience through science fiction writing and Disney illustrations and had an international appeal (Cramsie 118). America set trends that influenced Brazil. On the one hand, the typography choice that is trending in the United States and reflects its own culture ends up being assimilated and becomes embedded in the Brazilian culture as well.

Brazil is a developing country and, regarding the history of Brazilian typography, there is no actual national typographic identity or culture formally established yet. Just like many other developing countries, for centuries Brazil had imported metal type for letterpress printing from Europe and the United States; which places Brazil still in its infancy in terms of the maturation of its typographic style. Digital font design started in Brazil in the late 80s and expanded in the early 90s with the proliferation of the personal computer. Digital typefaces promoted the democratization of type in developing countries, since they gave Brazilian designers access and the opportunity to explore this new medium for the first time. Also, the internationalization of American culture since
the twentieth century makes defining fundamental cultural aspects of Brazilian type throughout periods of time relatively vague.

Even though there are currently significant Brazilian type designers, the Brazilian market still has a lot to develop regarding aesthetic, technical quality, and the behavior of the type market. Frequently, Brazilian companies are not willing to spend money on proper design and typography because they do not prioritize these as a compelling way to build their visual identity, or at least most of them were not educated to understand and give proper value to typography. Hence, Brazilian typography sales go mostly to brands from outside the country, and outside the South American continent. To understand the cultural relevance of type means that it is possible to create an environment where typography design is valued and compensated adequately in Brazil as well.

As for the role of the United States in the current type scene, the country continues to develop and value typography design and should use its power of international influence to promote the cultural relevant use of typography.
SECTION TWO: CULTURAL ASPECTS AND TYPOGRAPHY USE

Font selection, use of color, and other design choices are directly inspired by the visual language of their cultural surroundings, which reveals typography as cultural expression (Villagomez 1). Both United States and Brazil have multiple micro-cultures spread within their national territories due to their vast size. Of course, the typography scene will change depending on a specific city’s culture, but the overall national culture is identifiable and can be represented through typography.

Nikki Villagomez realized intensive visual research across various American signage environments, which proves that typography can be used to reflect unique characteristics of different cultures and that can vary within the same country. Each unique typography landscape is defined by the residents, that see certain type aspects as representational of their day-to-day life. Cultural characteristics, economic status, and geographic location are important factors that influence the use of typography (Villagomez 192).

Cross-cultural applicability of typography requires the understanding of the Brazilian and the American cultures and how they apply typography in branding; which allows for the cross-cultural instances and the research study done in this thesis.
The Brazilian Scene

Brazil is a vast country, and although it is considered a developing country, it is also one of the economic powers of the future due to its fast development. The negative side, however, is the massive contrast between the rich and the poor, which is manifested culturally in a mixture of high and low art, of technology and handicrafts (Figueroedo 191). The current graphic design in Brazil is very diverse regarding style and quality. Overall, the unconventional and colorful style happens with an eclectic mixture of classical and vernacular typography, different forms of photography, collage, and illustration. Additionally, some Brazilian business logos are known for their simple yet compelling designs, and the use of vivid colors (Figueroedo 192). This Brazilian style is carried in branding as well: the mixture of informality and vividness arises in visual identity systems and their typography.

In the survey for this thesis, the top mentioned words that describe the Brazilian culture all translated similar moods. Words such as friendly, happy, warm, and diverse, all show that Humanist Sans Serif or Casual/Scrip fonts would be more suitable to represent Brazilian cultural identity (see fig. 10).
In Brazilian local brands that aim to represent specific Brazilian traits, the typography is usually rounded and “not perfect.” There is a national preference for soft visual forms that are not trying to be perfectly straight or correct, which is an evidence of the Brazilian flexible cultural aspect.

Havaianas is a significant shoe brand in Brazil that influences not only the market but also the Brazilian culture. As mentioned before, the brand was chosen by almost 50% of the Brazilian interviewees in the survey as a brand that represents the Brazilian culture. Their logo is only composed by type, which shows that type alone is a huge influence on their brand’s look, and it is a direct reference to the Brazilian vernacular street style. The humanist sans serif type has sharp breaks that represent the embracement of flaws, the rudimentary. In their advertisements, Havaianas use bright imagery and illustrations and
soft, wavy, and hand-written typography or lettering. The type treatment continually changes, but they tie in together when representing the cultural mixture embraced by the Brazilian people.

