Digital media analysis to support type design teaching

Análise de mídias digitais para apoiar o ensino de design de tipos

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type design, teaching, digital media

This exploratory, descriptive research, with a qualitative approach, aimed to analyze digital media that present content and resources supporting digital type design teaching, from the perspective of information design principles. Therefore, based on the selection criteria (i) gratuity and (ii) potential use in type design teaching, seven media were selected and analyzed; they were classified as: repository, social media, websites, and games. As a result, we had the characterization of each media, the description relative to the type design content, the comparison and discussion between media, considering the information design principles best followed, and the potential use for teaching purposes.

design de tipos, ensino, mídias digitais

Esta pesquisa exploratória, descritiva, com abordagem qualitativa, tem como objetivo analisar mídias digitais que apresentam conteúdo e recursos de apoio ao ensino de design de tipos digitais, sob a ótica dos princípios do design da informação. Assim sendo, a partir dos critérios de escolha (i) gratuidade e (ii) potencial uso no ensino de design de tipos, foram selecionadas e analisadas sete mídias classificadas como: repositórios, redes sociais, sites e jogos. Como resultado, obteve-se a caracterização de cada mídia, a descrição relativa ao conteúdo sobre design de tipos, a comparação e discussão entre as mídias considerando os princípios do design da informação melhor atendidos e potencialidade de uso para fins educacionais.

1 Introduction

Based on aesthetic, economic, ergonomic, and technical prerequisites, information design encompasses the analysis, organization, presentation, and interpretation of messages (Petterson, 1998). For this purpose, aspects such as content, language, and format must be considered to guarantee efficient communication. According to the International Information Institute, this practice aims to structure and plan information to meet the public's needs. Thus, the main goal is to present clarity in the transmission of ideas, as a way to guarantee that the messages are created, produced, and distributed, allowing the target audience to interpret and comprehend

them without difficulties (Petterson, 2012; 2014). Oliveira et al. (2013) approach information design from the data organization aspect – which aims to simplify and make them useful – and from information presentation – related to graphic design – as it involves the planning and formatting of messages taking into account synthetic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects, in addition to the medium in which the information is inserted in.

Among the many elements used in information design, the text takes a central role, since informational pieces rarely dismiss the use of written language to transmit messages. Therefore, typography presupposes all communication types, being understood as an area that studies the history, anatomy, development, and use of types. The purpose of typography is precisely the transmission and comprehension of the presented text's message (Hammerschmidt; Fontoura, 2011; Lebedenco, 2019; Woloszyn & Gonçalves, 2024).

After several transformations throughout its chronology, typography was significantly boosted by the use of digital tools. They allowed for the development of digital type design, which involves the creation and systematization of typographic characters in font files (Hammerschmidt; Fontoura, 2011). The design process of digital types has been taught in undergraduate courses in Design and related areas, but due to its specific knowledge nature, it is not as in-depth as the content about typographic application (Cunha et al., 2019). There are many methods in type design, some were mapped in recent research, such as that of Cunha (2021). This study will apply as its basis the method/workflow of Henestrosa, Meseguer, and Scaglione (2014), whose stages are: planning stage, design stage, production stage, and post-production stage. Therefore, it is clear that due to its complexity, type design teaching can be supported by digital media and resources.

In this sense, it is possible to notice that social demands contribute to digital technology evolution, making society, technology, and communication inseparable (Mallmann, 2010). Digital media have characteristics that allow their context to be understood. Canavilhas (2014) highlights three properties – hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimediality – that directly relate to the content and, in their combination, demand maximum user engagement in the information consumption process. By hypertextuality, the author refers to the capability of connecting digital texts among themselves, provided by hypertext. Interactivity is a intrinsic property of technology and relates to the process in which the user can determine for themselves how to consume information. In turn, multimediality is the property that refers to the involvement of different elements in media to communicate one message.

Given the above, as exemplified by the **digital media** that were mapped, identified, and analyzed can be classified as: **repositories**, **social media**, **games**, or **websites**. Repositories are understood as a digital collection whose content can be stored locally or remotely for later retrieval, in addition to allowing the management of resources and metadata (Cechinel, 2015). Social media are virtual spaces for public expression and exposure, in which there is user profile creation, interaction through reactions, sharing, comments, and relationships between people and companies (Recuero, 2009). Digital games

are considered communication platforms, which are characterized by the ability to abstract concepts and real events, providing reflection and skills to the player. Websites are pages of interlinked content, hosted on a server and identified by a domain. Their main function is to communicate with their target audience through proper language (Flor & Vazin, 2017). Although they are not developed specifically for type design teaching, these digital media present strong potential as teaching tools.

Given this, this research **aimed to analyze examples of digital media that present content and resources supporting digital type design teaching, from the perspective of information design principles**. This research intends to contribute to studies and strategies targeted at type design teaching.

