

APPLICATIONS OF TYPEFACE SEMANTICS IN DESIGNING NAME IDENTIFICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Names reflect the prima facie image of a person/place/object/space. "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (Shakespeare, 1594-96). Likewise, in the visual design of a name using type and expressions, the design should reflect the very essence and value embedded in the semantics of that name. Schriver (2000) has described a 'typeface' as an accent, gesture and intonation of a text. Therefore, the choice of a typeface has an effect on the quality of the communication of a word's meaning. In visual communication, semantics plays an instrumental role in conveying the meaning of an expression to an audience. This paper analyzes and presents the synthesis of visual semantics of name identifications (written in Latin script) designed as part of a course conducted on typography. The designed semantics as part of different typefaces used to depict names of social figures applies either iconography or other known symbolic forms. The complete design process involves selection of typefaces as well as image representation metaphors (iconic or symbolic). It is a nine-fold step-by-step methodology to arrive at the final designs of the names that imply a range of typeface semantics approach.

Keywords: Typography, Typeface Semantics, Type and Expressions, Name Identifications

INTRODUCTION

It has been a general belief that 'names' form an intrinsic feature of a person's identity. If the person is a social figure, the importance of this feature may be considered more in context of social status and image representation. Research in the area of semantics, semiotics and typeface associations have indicated 'text' as 'the body' for which 'typography/type' is the visual 'dress/costume'. With respect to the history (Lechner, 1981; Raible, 1991) and practice (Willberg, 2002; Willberg and Forssman, 1999) of typography, 'body' and 'dress' are complementary and apt metaphors for how graphic designers and typographers might look at their work. However, when applied to possible perspectives of linguistics towards typography, these metaphors highlight two contrasting approaches. One approach views typography as the 'body' and assumes its role as a material precondition of any text. Just as there is no speech without voice qualities and intonation, there is no written document without (typo)-graphic qualities (Stockl, 2005). Therefore, in this context, when names of people are visually represented, they seem to express an inherent semantics that is communicated subtly in the type forms. Though studies have been done to understand and reveal the structure, functions as well as basis of different type styles of fonts used to communicate varied forms of semantics; the current paper, however, elaborates on the

designer's perspective of bringing forth the underlying semiosis applied in the visually designed letterform or a group of letterforms in the names of socially well known people. This paper presents the said approach associated with the symbolic treatment given to the letterforms as part of popular names of public figures from India and abroad.

NINE-FOLD METHODOLOGY FOR NAME IDENTITY DESIGNS

The foremost design thinking and concept development process, as given by the applied in all the designs of name identifications of well known people is as follows:

- 1. Social Figure's name:** The name could be a big name in cinema & other entertainment areas, politics, sports, fashion, social service, defence forces, performing arts, crafts etc (Fig. 1).
- 2. Overview:** A short overview of the selected social personality. What makes him or her personality unique? (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Selection and overview process sheets for E.V.R. Periyar and Dieter Rams

- 3. Personality image:** This is an actual image of a person that embodies the traits you wish to include in the design with a typeface or letterforms. This makes the personality less abstract. Pick a famous/ socially well known person. If he/she is representative that already embodies the personality, use that instead. Describe the attributes of the mascot that communicate the brand's personality (Fig. 2).
- 4. Brand traits:** List five to seven traits that best describe your social figure along with a trait that you want to avoid. This helps those designing and writing for this design persona to create a consistent personality while avoiding the traits that would take the name designs for the social figures in the wrong direction (Fig. 2).