Figure 11. Havaianas Logo. Seek Logo. https://seeklogo.com/vector-logo/246608/havaianas#

Interestingly, people that mentioned Havaianas also said that the adjective that described the Brazilian culture was either “warm, informal” (9 interviewees) or “friendly, easy-going” (13 interviewees), and that is precisely the mood their humanist sans serif represent: friendly and easy-going (see fig. 13).

![Adjectives Used To Describe Brazilian Culture By Participants That Mentioned Havaianas As A Brazilian Brand](image)

**Figure 13.** Adjectives Used To Describe Brazilian Culture By Participants That Mentioned Havaianas As A Brazilian Brand

Natura is another big Brazilian brand that produces cosmetics using Amazon natural resources. The brand does a great job handling typography to represent their Brazilian expression. Their Nature SOU, awarded in their outstanding packaging design solution, aimed to achieve the maximum sensorial effect, with low environmental impact as well cost. The typography used in the packaging gives continuity to the brand attention to detail when applying type that represents and engages with the Brazilian cultural environment. Steering away from conventional, sustainable solutions, the creative
concept for the product line conveyed conscientious consumption in vibrant and organic colors and the use of geometric sans serif type with rounded corners. It is soft and informal looking, yet powerful.

Figure 14. Sou Packaging And Logo. Tátil Design. http://tatil.com.br/pb/projetos/natura-sou/

The branding of the Rio 2016 Olympics is a great recent example of typography design with appropriate and robust Brazilian cultural representation. The Brazilian design agency Tátil had the mission to express the Carioca culture (Rio de Janeiro’s culture) and the Olympic Games through a single logo and logotype to go with it. The brand had to express unity, inspire achievement and optimism, and be innovative and reflect the local culture. It had to be universally perceived as dynamic and joyful, while expressing the Brazilian passion for celebrating and living. Besides the logo mark, the designers had to create the logotype and the typography that define the cultural essence of the Brazilian people. According to Tátil’s website, a group of over 100 strategists, designers, and
copywriters collectively shared and built upon the best references and ideas in a collaborative creative process. The result is a genuinely human brand, which conveys a mix of ethnicities, athletes and cultures, but most importantly, translates the Brazilian mood and expression. Brazilians embrace diversity and celebrate with passion, and the type design that composed the brand supported this expression across the entire brand identity system.


Overall, although cultural influences may change throughout the country, there is Brazilian commonality that is identified as national and that it is repeated by big Brazilian brands that are aware of the typography importance of their visual identity system. It is important that typography builds the image of the Brazilian culture: which brings not only a sense of cultural identity to the people that live in the country, but also adds a
valuable national cultural image to the international scenery of what represents the country’s character.

The American Scene

The United States is one of the biggest countries in the world, with worldwide economic power and political influence. The country is ethnically diverse as a result of large-scale migration from many nations throughout its history. Due to this diversity, many American cultural elements, especially from popular culture, have spread across the world by using mass media culture. Currently, the graphic design field varies between Modern influences –with clean, minimal, corporate-looking designs– and Arts and Crafts influences as well –with detailed handcraft lettering and illustration designs.

The thesis survey showed that the top mentioned words used to describe the American culture are more diverse than the ones mentioned to describe the Brazilian one. However, words such as strong, confident, and modern show that Geometric Sans Serif or Slab Serif fonts would be more suitable to represent the American cultural identity (see fig. 16). “Diverse” was also mentioned many times, although “divided” was also listed by some participants, which can translate the historical ethnic migration to the country and the current issues that the country has been going through of division of opinions in politics, and other points of view.
Apple was one of the most mentioned American brands in the survey, along with Ford. Apple’s overall look is modern, clean, yet reliable, which matches three of the top 10 words mentioned in the study. The brand uses San Francisco font in their digital interfaces, a typeface that is optimized for legibility, which is critically important for various digital applications of different sizes in Apple products. Apple embraces white space and minimalism, which implies a sophisticated and reliable brand.

**Figure 16. Top Ten Words Used To Describe The American Culture**
As mentioned in section one, Ford, along with Coca-Cola, are logotypes that were designed in the late nineteenth century, following a vernacular trend of script-based logotypes (Cramsie 155). These two brands’ association with American culture rely a lot on their history –Ford with the introduction of the production line, and Coca-Cola with their strong marketing– and the nostalgic imagery of their logotypes, that haven’t changed much since their first renditions, representing memorable customer experiences in the brand’s imagery.