2 Materials and methods

The research in question takes a qualitative approach and is therefore not capable of generalization. It has an exploratory and descriptive purpose (Prodanov, 2013), and was developed based on the following procedures:[1]

1. Search for digital media;
2. Selection and grouping of media, considering their characteristics and the inclusion criteria;
3. Analysis considering content about the type design process and information design principles.

The media for analysis were selected based on **two criteria** (i) gratuity, allowing for democratic information access, and (ii) potential teaching use in different stages of the type design process, ranging from the initial stage of idea generation to more advanced stages, as typography tests. Media were also selected based on their language: Portuguese and English. Due to the scope of the analysis, priority was given to texts and images in interactive online media, based on the granularity and quality of the content they present. These media do not cover the entire process of teaching digital type design, as would online courses or textbooks. All analyzed media are merely examples drawn from repositories in the field, and were classified in this study as: repositories, social media, games, or websites.

The analysis sought to identify characteristics of these contents and resources that allowed them to be applied in type design teaching, at what moments of the process, and for what purpose. Thus, such characteristics were analyzed according to the information design principles, by Pettersson (2012), which are:

- **Functional Principles** FP : involve analyzing the factors at play (medium, message, and receivers) in order to define a suitable structure of textual and non-textual graphic elements to represent the information. Related sub-principles include defining the problem, providing structure, clarity, simplicity, emphasis, and unity.

1 Note about the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the making of this article: ChatGPT was sparingly used to format references, summarize and translate books into other languages, correct and rearrange research texts, especially in relation to the introductory theoretical framework

- **Administrative Principles** AP : refer to the resources aimed at ensuring users' access to quality information whenever needed, while also considering financial and ethical issues. Sub-principles include access to information, information costs, information ethics, and quality assurance.
- **Aesthetic Principles** EP : involve using aesthetic appeal as a way to make information more attractive and inviting to the user. Their sub-principles focus on aesthetic harmony and proportion.
- **Cognitive Principles** CP : are opposed to complexity in informational materials, aiming to make the content as clear, simple, and understandable as possible, thereby supporting the user's cognitive process. Sub-principles include facilitating attention, perception, processing, and memory.

After the selection, based on the criteria outlined above, each media was classified and described for later analysis. The analysis included handling of each resource and the textual description of each principle. Afterwards, the results were discussed in terms of the possibility of the resources being applied in teaching.

3 Results and discussion

In the stage 2 of research, selection, a total of seven media were found. They were listed and grouped based on their characteristics. Table 1 presents the characteristics of each media regarding its development objective, its intended use, and its contents and resources presented that can aid in type design teaching. Given the stages of the type design process, as defined by Henestrosa, Meseguer, and Scaglione (2014), the intended use of each resource can be related to the main stages of type design teaching.

Repositories, websites, social media, and games were considered as they present content and resources more relevant to type design teaching. The following table succinctly presents the characteristics of the main selected media.

Table 1 Digital Media. Source: Made by the authors (2025).

Type of Media	Name	Description	Objective	Intended use	Process stage
Repositories	Type Design Resources[2]	**Repository** of type design resources. Covers from the basics to managing your foundry.	To gather resources in a growing, public, and collaborative type design collection.	To assist with specific questions, from the **type design process** to the foundry **management**.	All
Social Media	Type Design Class[3]	Open **Profile** on Instagram dedicated to publishing tips about type design.	To show, dynamically and visually, how to draw digital fonts.	To assist in the teaching of vectorial drawing, with practical tips.	Design Stage

2 https://typedesignresources.com/

3 https://www.instagram.com/typedesignclass/

Table 1 Digital Media. Source: Made by the authors (2025). (continued)

Type of Media	Name	Description	Objective	Intended use	Process stage
Websites	Fonts In Use[4]	**Website** that works as a catalog of fonts' graphic applications.	To show different font uses.	To assist in reference research.	Planning Stage
	Type Cooker[5]	Interactive **Website** capable of generating requirements of a fictional and random briefing, matching the experience level needed.	To generate random briefings.	To assist in the project planning practice of **concept** creation.	Planning Stage
	Wakamai Fondue[6]	**Website** that allows the visualization of all functions of a font file.	To show what a font can do.	To assist in font analysis.	Planning Stage
Games	Shape Type[7]	Interactive **Game** with exercises on adjusting the handles of bézier curves that generate the vector drawing.	To complete the vectorial drawing, the closest to the ideal as possible.	To assist in the visualization and understanding of vectorial drawing.	Design Stage
	Kerning Game[8]	Interactive **Game** with space adjustment exercises, such as kerning pairs.	To arrange letters, controlling the space.	To assist in the perception of the space between letters.	Production and Post-production Stages

4 https://fontsinuse.com/
5 https://typecooker.com/
6 https://wakamaifondue.com/
7 https://shape.method.ac/
8 https://type.method.ac/

3.1 Analysis results

Following steps one and two, search and selection, seven media were analyzed, namely: Type Design Resources, Type Design Class, Fonts In Use, Type Cooker, Wakamai Fondue, Shape Type, and Kerning Game. The analysis results are shown below.

