

Elevating Solo City's Brand Through the Essence of Javanese Script into Modern Typeface

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Abstract

Surakarta city, more popular with Solo, has a memorable branding tagline that suits the condition of the town, "The Spirit of Java." It has the potential to be accurate, being the "spirit" of Java, so it needs a bit of strength to make it real. Gain more strength and use the authentic aset of Solo for the visual identity and easy-to-recognize identity through the typography as the primary purpose of this research, so the researcher used qualitative method as the tool to gather the information that can translated into words and visual for the typography by did a few steps such as interviews, literature study, and visual study. This study shows us that typography has

Keywords: typography, visual identity, branding, the spirit of java.

Abstrak

Surakarta yang lebih dikenal dengan nama Solo memiliki slogan branding yang sangat cocok dengan kondisi kotanya, "The Spirit of Java" slogan ini memiliki potensi yang dimana Solo menjadi "jiwa" dari kebudayaan Jawa, jadi brandingnya memerlukan elemen dan nilai-nilai yang mendukung untuk mewujudkan semangat dari slogan yang digunakan. Perlu adanya peningkatan atau penguatan yang menggunakan elemen dan nilai yang benar-benar asli dari kota Solo untuk dijadikan salah satu atribut yang mudah untuk dikenali yang dikemas dalam bentuk font yang menjadi tujuan utama dalam penelitian ini, karenanya penggunaan metode kualitatif dapat membantu untuk mengumpulkan data yang diperlukan yang dapat diterjemahkan menjadi bahasa visual yang cocok untuk tipografi tersebut. Dibutuhkan wawancara, studi literatur, dan studi visual untuk mewujudkan perancangan dalam penelitian ini. Hasilnya dapat memberi gambaran bahwa tipografi memiliki dampak yang besar untuk membantu membentuk persepsi target audiens terhadap identitas visual yang mudah dikenali saat diaplikasikan di berbagai media yang digunakan.

Kata Kunci: tipografi, identitas visual, branding, the spirit of java.

1. INTRODUCTION

Surakarta, once part of Mataram Kingdom, split and led to Kartasura. *Geger Pecinan* happened, and relocation caused Kartasura's downfall. The palace moved to a village with many "Sala" trees, prompting the name change to Surakarta with hopes that it would have a different fate

from Kartasura. "Sala" became "Solo" for ease of pronunciation, gaining popularity and persisting, overshadowing Surakarta's name [1].

In 2009, the exresidency of Surakarta, encompassing Solo, Klaten, Srage, Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Boyolali, and Karanganyar, drew

inspiration from city branding that was popular out there—influenced by campaigns like Enjoy Jakarta, Malaysia Truly Asia, and so forth. They launched “Solo The Spirit of Java,” which aimed to highlight local culture, warmth, and economic potential, the city branding established through a government agreement. Also, the word “Solo,” which refers to the city’s name, was chosen because it’s famous nationally and internationally [2]. Since the branding was established, we couldn’t change the name of the brand, so the name Solo was prioritized over Surakarta.

April 2023 Solo released the new logo as the visual identity of their city to get in touch with the city branding that still has the same tagline, “The Spirit of Java.” This time, they wanted to make the new logo look fresh and dynamic. Unfortunately, no typography is used as a visual identity supporting their city branding. A city branding that can be a strong representative of their city must have a unique attribute that can make the identity look more expressive from the city’s character represented by the visual identity [3]. Typography has an essential role in visual identity work because typography is a medium that relays messages and information to the target audience [4].

This research has a primary benefit to Solo’s city branding, which gains power from the usage of typography designed with the essence of the culture of Solo. Moreover, this research can be the medium to promote the styles of the Javanese alphabet written by hand around Indonesia. This research also triggered the following research in the same field, maybe in the styles of the Javanese alphabet or about typography inspired by local culture around us, especially the City of Solo.

Typography also has an essential role in visual identity that represents place, message, spirit, and time designated through it [5]. Typography is a frontline for branding necessity because typography interacts directly with the target audience through online or print media. The planning of typography that contains the essence of the local culture can be supported to boost the message that wants to be

delivered in the visual identity necessity [6]. As a fact that the City of Solo needs typography to be used in the visual identity to accommodate the message and image that wants to build the city branding of Solo strong as the tagline, The Spirit of Java needs to be one or two typography that is being used. Designing typography that accommodates necessity is an urgent call that can create an appreciation of local identities categorized as a culture [7].

