

Public Abstract

First Name:Christopher

Middle Name:

Last Name:Melchiondo

Adviser's First Name:Laura

Adviser's Last Name:Johnston

Co-Adviser's First Name:Beverly

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Horvit

Graduation Term:FS 2017

Department:Journalism

Degree:MA

Title:Do fonts have politics? Typography and design of partisan and nonpartisan websites

This research identifies and analyzes design choices made by online liberal and conservative media outlets with a focus on typography to identify design elements and font characteristics as signs of political ideology. Most news media outlets, whether their objective is to report the truth as an independent fourth estate, persuade citizens toward a partisan agenda, or simply to make money, strive to gain and retain readers. To do this, they deal in credibility with their target audience. Some media sources target partisans and others do not, but they must persuade their readers that they are a credible source of necessary information. Typography can be part of the message — not just as part of the design's overall professionalism and credibility, but as a semiotic sign that lends meaning to the words (Stöckl, 2005). Left- and right-leaning sites use typography in similar ways that differentiate them from centrist sites, and sites may select specific typography to demonstrate either a liberal or conservative bias.

Nonpartisan websites do not seem to use serifs or sans serifs more often, but depending on how you classify the sites that lean slightly left and right, you will see a preference for sans serif. Liberal and center-left websites use many more serif headlines than centrists or conservatives, while conservative sites prefer sans serif headlines. Also, the least trusted sites, and the sites regarded as most partisan on both the left and the right, shared similar typography, most notably the use of sans serif headlines. The results of this research can be used to inform design decisions of nonpartisan, or partisan news outlets to help them gain credibility with their preferred audiences.