3.1.1 Analysis by type of media: Repository

The **repository** Type Design Resources (Figure 1) was planned and developed by Justin Penner to serve as "a growing, public, collaborative collection of type design resources" (Type Design Resources, 2025).

The digital repository has a well-defined summary to guide the user according to their needs. Its main characteristic is **hypertextuality**, in which each entry has a link to certain material available online; therefore, there is no incorporation of this content in the repository itself.

The repository information is structured by themes, starting with general aspects of learning and type design initiation, followed by more in-depth questions, such as project management by professionals established in the job market who seek to start a business.

Regarding the use of information design principles, the main benefit of repositories is access to information, since they can be hosted on free

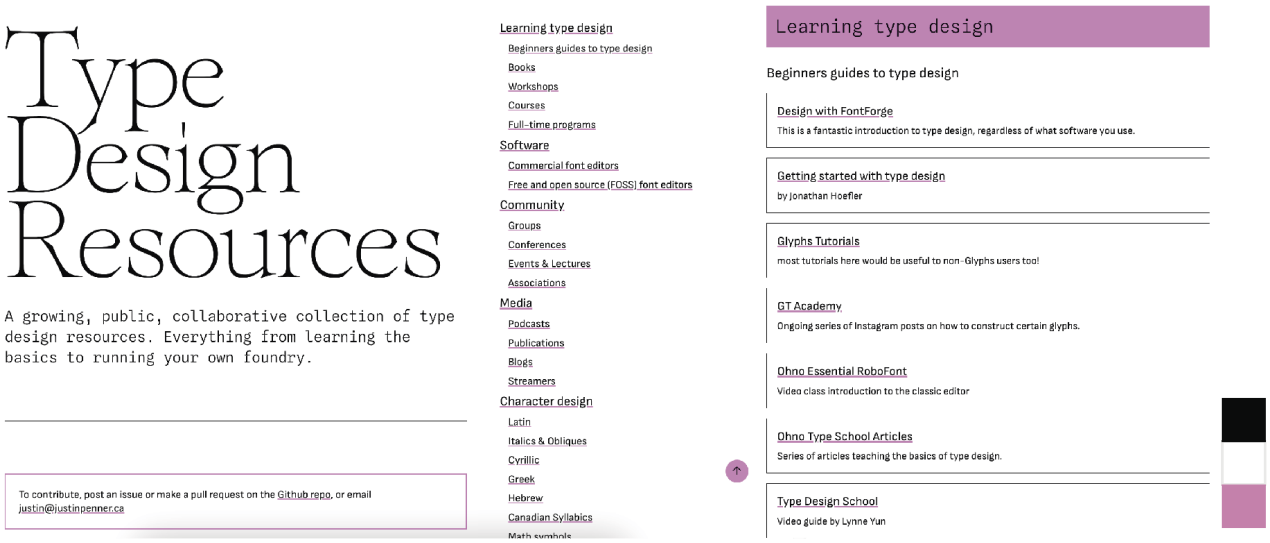

Figure 1 Repository Type Design Resources. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Type Design Resources.

platforms, such as Github , Notion , among others, thus relating to the administrative principles. This favoritism can be seen in repositories with resources integrated into their system as well as in those where there is a redirect to the content's original webpage. About the functional principles, the repositories provide index-based structures with clearly visible topics, although with limited contextualization. The aesthetic principles can be attributed to the graphic choices in this type of media. However, the repositories allow for risky choices because of the modalities that redirect the user to content outside their system. This function of redirecting also implies less compliance with the cognitive principles, since by accessing information in another location, directed by the repository, the user can be distracted and encounter obstacles to returning to the main system.

Considering the information design principles, it was noted that the *repository* media mainly adheres to the administrative and functional principles. The following diagram summarizes the result.

Order of the Information Design Principles best followed by **repositories**:

\+ AP FP EP CP –

3.1.2 *Analysis by type of media: Social Media*

The **social media profile** called "Type Design Class" (Figure 2) is the result of the dissemination of theoretical and practical content by Viktor Baltus, a Dutch graphic and type designer, with the intent of making type design content publicly accessible.