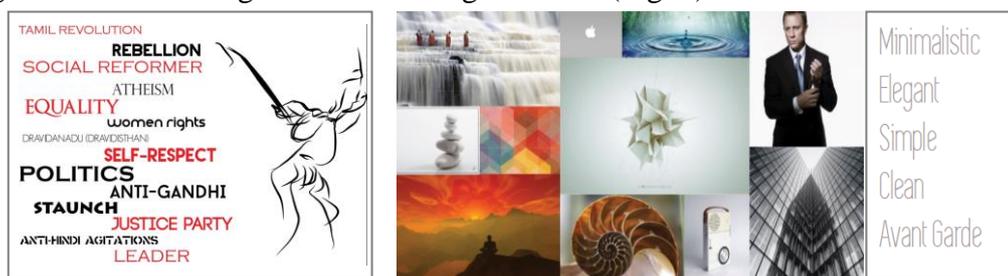


Figure 2: Personality Image and Brand traits analyzed for Periyar and Dieter Rams

- 5. Personality map:** Create map personalities on an X / Y axis. The X axis represents the degree to which the personality is unfriendly or friendly; the Y axis shows the degree of submissiveness or dominance (Fig. 3).
- 6. Visual lexicon:** As a designer creating this document for yourself, you can create a visual lexicon in your design persona that includes an overview of the colors, typography, and visual style that conveys your brand's personality. You can be general about these concepts, or include a mood board (Fig. 3).

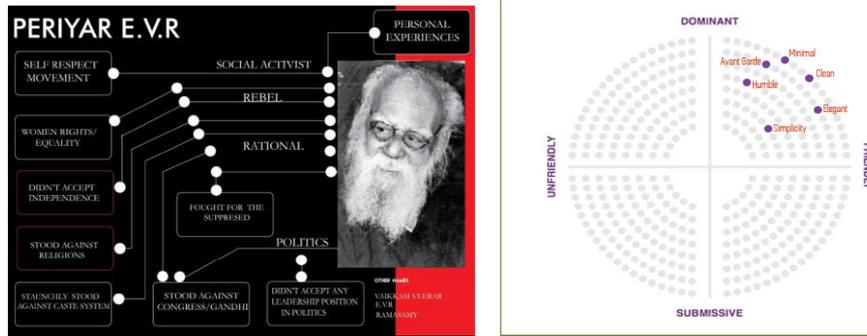


Figure 3: Personality mapping of famous social figures Periyar (Indian context) and Dieter Rams (Global context)

7. **Typographic Voice:** If the social figure in the costume of the typeface could talk, how would it speak? What would it say? Would it speak with a folksy vernacular or a refined, erudite clip? Describe the specific aspects of the selected social figure’s voice and how it might change in various communication situations. People change their language and tone to fit the situation, and so should your brand’s voice (Fig. 4 and 5).
8. **Copy examples:** Provide examples of copy that might be used in different situations in your design process. This helps writers understand how the design persona should communicate (Fig. 4).
9. **Engagement methods:** Describe the emotional engagement methods you might use in your final design to support the design persona and create a memorable experience (Fig. 3 and 4 and 5).



Figure 4: Typographic voice of different type styles selected for E.V.R Periyar



Figure 5: Typographic voice of different type styles and other visual engagement requirements designed for Sudha Chandran’s name identity

ICONIC AND SYMBOLIC FORMS

Iconicity in the name identifications captures some feature of the social figure's face/personality or other personalized forms (such as signatures). In contrast to this, the approach of using symbolic forms in the name identities presents an abstraction in one or two letterforms for subtle communication of one or the other trait of the selected social figure (see Table 1). The following visual compendium of iconic forms as well as symbolic forms in name identifications designed by few master's students as part of their course on 'Basic Typography' are as follows:

Table 1: Forms-Expressions (Semantics) application to represent different name identifications of socially well known figures (context: national and international)

Social Figure name	Iconic	Symbolic
 (film actress and fashion icon)		No
 (Industrial Designer)	No	
 (Architect)	No	
 (hollywood actress)		Yes
 (famous designer who gave India 'The Rupee Symbol')		No

CONCLUSION

There appears a lot of scope to play with Type and Expression to give an appropriate visual meaning to a text. The various attempts to bring forth the live identities of these social figures by using Type & Expression (Semantics) as a visual tool opens up newer and more creative possibilities for brand identity designs in popular context. The nine-fold methodology to develop the concept design plays an instrumental role in furthering the selection of iconic or symbolic forms to apply in designing and adorning the letterforms sitting on the visual stage of Type with indigenous expressions with their unique visual communication.

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