Choosing typography for branding needs is indispensable because it can affect the brand’s image that wants to be built. Typography style also has a role as a mouthpiece for the represented branding identity [8]. A brand can use the ready-to-use typography or custom design it from scratch [9]. A custom typography design from a sketch will have the flexibility to achieve the most suitable message in every alphabet designed with the branding identity. An element must represent the image of a company, product, service, organization, event, and so on [10]. Likewise, typography has to help the visual identity reach the target audience better and able to represent the things mentioned previously.

Typography design is needed to build representation and even increase the emphasis on the message and image of the branding carried out by the city of Solo, namely the need for typography that can convey the message that the city of Solo is humanist and dynamic. The image of the branding of the city of Solo also wants to be displayed in typography, namely as the center of Javanese Culture or The Spirit of Java, which is written in the slogan. Improving brand image through visual communication needs to be done considering that many visual cultural heritages from the archipelago can be used as inspiration for creating a design [11].

The city of Solo has its style of writing Javanese script and was admired by European scholars in the 19th century for its beauty [12]. Using the Javanese script of the Surakarta style is the right step to be used as inspiration in typographic design because its association is still in the same field, namely about writing and letters, and can be aimed at supporting the

visual identity in Solo's city branding, The Spirit of Java. The collection of characters from the typography can be inspired by the history of a place or what is trending at a particular time [6].

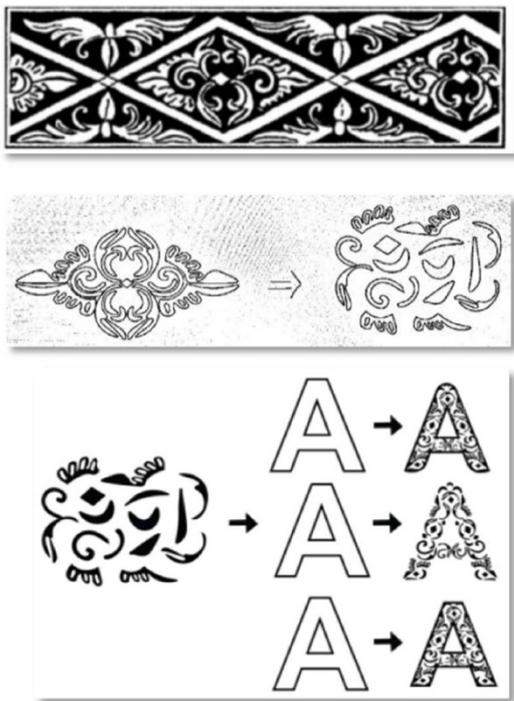


Figure 1. Saik Galamai to SAGA Typeface
[Source: Putri Hasanah Sya'bani & Hendra Afriwan, 2023]

The design of typography can come from various forms of inspiration; in a study of the Saik Galami Motif in Typeface Form, SAGA designed a semi-decorative typography that uses the Saik Galamai carving as a filling of Latin letters with an outline. Apart from Latin letters, the research intended typography with a Saik Galamai motif without outlines, where the nature of the decorative font is to attract attention with its unique shape. However, decorative typography tends to be challenging to read and less suitable for writing body copy [13].

Research into the Typography of the Angso Duo Batik Motif, the Decorative Variety of Jambi City, produces readable typography with cultural solid elements. The category of typography created by this research falls into serif typefaces, which have "feet" and a

relatively good level of readability for print media [14].



Figure 2. Angso Duo to Typeface
[Source: Widia Marta & Muhammad Rio Akbar, 2020]

Good typography must have a reasonably high level of readability due to its use in various media. Both previous studies show that the literal application of cultural elements can reduce readability. This can happen because the typography produced is decorative. Typographic characters that can give a neutral, functional impression and adapt over time are typography with sans serif characters and can represent the object being represented [5].

Selecting or designing typography that cannot convey the message and image of the branding you want to achieve can create an inappropriate image for the target audience. Serious problems due to differences in perception can be reduced by several criteria that can be met when typefaces are selected or designed. Typography that can improve the branding image and accuracy of the message

usually has the same impression as the branding image that is formed, is practically not noticed by the target audience, contains the value of the message in the branding, and can create the desired perception [15].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Design Thinking is oriented toward human needs; the first thing that must be done is to gather insights and make observations by paying attention to what other people are not doing [16]. Design Thinking is an approach that utilizes human capacities but is perpetuated by more conventional problem-solving practices [17]. Design Thinking can occur during a practical, human-centered problem-solving process. A project design must go through three completion stages: inspiration, ideas, and implementation [18].