Throughout its 234 posts, basic and advanced knowledge were addressed, such as "beginner mistakes" about vectorial drawing (that includes the basis of typographic rules and visual perception), tips about vectorial drawing

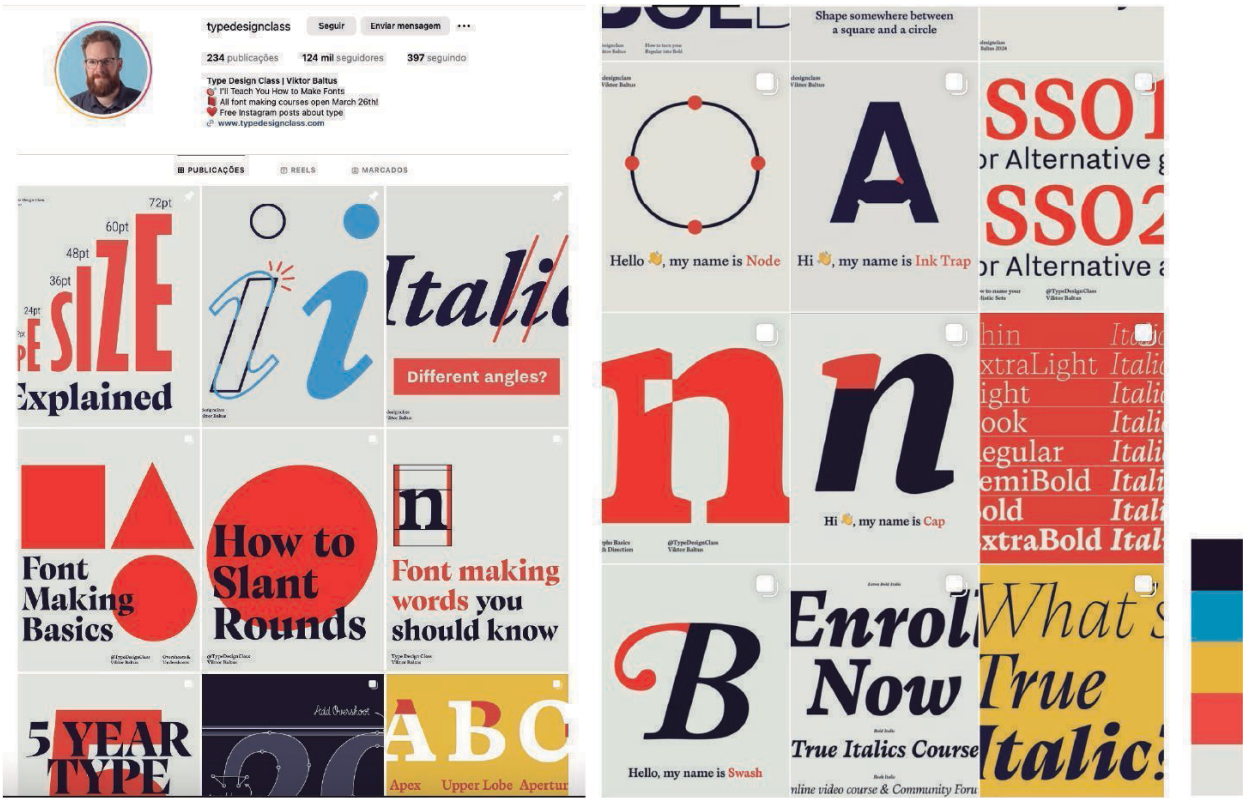

Figure 2 Type Design Class social media profile. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Type Design Class.

tools in specialized software programs, explanations about different types of typographic styles, digital resources that assist in the type design process, as well as concepts related to the type design practice, heavily associated with different types of software. Furthermore, the topic most relevant to type design teaching in the profile is "how to draw [certain glyph]", in which the designer displays didactic ability by showing what to do and what not to do to elevate the refinement level needed in type design.

In terms of media characteristics as a social media that can stimulate learning, the frequency of posts, and the short and well-balanced content stand out. On the other hand, its nature, based on **interactivity** with other profiles, can disperse the user's attention.

Being public and free, social media contribute mainly to information access, meeting the administrative principle of information design. After that, the analyzed media is connected to the aesthetic principle, due to the visual character sought on Instagram. In the profile example, there is a greater use of images, and the exploration of compositions that attract user attention. However, the textual content is less expressive and undervalued. Regarding functional principles, criteria related to graphic design, such as simplicity, emphasis, and unity, stand out in contrast to those related to information structure. The hierarchy and retrievability are compromised by the interface structure pattern used by Instagram. Moreover, by presenting multiple stimuli, this type of media can compromise information retention and the effectiveness of communication in educational content, making it

more difficult to achieve cognitive learning principles. Attention, as a limited resource, tends to become depleted with the use of multiple media, reducing performance on the primary task and affecting working memory – especially when the content is presented on social media platforms like Instagram, where attentional dispersion is greater (Shanmugasundaram & Tamilarasu, 2023; May & Elder, 2018; Araújo et al., 2015; Meyer, 2005; Kastrup, 2004). These characteristics concern the social media platform itself rather than the specific profile selected for analysis, but they still affect its use for educational purposes.

Considering the information design principles, it was noted that the social media profile as media mainly adheres to the administrative and aesthetic principles. The following diagram summarizes the result.