Nike, mentioned four times in the survey as an American looking brand, is an excellent example of a brand with strong mood. The font used in their logotype is close to Futura bold condensed oblique, which falls in the category of Geometric Sans Serif, generating an appropriate reliable and strong mood effect in the viewer.
The United States also have multiple cultural influences within the country, yet there is an American identity pattern in the national territory, which is mirrored by important American brands that are aware of the power of typography as part of their visual identity system. To acknowledge this influence is to reflect the American culture in the visual language of graphic design.

**Cross-Cultural Applicability**

“Tweaking language is fun. There is something artificial and poetic to it, making it a tricky yet effective design tool that lets ideas stick out – in a fashion that could even be bolder than an extra-bold typeface” (Victionary 4)

The cross-cultural applicability of type in branding becomes necessary when dealing with brands in the international market. Scholars Julien Cayla and Eric J. Arnould have agreed that the international marketing has proposed a universalizing approach—in other words, ethnocentric—to branding; which becomes precarious as the global market develops (Cayla, and Arnould 88). Although this opinion focuses on managerial problems, the visual aspect of the brand, including typography, can also be added to the list. The increasingly globalized world demands different kinds of connector tools to demystify, depoliticize and reconcile multiple cultures. That means that typography can be that connector in branding and that it can improve communication and cultural representation, for the sake of national identification, education of multiculturalism, and
tolerance of different cultures. To use graphics to represent cross-cultural values is to transcend cultural borders using a universal language (Victionary 5).

When any intercultural relationship happens, intercultural strategies are consciously or unconsciously applied to the cross-cultural encounters (Berry 352). Acculturation strategies can be essential in two ways: assimilation/integration or separation/marginalization (Berry 353). Graphic design and typography per se is a powerful tool that should be used in branding to target multiple cultures without marginalizing or misrepresenting one of the cultures. To assimilate and to integrate cultural aspects is to value their individualities, but address the power in their integration as well.

The field of cross-cultural psychology is of critical support to the understanding of the cultural aspects of both Brazil and United States, and how they can be used to strengthen the use of branding design between these countries. According to John W. Berry, the definition of cross-cultural psychology is as follows. “Cross-cultural psychology is the study: of similarities and differences in individual psychological functioning in various cultural and ethnocultural groups; of the relationships between psychological variables and socio-cultural, ecological and biological variables; and of ongoing changes in these variables” (Berry 3). Considering that both culture and typography have psychological effects on any individual or society, they both indeed can be categorized according to the response they generate in an individual or a group of individuals. The survey that I have created to complement this thesis, detailed in the next
section, tests the cultural understanding of individuals of each of the two countries, and
show the differences in how each culture sees themselves.

As an example in branding, Nike designs the soccer uniform for both Brazilian
and American national teams. Nike is a global brand and has its brand guidelines and
typography rules. The typography on the some uniforms, however, are different
depending on the country, which reflects the careful reflection of each cultural relevancy.
The numbers in the Brazilian uniforms of 2015 were curvier and softer, much more
informal looking and warmer. The humanist sans serif, as seen in the first section, is a
more approachable type of sans serif, representing relatable characteristics to people’s
way of writing. The numbers in the American uniform of the same year, on the other
hand, are slab serifs, typefaces which present heavy serifs with minimal bracketing, with
imperceptible changes in stroke weight. The typography chosen has a squarish look, with
angular breaks in the letters and numbers. The overall look and feel are of confidence and
assertiveness.


It is not a coincidence that Nike and Coca-Cola were mentioned in the survey as being part of the cultural identity of both Brazil and the United States. Although they were mentioned more times among the American interviewees, they were also mentioned
by at least one Brazilian (see fig. 20).

![Bar chart showing common brands mentioned between Americans and Brazilians](chart)

**Figure 20.** Common Brands Mention Between Americans And Brazilians

These brands are American, but they have become global brands that need to adapt and be relatable to multiple cultures. That is when cross-cultural research as it pertains to the impact of graphic design and the understanding of the power of typography becomes important to branding.

As mentioned in section one, the American vernacular style influenced the Coca-Cola logotype design. The brand is part of the American history in branding, but its casual/script logotype also appeals to the Brazilian culture.