The inspiration process is naming a situation where something can provide an idea or motivate the search for a solution to a problem. Ideation is a process aimed at generating, developing, and testing ideas that can solve solutions. Implementation of methods for applying, mapping, and solving problems created in the ideation process [18].

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Solo branding, 'The Spirit of Java,' was selected to portray and represent the city's cultural, artistic, and historical roots. It embodies the essence of Javanese culture, mirroring the richness seen in 'The Soul of Java' [2]. In Solo, Javanese culture and traditions, such as Grebeg, Sekaten, Batik, etc., are prevalent. The branding tagline, 'The Spirit of Java,' reflects these cultural elements' well-preserved richness in the city. Also, since the 19th century, European intellectuals have acknowledged Solo for the beauty of its culture, particularly captivated by the elegance of the Javanese script's writing style.

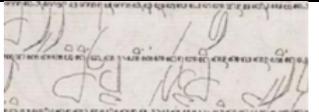
The inspiration stage was triggered by selecting a new logo for the city of Solo, which claimed that the logo could represent the city branding slogan, The Spirit of Java, initiating a problem. Moreover, using elements in the logo is a fairly common icon in Javanese culture, namely the Gunungan. A good representation is using

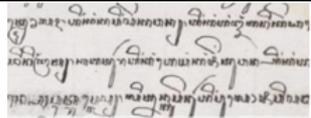
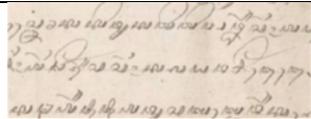
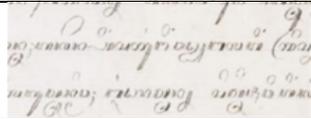
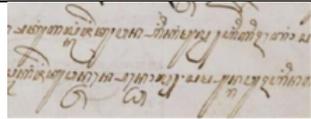
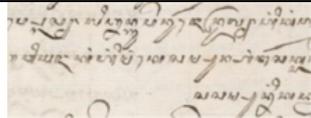
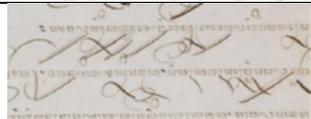
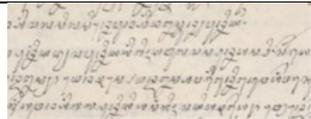
elements in a visual identity is an element that can represent the unique characteristics of the city [3]. The existence of such problems requires a solution that can act as a support for the existing visual identity. Typography, which has an essential role in branding a city, is considered to be an excellent solution to support the visual identity that has been chosen, thus continuing with the selection of an ideal base that is still close to the realm of typography and can represent the typical characteristics of the city of Solo. Javanese script is the top thing that comes to mind when you hear Javanese culture and writing letters.

Collecting data and finding facts about Javanese script is relatively common, and there is a lot of research and design on this matter, so it is necessary to do more in-depth research on Javanese script. The use of Javanese script spread almost throughout the island of Java in the 19th century, which can be seen from a collection of letters addressed to the Governor of Java at that time, Thomas Stamford Raffles. The letters received were then collected into three volumes, the third volume containing a farewell letter when Raffles retired from his position in 1816 [12]. Most leaders from various regions used Javanese script in these writings, but each letter had its writing style. The Surakarta style stands out the most, more than any other style from any other region that has its style for writing the Javanese alphabet. The data shows us that the Javanese alphabet has another side that can be translated into how rich the local culture can be metamorphosed over time so the designer can have much inspiration which created fantastic work for their design needs in the same field like typography or even another field could be affected by it. It is an example of the richness of the local culture if we look at it more closely.

Table 1: Sample of The Javanese Alphabet style from different origins.

[Source: Ragam Lnggam Aksara Jawa dari Manuskrip hingga Buku Cetak, Perdana, A. B. 2020, Manuskripta]

Sample	Origin
	Surakarta

	Yogyakarta
	Cirebon
	Bandung
	Semarang
	Lasem
	Bangil
	Banyuwangi

The Surakarta style Javanese script has characteristics that stand out from most Javanese scripts from other regions: the writing seems to have sharper corners, and the proportion of Sandhangan or pair writing has a high structure. The writing style of the main letters also has an acute angle to the use of fighting in the Surakarta style of Javanese writing [12]. The overall writing looks more flexible than the Javanese script of other regions but has a firm side to its writing style; this can be described from the Surakarta style of Javanese script.