Order of the Information Design Principles best followed by **on the Instagram profile**:

\+ AP EP FP CP –

3.1.3 *Analysis by type of media: Websites*

The website Fonts In Use (Figure 3) is a public initiative of typographic curation that serves as historical documentation of font application. Its search function is based on typeface, format, industry, and period or historical movement. According to the website, its goal is to improve literacy and typographic appreciation, which helps the visual repertoire of its users. It is used especially by designers for project research, type selection, and to discover new ways of selecting and using fonts (Fonts In Use, 2025).

Its browsing is linear, based on terms or categories search, and the home screen is a random collection of all samples. This way, it works as a library of graphic publications, in which the goal is the viewing of different applications of the same font. For better recognition, the names and formats of each font accompany the images. By clicking on one, details such as description, copyright, and links to see the original work, when available, are shown, indicating its **multimediality**.

When thinking of its use for reference research, Fonts in Use can become a great substitute for social media marked by the generalization and reapplication of trends. With a simple and clear interface, the fonts gain a digital showcase capable of inspiring graphic and type designers to create authentically.

The website Type Cooker (Figure 4) contains categories of typographic classification, indicating characteristics that serve as project requirements for typographic characters. Based on **interactivity**, the requirements are randomly generated, depending on the experience level required, which ranges from beginner to professional.

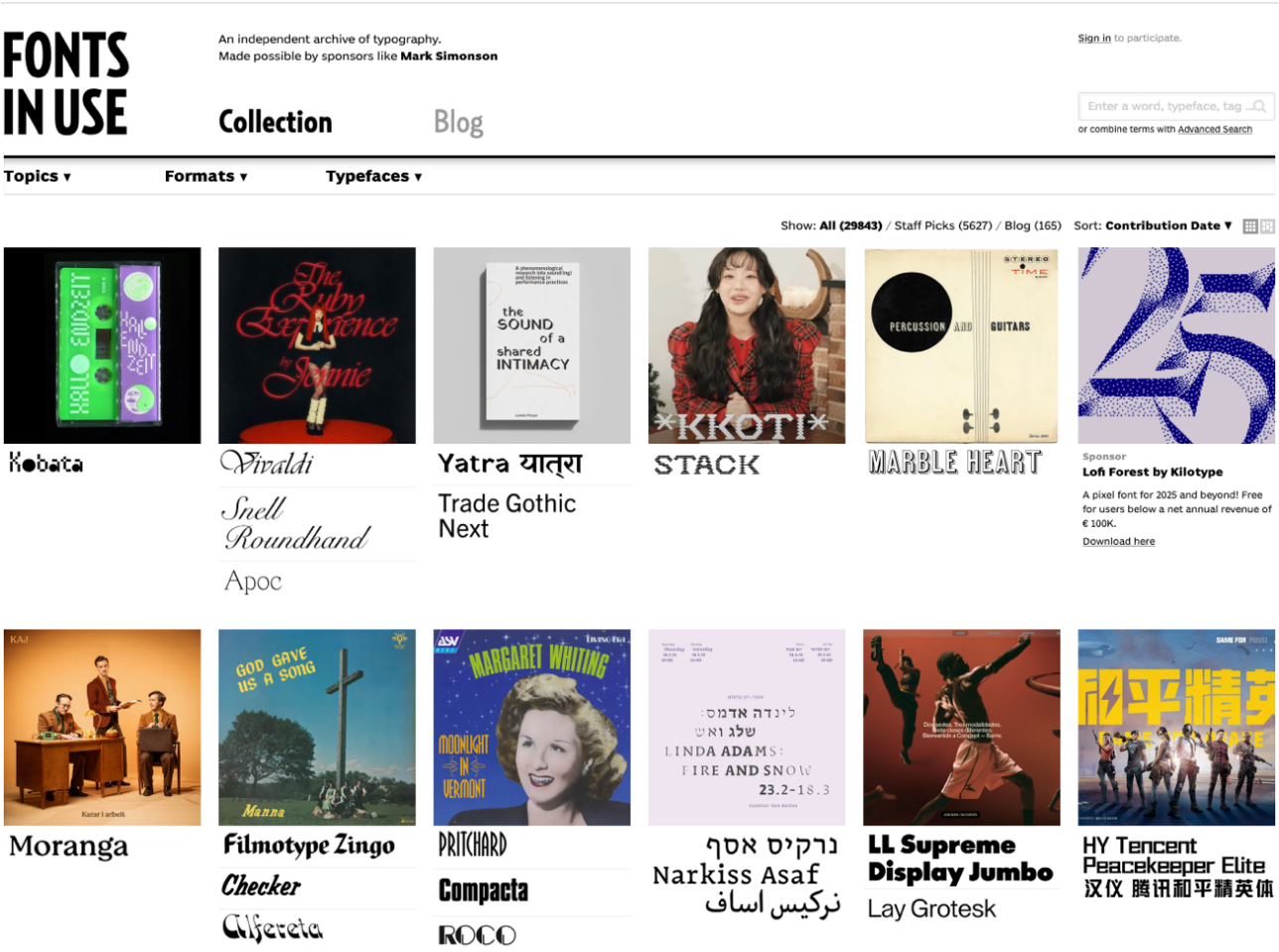

Figure 3 Website Fonts In Use. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Fonts In Use.