Understanding brands as part of cultural identity helps in analyzing them in their historical, social, and local context. To have a cultural approach to global branding is to
avoid the universal notion of branding by acknowledging the diversity branding can take across cultures. To recognize that is to make careful decisions in the visual identity of a brand, including its typography choices in various layers that define the visual system.
SECTION THREE: SURVEY FINDINGS

Survey Analysis & Appropriate Type Usage

My thesis survey had a total of nine questions, and it was answered by a total of 87 people: 45 Brazilians and 42 Americans. The Brazilians that answered the questionnaire belonged to a niche that speaks English as their foreign language, so they were able to understand the questions of this survey. Although only 5% of the Brazilian population knows how to speak English, they represent the most crucial portion of Brazilian cultural influencers, which means that they symbolize more than that in numbers of cultural identity (Amorim).

Since specific typefaces have distinctive personality traits, it is essential to consider the responses they create in the viewer. If we are dealing with typography use in branding that talks explicitly about cultural relevancy, typography’s personality provides a way to match precise characteristics that are common to the culture targeted and the typeface. Each type category triggers a particular response, which can be a direct representation of cultural identity.

The survey shows clear patterns for each cultural identity, which is helpful to define relevant culture traits and match with appropriate typography use for branding that deals with cultural aspects.
Figure 21. Adjectives Described By Brazilians

Figure 22. Adjectives Described By Americans
The difference between the two countries is very discernible. In Brazil, the categories “friendly, easy-going” and “warm, informal” are mentioned much more than any other category, and they cover 91% of the Brazilian interviewees. In the United States, the categories “assertive, confident” and “reliable, strong” are the most popular, representing 78% of the American interviewees. If this data matches with the typography characteristics chart proposed in the first section of this thesis, it provides significant insight on appropriate type for each of the two cultural identities (see fig. 23 and fig. 24).

Figure 23. Americans Adjectives Matched With Typography Moods

As mentioned in section one, slab serifs appeared in theatrical poster designs in the United States during the nineteenth-century, and the same style is still addressed today in America to convey a vintage and nostalgic mood. Geometric Sans Serifs are more used in corporate branding, as they are suited to transmit the feelings of reliability
and strength. To put this valuable information in charts is to be able to inform graphic designers about typography and cultural voice.

![Brazil: Adjective with Typography](image)

**Figure 24.** Brazilian Adjectives Matched With Typography Moods

In Brazil, Casual/Script and Humanist Sans Serifs are indeed the most used to depict brands relevant to cultural identity. They convey the warm, informal, and friendly aspect of the Brazilian culture. Whereas script typefaces are used to illustrate a more vernacular and street style feel, the Humanists Sans Serifs are used in corporate branding.

The survey question about the prevailing cultural mood reaffirms the cultural characteristics of each country. “Happy” and “Excited” were the most mentioned by Brazilians, corresponding to a total of 65% of the interviewees; while 62% of the Americans answered “Stressed” or “Tense” (see fig. 25).
Figure 25. Brazilian And American Mood Comparison

The survey also asked participants about a shape that reminded them of their own culture to see if there was any pattern according to letterforms shapes and cultural identity (see fig. 26). The answers were also different between the two cultures and confirmed the previous cultural/typography relationships. 65% of the Brazilians answered “circle” or “triangle,” circles imply softness and movement—and are associated with the letterforms of casual fonts—whereas triangles may be related to the breaks of the Brazilian vernacular fonts. 56% of the Americans answered “rectangle” or “square,” shapes which transmit stability and trust. These characteristics go together with the most
mentioned American characteristic of “assertive, confident” and “reliable, strong.” Slab serifs have square brackets, and geometric sans serifs also provoke a sense of strength to the reader.

Figure 26. Brazilian And American Shape Comparison

Color can also be a helpful element to incorporate into typography to potentialize the desired effect. In regards to color and culture, both countries seem to identify their flag colors as representative of their identity. 27 out of 42 Americans chose “red” and 11 chose “blue.” The Brazilian answers varied between “green,” “blue,” and “yellow.” Green was the most popular color, corresponding to 30 out of 45 participants, while 7 chose blue and 6 chose yellow. Since blue is a characteristic color for both countries, it may be a more appropriate color to be used in cross-cultural branding interactions.
Overall, the survey conducted for this thesis was beneficial to confirm the theoretical research about typography in branding in relationship to the culture it refers to. Hopefully, graphic designers will do more studies like this one with even more participants and among different cultures other than the Brazilian and the American, to provide even more useful data on this topic.
CONCLUSION

With my thesis, I have investigated the phenomenon of the use of typography in branding in Brazil and in the United States. My goal was to understand the importance of type in branding and how the place in which it is used affects the whole visual effect of the branding message, to create culturally relevant visual identities.