Table 2: Sample of the typical Tarung.

[Source: Ragam Langgam Aksara Jawa dari Manuskrip hingga Buku Cetak, Perdana, A. B. 2020, Manuskripta]

Dull			
		(i)	(ii)
Keen			
		(a)	

Origin of the letters: Add MS 45273 British Library.

Letters that use dull type of Tarung:

- i. Yogyakarta, f26r
 - ii. Cirebon, f30r
- Letter that wrote using the keen type of Tarung:
- a. Surakarta, f25r

The discovery of several samples showing that Javanese script has been widely used and applied to typography provides an illustration of how typography that uses Javanese script literally works on visual identity. This stage emphasizes looking more broadly through visual studies to find out what previous plans were and to try to explore what the previous designer had not done. Most of them retain the impression of the Javanese script which makes Latin typography imitate the appearance of the Javanese script.

Table 3: Sample of the typography on the internet inspired by the Javanese alphabet.

Sample	Designer	Category
 Upakarti (2015)	Adien Gunarta	Decorative
 Jogjakartype (2016)	Locomotive	Decorative
 Aksara Sastrajendra (2020)	Nuryantodwi	Script

Ideas that focus on testing, developing, and producing solutions to solve problems found in the previous stages, namely the many plans that only imitate and literally apply the Javanese script structure, which makes the typography have a low level of readability. Before carrying out a good design to find out which type of typography has the highest level of readability, the researcher conducted research comparing each type of typographic character that exists. Sans serif has a high level of readability in small sizes in both print and digital media [5]. The use of sans serif in designs to support the visual identity of Solo

City branding. The typography uses a sans serif typeface so that it can be displayed on smaller screen sizes and still has good readability [19]. The Spirit of Java is the type of typography that is most suitable to use because it has a neutral and formal impression and has a high level of legibility, and the characters of the letters can be seen clearly from one to another. Letters with other letters.

The inspiration stage, the contents of which are observing and collecting data through literature studies, visual studies, and interviews as well as ideation which focuses on testing, development, and production, the output of which is in the form of typography for problem-solving, resulting in a brief in which the typography is designed using sans serif as The type of typography has a dynamic, humanistic impression, has the essence of the Javanese script structure of the Surakarta style and has a high level of legibility. Sans serif was chosen because it has the highest readability level and has a feel that could represent the modern [20] Sans serif is a typography that is relaxed, unique, dynamic, and bold [21].

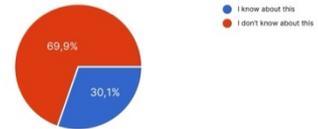
The design resulted in two typefaces because one typeface could not contain too many impressions, so a new typeface was needed. City branding for the city of Solo wants to look more dynamic and humanist, where if you want to get a more humanistic impression, then what is close to this is something organic, such as handmade, as well as a dynamic impression that requires typographic characters not to be straight, in other words slightly diagonal. Typography should make the readers enjoy the work with its appearances in the part of or the whole piece of branding [22]

Apart from that, during the inspiration process, it was discovered that there was a problem not only with typography imitating Javanese script which has a low level of readability but also with the need for typography to act as a frontline in the city branding of the city of Solo by including the culture that only the city of Solo has as stated in the introduction. This problem requires a typography design that is similar to the brief that has been obtained. Typography as a part of visual communication

design gains the success of the brand to communicate but it could have another impact and decrease the quality of misusing the typography [23].

Javanese script has its own writing style in each region, especially in the 19th century and the Surakarta Javanese script was known to be the most beautiful Javanese script at that time, did you know this?

73 jawaban



So, which do you prefer when creating a Latin typeface using the Sans Serif or Decorative style to represent the Surakarta Javanese script?

73 jawaban



To elevate the new identity of Solo The City of Java, is it necessary to create a dedicated typeface that adopts cultural richness to align branding and typeface?

73 jawaban



Figure 3. Questionnaire data [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

From questionnaire and interviews with head of the design competition organizer it can be translated into brief that lead to the picture of how the typeface should be designed. Also, the creative brief make things more clear to stepped into next step and decided the best treatment for each design.

Creative Brief for Branding of Solo The Spirit of Java

The Problem

Due it has new visual identity for its brand the brand lack of dedicated typeface that willing to elevating the brand strength.