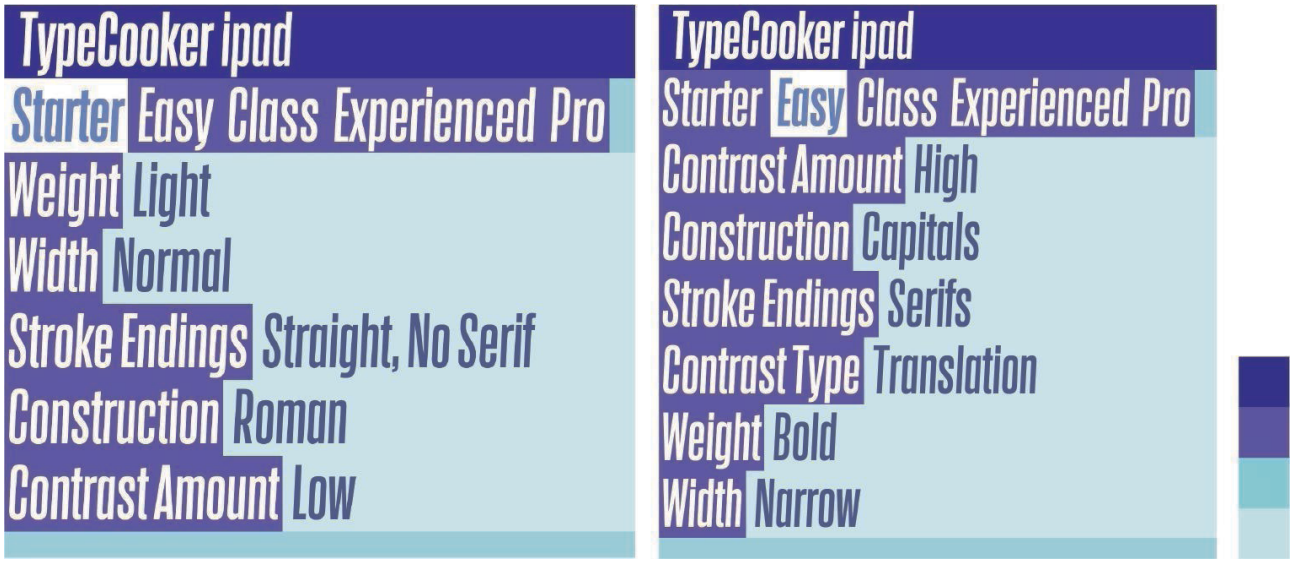

Figure 4 Website Type Cooker. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Type Cooker.

Designers can use these requirements to exercise character design or to create a fictional project, for academic purposes, or for entering the job market, for example. The typographic classifications delineate the glyph form to be drawn, indicating how its weight, width, stroke endings (serifs or not), construction (roman, italic, small caps, and other classifications, such as tabular and proportional alignment), contrast amount, contrast type should be, among other several decisions to be made in the design of a font.

Going beyond the exercise of character design, Type Cooker is also an important demonstrator of specific terms in the field. Beginners can get to know them through a first look at the website, which summarizes its meaning, or how a certain decision impacts the design, for example: high contrast amount means that "thicks are a lot thicker than the thins." (Type Cooker).

The Wakamai Fondue website (Figure 5) works through a font file upload. That way, by inserting the desired font, its technical functionalities, description, and character set (which shows all the font's characters) are displayed, due to its **multimediality**.

With a more casual aesthetic approach, just as its name "*what can my font do?*", the website can be very useful in the font analysis process. Because, by showing exactly "what the font can do", it is possible to establish requirements about the project scope, to analyze existing solutions, and to view the analyzed font applied in a long text, subtitles, or captions. With a clear and contemplative browsing, without a lot of interactions, the website can objectively summarize a font.

Websites, in general, have a set structure that guides the user with clarity and simplicity. Therefore, they mainly met the functional principle of information design. After that, this type of media contributes to the administrative principle, due to the ease of information access. By displaying the information with clarity and simplicity, the websites contribute to the cognitive process (and principle), as they allow for the direction of content and benefit information understanding for the user. The aesthetic principle depends on the type of content present – visual, audiovisual, and educational content. However, these elements might compromise the speed and performance of the system.

Considering the information design principles, it was noted that selected websites as media mainly adhere to the functional and administrative principles. The following diagram summarizes the result.

