Title:

Do You Believe? *An examination of the effectiveness of Baskerville as a display type across print, environmental and social media*

Keywords:

Baskerville, display type, typeface effectiveness

Abstract of the paper:

The effectiveness and authority of the typeface Baskerville is well established, but it is a generally accepted notion that it's main function is as a text type. Inspired by a recent online New York Times survey originated by Errol Morris intended to evaluate various typefaces and the impact they may have on information effectiveness, a class of graphic design students at the University of West Georgia have set out to investigate Morris' hypothesis that Baskerville presents information that is inherently more impactful. But the students are taking the examination of Baskerville one-step further: can it be as effective when used as display as it is as text type? This investigation is taking place in different circumstances on the campus of UWG which are intended to test the typeface's flexibility in print and outdoor environmental signage and in responses tallied on social media.

A series of simple but evocative questions centered on the opening phrase "do you believe…?" are designed and distributed around the UWG campus on printed posters and projected onto building walls at random using the typefaces Helvetica, Bradley Hand, and Baskerville. [In seeking alternate typefaces that would test font effectiveness, the students decided that the use of Comic Sans would be too obvious.] The presentation of the questions asks that the viewers respond to a Twitter address specific to the message they viewed. The numbers of responses are then evaluated based on which font the message appears in and the length and level of emotion in the responses.

The questions are:

Do you believe in UFOs?

Do you believe in evolution?

Do you believe in climate change?

Do you believe in God?

This presentation describes the process and the results of this non-scientific investigation and the conclusions reached by the design students based on their observations and comparisons of Baskerville's effectiveness not only as a display type, but also across several media.

References include the work of Errol Morris, "Are You and Optimist or a Pessimist?," New York Times "Opinionator", July 12, 2012, "Hear, All Ye People; Hearken, O Earth", Parts One and Two, New York Times "Opinionator", August 8, 2012 and "The Secret Life of Fonts," by Phil Renaud, Fadtastic blog, March 12, 2006.

Images of Work:

This particular investigation is in the process of implementation and study, so specific images are not yet available. The images provided are from examples of a similar investigation on campus that involved the students creating statements across campus using sidewalk chalk using specifically assigned typefaces.

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