The Facts

Majority of people 69,1% aren't aware of the cultural richness in typography or scripts of Surakarta's (Solo) style.

The Target Audience

18 - 30+ Tourist domestic / international
30+ Domestic or international investor
These target audience are people that has interest in cultural trip especially in Javanese culture.

The Objective

Since the brand of Solo The Spirit of Java aimed to promote the local culture, warmth, and economic potential it has to increase of the awareness and strengthen the brand in a wider range of target audiences.

Summary

A font that can represent the philosophy of a new identity that is **fresh and modern** and has an implicit impression of the writing style of the Surakarta Javanese script which can be accepted by the **wider community**, thus it is hoped that it will also **reintroduce the Surakarta Javanese script** which has its own characteristics and differentiates it from the Javanese script that originated from other areas.

Fonts that have a **humanistic touch** to get the impression of **warmth** from human nature and are far from computerized to avoid a cold impression.

It is hoped that these two fonts can provide headlines and body text that have **high level of readability** even at sizes that are small enough for print media purposes, so the **flexibility** of these two fonts can allow them to have many configurations or combinations.

Figure 4. Creative brief
[Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

The first typography adopts the essence of the Surakarta Javanese script structure which has sharp corners, so sharp corners are maintained as much as possible. A flexible writing style is also applied as much as possible to the typeface being designed. The brief that is created will simplify the ideation process by focusing on an initial plan that has a rough output to simplify the subsequent process.

The initial role will be the overall direction of the typography created for each letter. A typographic designer or what is usually called a type-foundry does not necessarily design from letters A - Z but classifies them based on the characteristics of each letter in their head image, for example, letters with diagonal lines such as A, V, X, W, Y, and K, then there are letters with the character of using circles such as C, O, and G, and characteristics of other letters [24]. Based on the existing sentences, typography design can be done in a more structured way.

The first typography to adopt the characteristics of the Surakarta style Javanese script with a dynamic modern touch tries to get a flexible impression which is a reflection of Javanese culture, one of which is the script. Designing typography with more curved lines can be a solution to make the typography unique, so the classification of letters used in this design is slightly different.

The classification of letter characters that have diagonal lines, such as the letters A, V, The

initial sketch was designed in two slightly different directions, firstly the typography adopted more distinctive characteristics and was slightly more inclined towards the characteristics of the character, and secondly it prioritized a high level of readability but with accents that still came from the same base.

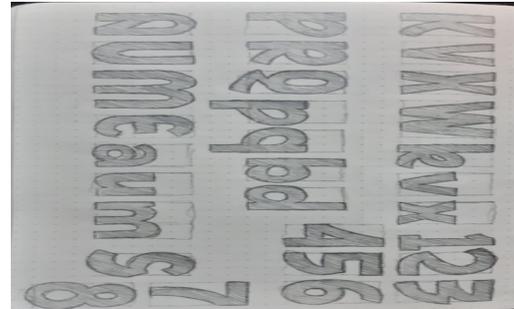


Figure 5. Sketch 1 for first typeface
[Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

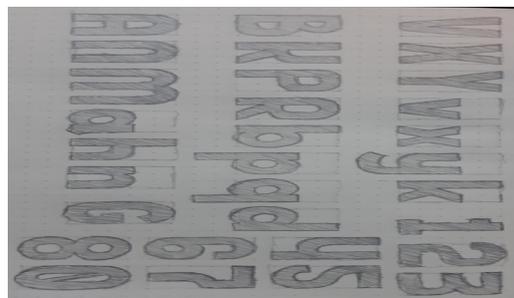


Figure 6. Sketch 2 for first typeface
[Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

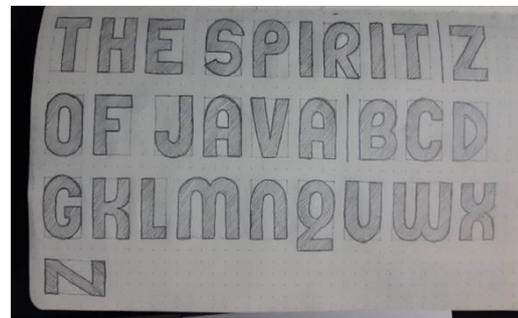


Figure 7. The selected sketch for first typeface
[Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