Order of the Information Design Principles best followed by **sites**:

\+ FP AP CP EP –

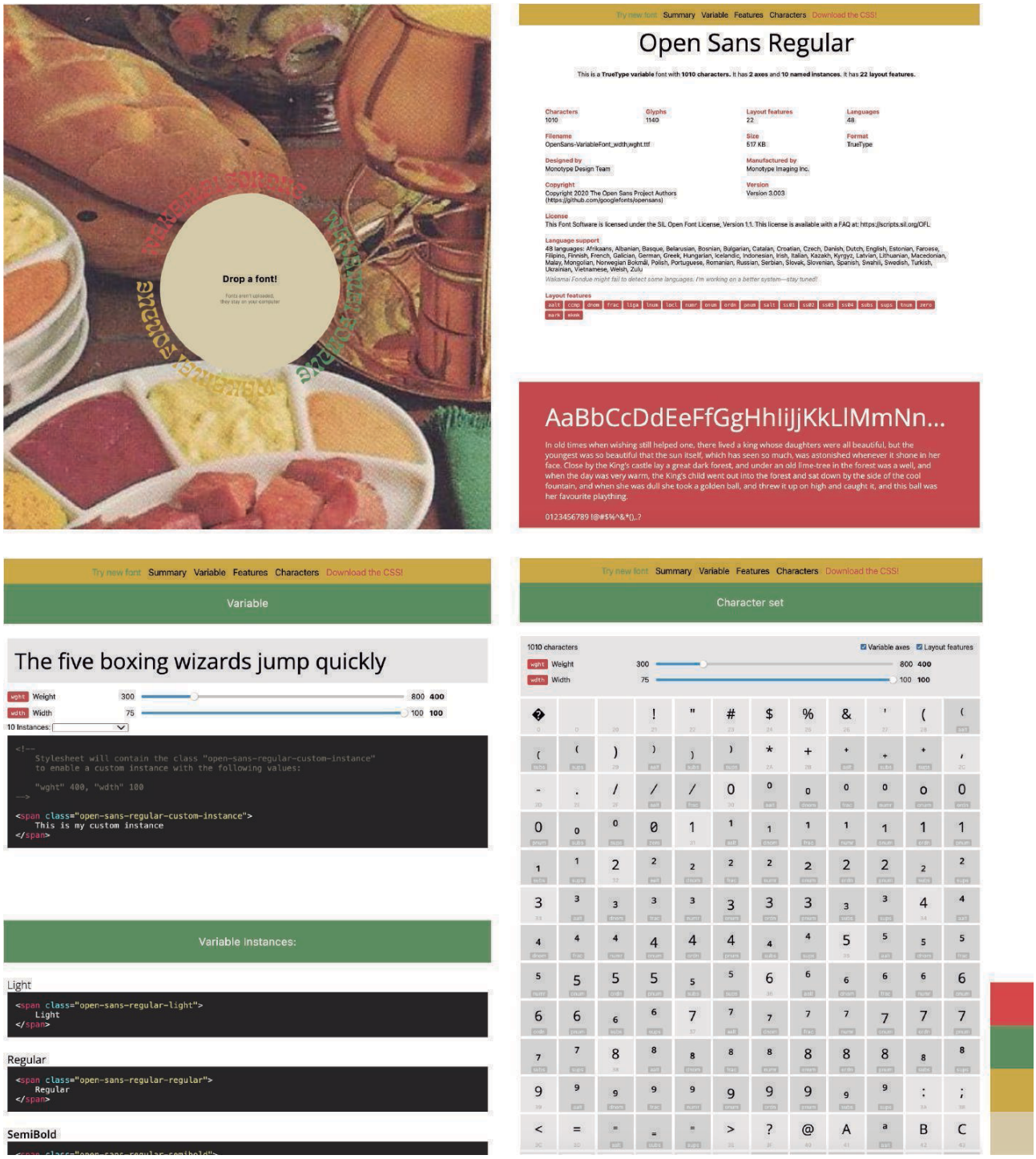

Figure 5 Website Wakamai Fondue. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Wakamai Fondue.

3.1.4 *Analysis by type of media: Games*

The Shape Type game (Figure 6) is an exercise in visual perception via the adjustment of handles of a vectorial drawing, through **interactivity**. At the start, the game gives an example of what should be done to balance the glyph design. Afterwards, exercises in which the user has autonomy to "vectorize" come up, and by the end, they receive feedback on the likeness of the original design. This enables understanding by showing how the nodes and handles are positioned.

Figure 6 Game Shape Type. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Shape Type.

Kerning Game (Figure 7) is an exercise in space perception, by adjusting the spacing between letters, through **interactivity**. At the start, the game gives an example of what should be done to balance the spacing. Afterwards, exercises in which the user has autonomy to "space" come up, and by the end, they receive feedback on the likeness of the original spacing. This enables understanding by showing how more problematic glyphs, such as 'AV' in upper case (capital letters), are positioned. The two games, therefore, are very similar, but present different tasks, related to different steps of the type design process.