In the introductory part of the thesis, I provided my hypothesis and raised two questions that presented the framework for this research. The questions are repeated once again below, along with their appropriate and significant answers.

Hypothesis:

Branding, which is used to promote brands and services, intrinsically relies on effective typography, which is utilized to give the linguistics a written form and to function as a visual communicative tool that reflects its cultural environment.

Question One:

What role does typography play in branding message throughout the communication process in these two countries?

The primary and most direct use of typography is to give messages a written form. The other meaningful layers, however, reflect different cultural understandings and perceptions of the world and should be taken into account to empower the branding
message. The letterforms carry meaning and character that also match intrinsic cultural traits. Typeface choice, form, size, weight, color, and tracking can change the way individuals perceive the message, thus altering its meaning as well. Brands that intend to appeal to the Brazilian or the American, or both countries, should use typography choice wisely to address that in their visual identity systems.

Question Two:

Is typography more than just a way of transmitting a verbal message? Does it differ according to each culture?

Typefaces have a tremendous impact on readers. Depending on the context in which they are used, their effect can be maximized. Each letterform’s intrinsic characteristics make them more than just shapes, and these characteristics can be matchable to cultural traits as well. Historical experiences, personality, mood, and cultural background match typefaces and viewers. Choosing the right font following the audience, and specific cultural identity for branding allows for more appropriate messages. The demand for relatable typefaces in branding lead to the appearance of patterns in typefaces that differ in Brazil and the United States. The more suitable typefaces are, the better it is as they can represent their cultural identity. The survey made during this thesis research proves the different patterns of the Brazilian and the American cultural identity in relationship to mood, characteristics, and brand image.
This thesis is an initial step towards this theoretical approach to help navigate typographic use in branding among countries with different cultural values. Future work should consider the following topics:

- Typeface design in branding use and their characteristics should be more thoughtful, and features used for typography may be comprehensive, diverse, and culturally relevant.

- In the future, graphic designers may select typography based on their intrinsic moods, using it as a tool to help make branding related to cultural traits more accurate, and specific.

- This thesis's methodology included some limitations that should be addressed, such as participants' reading comprehension in the language used, and sample size. All these factors need further examination. Future research may take into consideration the translation of the survey and the distribution of interviewees based on age and education background and different local cultures within one country.
APPENDIX

The survey results chart are in the following pages. Column 1 stands for each participant. Below are the survey questions:

1. Where do you live?

2. What is your age group?

3. What is your gender?

4. Please choose one adjective that would describe your country’s culture?

5. If you had to describe your country’s culture in 1-3 words, what would they be?

6. If you had to choose one color to describe your country, what would it be? The color choice can be related to a thing or a memory that strongly reminds you of your country.

7. If you could choose one mood to describe the overall mood of your country, what would it be?

8. If you could choose one shape to describe your country, what would it be? The shape choice can be related to a thing a memory that strongly reminds you of your country.

9. If you could name one brand that represents the overall mood of your country’s culture, which brand would that be? Think about a well-known brand that you think it is authentic to your country’s culture. It can be any type of brand.
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<th>Age Group:</th>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>Adjective:</th>
<th>1st Word:</th>
<th>2nd Word:</th>
<th>3rd Word:</th>
<th>Color:</th>
<th>Mood:</th>
<th>Shape:</th>
<th>Brand:</th>
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<td>Undeveloped</td>
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2015.
CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Carolina Coimbra Ganon

ADDRESS: 3104 Plover Rd. Louisville, KY, 40213

DOB: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - September 7, 1991

EDUCATION: University of Louisville
August 2014 — May 2018
BFA in Graphic Design, Minor in Art History  GPA 3.94

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Adobe Creative Jam (judge’s choice 2016)
ADDY’s Awards (gold and best of show student awards 2018)
Packaging of the World (featured work 2018)
Hite Merit Scholarship (2015 — 2018)