

Chapter 4

Variable Fonts From Pioneer Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The impact of fonts on user experience and brand perception has been widely discussed by a variety of specialists. In 2016 a new technology called variable fonts came out with a promise of lighter font files, responsiveness, variability, and adaptability on the web across devices. This chapter reminds users of parameters that should be taken into account when choosing a font and discuss ways in which brands can implement variable fonts to increase their performance. Unique perspective on variable fonts from specialist in different domains related to variable fonts and their implementation will be proposed in this chapter as it aims to focus on providing unique insider knowledge on currently developing projects that implement this new technology as well as on ideas and possibilities that might interest future e-learning and e-business brands.

INTRODUCTION

Type designers and developers are key individuals in regard to font design and font implementations. The choice of font can have an effect on users' opinions about the brand (Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004), generating emotions and stimulating customer demand. Responsive design is important for businesses and e-learning platforms as it enables flexibility across platforms and interfaces. Unfortunately, while web design is often flexible and responsive, regular fonts are static and do not enable smooth variations across devices. In 2016, Apple, Google, and Microsoft announced a new software that allows users to store several variable font designs in one file, making a single font behave like multiple fonts. Variable fonts are a new technology that enables glyphs' outlines to morph in between variable style shapes and offers flexibility to responsive design. Variable fonts can create better type hierarchy on websites compared to regular fonts, visual consistency, and better readability across screen interfaces, which are important aspects in web usability (Bhatia et al., 2011) and user experience. Compared to regular fonts, variable

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fonts exist in one lighter file that encapsulates the entire font family, speeds up webpage download time, has a smaller disc footprint, requires fewer server requests, and improves performance, readability and delivery. Screen adaptability makes text more accessible and memorable; then, users' attention to the website grows, generating a positive response to the brand (Nakilcioğlu, 2013). With this new technology, clients can differentiate their businesses from others by fine-tuning fonts and creating custom styles of fonts for specific purposes and devices (Hudson, 2018). Moreover, variable fonts benefit designers and brands as they enable them to choose the exact weight and width of a font for their interfaces and displays. Variable fonts, as a responsive typography, have the potential to fine-tune digital design based on screen orientation, reading distance, or the size of the screen (Hudson, 2018), morphing the text with the responsive web layout.

Variable fonts have emerged in the recent years. However, academics have yet to study their implications. The paper attempts to contribute to the lack of literary work in the field of variable fonts and provide the field with the first academic publication on the matter. In order to demonstrate the importance of taking into account variable fonts in business and e-learning, this paper consists of two parts that aim to use different perspectives to research how variable fonts can generate a better user experience than with regular fonts. This paper will begin with a background and literature review on regular fonts, as academic research on variable fonts is almost non-existent. Researchers can transpose and adapt the hypothesis proposed by academics in regard to readability and user experience surrounding regular fonts onto the variable fonts issue. In the second section, this paper will propose an interview summary conducted among currently developing variable fonts studios, developers, and type specialists in order to acquire professional opinions on the subject of variable fonts and user experience. It is crucial to take into consideration insider knowledge from individuals who create and develop variable fonts as they take into account design-related issues that impact user experience. In summary, this paperer will summarize various aspects of variable fonts that should be taken into account to improve user experience.

BACKGROUND

In the age of globalization, cultures affect brands linguistic elements, consumer behavior, and users' responses to brands' attitudes (Schmitt et al., 1994; Zhang & Schmitt, 2001). Brand and corporate-identity elements, such as brand names, trademarks, brand personalities, logotypes, fonts, colors, and shapes, contribute to distinct consumer perception of a brand and better business performance (Grinsven & Das, 2014; Henderson et al., 2004a; Hutton, 1997; Kristensen & Grønhaug, 2007; Puškarević et al., 2014; Zaichkowsky, 2010). Brand personality (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) and brand names can generate favorable impressions of the product and influence consumers' behaviors (Argo et al., 2010). In marketing strategies, the most persuasive design element for accomplishing communication goals are fonts (Henderson et al., 2004b). Fonts are involved in brand perception (Childers & Jass, 2002) as "typography deals with the form, spacing and layout of words and sentences in the text written or displayed communication messages" (Mccarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002, p. 664).

Typographic website information consists of several aspects that affect brands' success (Salehi et al., 2012) and brands' perception (Nakilcioğlu, 2013). Studies have shown that web page design (Wang et al., 2011), color (Chadwick-Dias et al., 2007; K.-C. Huang et al., 2008; Tavassoli, 2001), images, and text can have an impact on users' desires to engage with digital content (Diouf & Lemoine, 2019). Reading can provoke feelings of excitement, joy, serenity, or even distress (Bayer et al., 2010; Lemoine, 2012).

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