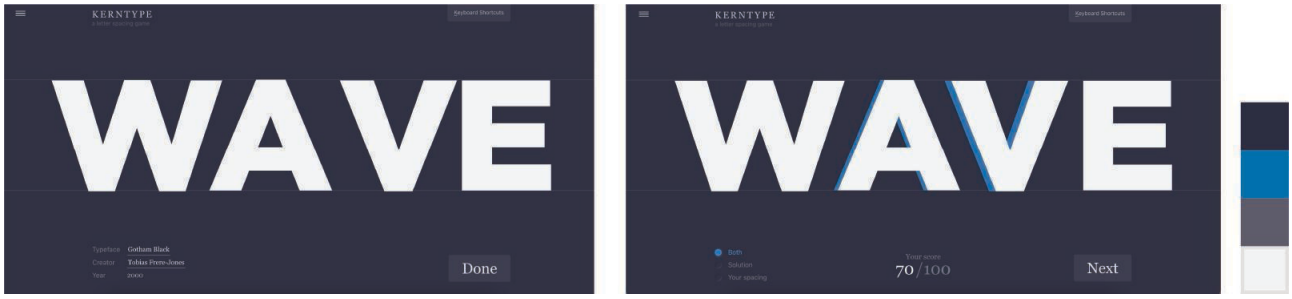

Figure 7 Kerning Game. Source: Made by authors (2025), based on Kerning Game.

In interactive games, like the ones analyzed, the problem-solution is well-defined, making its functionality the main advantage. It is understood that, by having a lesser amount of informative content, user learning depends mainly on the completion of tasks that display errors and hits with the help of feedback. Given that, this type of media stands out from others by meeting the cognitive principle to a higher degree, since the learning success is easily perceptible. After that, the following of aesthetic principles is highlighted. By having a smaller amount of information and content, the simplicity, clarity, and visual unity are easily perceived in interactive games. Regarding the administrative principle, information access must be highlighted, which can be simple for the user, but presents a burden for developers and creators, as they depend on specialized programming languages and hosting with interactive functionalities, making its dissemination financially onerous.

Considering the information design principles, it was noted that games as media mainly adhere to the functional and cognitive principles. The following diagram summarizes the result.

Order of the Information Design Principles best followed by **games**:

3.1.5 *Analysis between types of media*

After the descriptive analysis of each selected media, a comparison was made, considering the contents and the information design principles (Table 2).

Table 2 Comparison between types of media. Source: Made by authors (2025).

Type of Media	Order of the Information Design Principle, from most to least followed	Potential use in the teaching of digital type design
Repositories	+ AP FP EP CP –	Comprehensive and exploratory content, with tips based on solving a problem.
Social Media	+ AP EP FP CP –	Short content and continuous theoretical-practical reinforcement, visual repertoire, and quick tips.
Websites	+ FP AP CP EP –	Long content and theoretical-practical assistance with greater direction and didactics, visual repertoire
Games	+ FP CP EP AP –	Unique content directed at specific practices

Therefore, the analysis might indicate a potential use of media in type design teaching, as well as recommend which media can be prioritized in the selection stage, for the dissemination of content and resources related to type design, based on the information design principles to be prioritized.

4 Concluding remarks

The results suggest that information design principles have often been incorporated in the design of digital resources related to type design, which indicates a growth in design practices in the field. Although the analyzed websites comply with the principles set by Pettersson (2012), the **scope** and **flexibility** of these principles may have contributed to the **high alignment tax** observed.

Regarding the **media use for educational purposes**, the **cognitive principle** was noted to have a fundamental role in type design teaching. Thus, in this context, media that best follow this principle should be prioritized. To this end, websites more easily allow for the development of long and complex content that can be assimilated gradually, guiding the user. After that, games teach the completion of a single task very well, assimilation of specific content. In contrast, repositories and social media work as a grouping of information without a lot of guidance for the user, being best used more as support or theoretical-practical reinforcement for different ends, such as quick tips and visual repertoire in social media, or access to extensive and exploratory content through pre-determined topics, in the case of repositories.

Furthermore, considering the method of the design type process according to Henestrosa, Meseguer, and Scaglione (2014), the analyzed media supports mainly the stages of: planning and design. Due to the specialties and redirection of each media, it is possible to choose according to the requirements of each stage in the classroom.

Despite the general alignment with the information design principles, variations to the application of specific criteria, such as **clarity**, **attention**, and **processing**, were identified, variations that can impact the experience of different **user profiles**. By considering beginner users, the target audience of the type design teaching application, it is understood that there can be an overload of content, especially in repositories, whose information doesn't have an initial direction. For experienced users, like established type designers who aim to improve their knowledge, such tools can be useful, even if sometimes saturated, since the advanced content is immersed in the basic principles of the profession. Thus, alternatives for a better definition of user profiles in the creation of digital tools can be considered. Just as strategies for the application of digital resources in the classroom, with a well-defined user profile, can be listed.

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