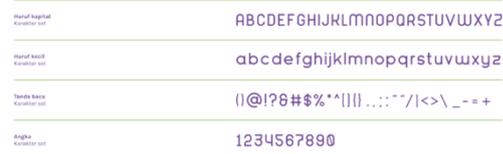


Figure 8. Digital form of first typeface [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]



Figure 9. Implementation of the typeface on to mockups [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

It is hoped that these differences can provide an idea for selecting an initial plan that can become an overall typography design package. Sketch number two was selected for the digitization process but with adjustments to create an ideal plan for use in the visual identity of the city branding of the city of Solo. Adjustments are made to the combination of using curved lines with sharp angles but with characteristic rounding in the anatomy of the letters. This is done to get a more visible friendly impression, unlike the initial sketch or drawing of the typography which still seems a little stiff and arrogant. The process of selecting and adjusting by the parties concerned with what is considered suitable for city branding can be achieved well, as well as the involvement of the audience to assess whether the plan that has been digital or in prototype form is suitable for depicting a frontline of the visual identity of the city of Solo.

The second typeface design focuses on the humanist impression that can be felt from each letter character. The grouping still applies to the design carried out in the second typeface. The impression of human touch is the main value, so the design is carried out directly on digital media using a pen-tablet so that the impression of organic or traditional handwriting can be obtained well.

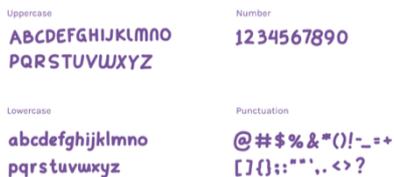


Figure 10. Digital form of second typeface [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

By creating two typefaces with characters that were considered suitable for getting feedback from the audience, the researchers conducted trials on the application of the two typefaces to examples of digital media design needs or mockups.

Is the existing font suitable for the branding identity of Solo The Spirit of Java by assessing the aspects of the Surakarta Javanese script mentioned previously?
73 jawaban

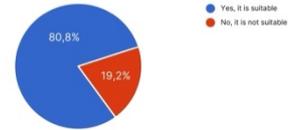


Figure 11. Public response for the typography [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

The application or implementation stages carried out in the form of a social media upload mockup can provide an idea of how the two typefaces complement each other. This application was tested on the public, resulting in the results that the two typefaces with two different combinations were deemed suitable by the public with the city branding identity of the city of Solo. Likewise, the team organizing the Solo City logo contest found the two typefaces suitable for the typographic combinations. The second typography, which is final and published in the Graphic Standards Manual (GSM) or guidebook for using the visual identity of city branding for the city of Solo, can be used by the public to minimize the distinctive characteristics of the visual identity that has been determined.



Figure 12. Final form of the first typeface that written in Solo The Spirit of Java's GSM [Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]



Figure 13. Final form of the second typeface that written in Solo The Spirit of Java's GSM
[Source: Ahmad Ghazali, 2024]

Typography can help in the marketing category through visual design, which can increase awareness of the brand it represents. This is the same as branding as a whole, which can help increase marketing development based on the help of visual design [25]. By using sans serif, combining the two typographies is effectively reaching the target audience. Typography that uses sans serif or no hooks can be a modern, contemporary, and practical symbol to use overall [26].

4. CONCLUSION

Typography that matches the message you want to communicate will have a significant impact when applied to mass media or design needs. Characters that are unique and can represent ideas or concepts of city branding that need to be achieved but maintain the functional value of typography, which is actually to communicate with the audience. The role of typography inspired by Solo local culture can take the essence of cultural elements that become ideas as the basis for typography creation. The use of Cultural elements in a literal, literal, or crude way can disrupt the functional value of the typography; even though the aesthetic value is enough to attract the audience, the function of the typography will be reduced because only the aesthetic value is the selling point. As stated in the introduction, good typography that can increase brand awareness usually fulfills four things, which in this research can be fulfilled by using the essence of culture and messages from city branding, which are the basis for designing typography.

This research also aims to increase cultural insight, especially regarding Javanese script with different writing styles in each region. The typography resulting from this design can become a promotional medium in addition to

improving Solo's city branding image. This research also has a weakness in that ordinary people will not be aware of the story of the typography used in the city branding of the city of Solo because the characters of the letters in the typography still need to describe the basis of the typography. This can happen due to the public's need for insight into the various types of Indonesian script, especially Javanese. It would be better for further research to lead to the creation of typography that has cultural essence in the form of letter characters and still fulfills the functional value of a typeface.

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